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Engaging Our Youth

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About This Issue

I am one who loves to study our Moravian history, and after coming to Canada I found a wealth of wonderful history here that told of faithful settlers in this land who built a vibrant church. It is important to remember our past and from where we came. But as we confront significant change in our society and in our church, with declining numbers, aging membership, competing commitments, and increasing isolation and fragmentation in our relationships, I have begun to realize a gnawing question as I have worked in our Archives. Is our history more than just history? How might our history inform the issues that we confront in the church today?

One such issue is the gradual disappearance of our youth from our churches. Does our history have anything to say to us about our youth ministry today? So we have asked contributors to this volume of our Historical Magazine to write about the history of the youth movement in the Canadian churches. Bob Voelker has pulled some interesting comments from the *Hoyler Diaries* that speak to a focus on youth from the very beginnings of the Moravian Church in Canada. Alfred Harke has provided us with an overall summary of this movement, beginning with the “Yugend Tag” in 1914, and Mary Lange shares her own story in this regard and the impact of our youth

program on future clergy of our church. This is followed by Eric Schulze's more detailed account of both his participation in the programs as a youth and then his leadership in youth ministry. Gordon Sommers has written about his spiritual growth as a youth in Alberta, and Betty Voelker gives the perspective of a lay person who was very involved in the camping programs. Gary Straughan shares a moving account of how the youth programs in Canada changed his life, and Laurie Ward focuses in on the convocation experiences of youth in Canada. Meghan Ward gives a moving account of how the recent Convo in the Holy Land has impacted her life. Finally Matt Gillard speaks about our current youth ministry, how that has or has not changed, and what the challenges are for us today.

As you read through this volume I think that you will find yourself not only celebrating what the Moravian Church in Canada has accomplished in the past in its work with youth, but you will also discover underlying values that continue to be relevant today in this ministry. You will see that the church has responded to decline in the past with innovative and flexible programming. Our contributors name important underlying factors, such as ongoing communication with our youth, even though how we do that has changed significantly. Music was a strong presence in our youth movement and continues to be today, even though it is no longer an octet singing well known

hymns. The youth movement was often led by the youth themselves and provided opportunities for them to grow in leadership skills and to be exposed to the issues and people of the wider world. Ongoing visits from missionaries were influential on the faith journeys of our youth. The leadership of pastors was crucial to their faith development, and you will also see how many lay people became important keys to keeping the youth programs going. But most important running through these articles is the presence and experience of God that was foundational to the lives of those in the early church and continues to be the source and reason for our ministry to youth today. I hope that this edition of our magazine provides further insight and inspiration as we continue to walk alongside our youth in the ministry to which God calls us.

Judy Ganz, Editor

THE EVOLVING OF YOUTH MINISTRY IN THE CANADIAN DISTRICT

By Robert Voelker

The Canadian District Youth Movement through Camp Van Es and the churches of the District will be written by others. This article is but a perusal of early historic documents of the Canadian Moravian Church to show that the Youth Movement of the Canadian District was born in the earliest ministry of the District pastors.

The Bruderheim and Bruderfeld Moravian Churches were the first Moravian Churches established in 1895. However, it wasn't until February 3, 1896 that their Pastor, the Reverend Clement Hoyler arrived. Hoyler held the first worship service in Bruderfeld in the home of Andreas Stolz. An entry in *The Hoyler Diaries 1896-1909* for February 9, 1896 reads, "This was my first Sunday in Bruderfeld and it was indeed a blessed one. Despite the fact that a strong wind blew all day, causing snow drifting, the service was attended by 70 worshippers....50 to 60 persons attended the afternoon service at 3:00 p.m...."¹ Right from the first service the numbers were amazing and in spite of the weather people came for they were so hungry for the Word. They came to Canada wanting religious freedom, now they experienced it for the first time.

Just one week later, at the Sunday worship service at Bruderfeld, Hoyler writes on February 16, 1896,

“Today is Sunday and the weather is mild. The mercury stood above the freezing point and one could see the snow disappear. There were many people at the service, about 70, and the room was crowded. The singing was a considerable improvement over the previous Sunday and during the praying of the litany several joined in at the appropriate places of the responses. I preached about Col. 2:10a ‘You have come to fullness of life in Him.’ At this service I announced that this afternoon we will start a Sunday School and I asked them to send their children, if they had any of the proper ages. Twenty children attended and I recorded their names so that I could divide them into classes later...”² At this service a Superintendent and Secretary-treasurer were elected and teachers were appointed. Attendance records were to be kept and all the children were asked to bring five cents on the first Sunday of the month as an offering.

I point out the beginning of Sunday School in Bruderfeld, (similarly it happened in Bruderheim, but it was at Hoyler’s first service there), because I believe that the early attention of Brother Hoyler and other pastors at the beginning of the Canadian District Moravian work, felt a great call to provide a strong ministry to the young and the youth of the District. Pastor Hoyler met frequently with the Superintendent and teachers to instruct them in the Sunday School lessons.

On March 22, 1896, Hoyler wrote, “...In the evening a good number of mostly younger members came to my

room at Reimer's at my invitation to start a choir. Some had quite good voices. Others had more willingness than ability. But with time we are going to accomplish something."³

Confirmation instruction was also started early in the church's ministry, sometimes with individuals and sometimes as classes. On April 6, 1896 at Bruderheim, just three months after his arrival, Rev. Hoyer records, "After this I held my first instruction for confirmation and had 9 young candidates in attendance. The lesson was in lieu of a service and the whole congregation was allowed to attend."⁴ On May 24, "For Bruderheim today was a real festive day. Nearly the entire membership participated. A good number of friends celebrated with us. We used the new hymn books for the first time and we prayed the litany for Pentecost as the introduction. The focal point of the service was the confirmands. I preached about Psalm 121. Following this, 9 young people (4 boys and 5 girls) who had been instructed in the main points of the Christian doctrine were confirmed. Preceding this they had made their confession of faith..."⁵

The emphasis on Christian education for the Volhynian emigrant children and youth built strong young minds and hearts committed to loving and serving the Lord. On February 13, 1900 for Bruderfeld, Hoyer wrote this note in his diary: "Tonight, at my invitation, the confirmed sons of the congregation came to spend the time from 5:00-9:00

p.m. here in pleasant conversation. At first we had a little musical program and then we passed around some refreshments and spent a genial hour together. It was decided to meet socially like this every two weeks.”⁶ Two nights later for Bruderfeld, he wrote: “Tonight the girls of the congregation came to our home for a family night. The program was along the same lines as the boys.”⁷ These two February meetings of 1900 were the beginning of Youth Programming in the Canadian District Moravian Church. Meeting every two weeks helped to build cohesion among the young of the Bruderfeld congregation.

By 1907 a young man, Ferdinand Drebert answered God’s call to Mission work in Alaska where he served for 42 years. Many other young people, men and women from the various Canadian District congregations, answered God’s call to missions or parish ministry throughout the succeeding years.

Youth Rallies started in 1914 and continued as one-day rallies through 1936 (except for 1925). Then four-day rallies were begun and in 1940, “At the business meeting of Friday, July 5, the decision was made to accept the offer of 5 acres of property at South Cooking Lake. The motion was made by Brother Redberger and seconded by Florence Drebert. The Executive to take such steps as are necessary to raise funds and commence the erection of buildings and improvements of grounds as soon as possible. This was accepted enthusiastically.”⁸

The role of the pastor in the growth of young minds of faith goes without question. He/she is to be a spiritual example and a reservoir of spiritual knowledge to the young leaders and youth of the church as they look for answers to life's questions.

Today campers at Camp Van Es still feel, still experience the leading of God's call in their lives. Though ministry is to be for all ages, ministry to our young must have a high degree of emphasis in the life and work of a church or denomination if it is to have a future. The young of the church make up the future for the forward movement of the Christian ministry at home and around the world.

REFERENCES

¹*Hoyler Diaries 1896-1909*, p. 10.

²*Hoyler Diaries 1896-1909*, p. 13.

³*Hoyler Diaries 1896-1909*, p. 25.

⁴*Hoyler Diaries 1896-1909*, p. 29.

⁵*Hoyler Diaries 1896-1909*, p. 37.

⁶*Hoyler Diaries 1896-1909*, p. 182.

⁷*Hoyler Diaries 1896-1909*, p. 182

⁸*Following the Lamb 1941-1991*, p. 15.

QUARTERLY DISTRICT YOUTH RALLIES

By Alfred Harke

Youth rallies, or "Yugend Tag" had their beginnings in 1914 in the Canadian District. The first "Young Peoples Day" was held on Oct. 2, 1914. For 22 years these one day rallies were opportunities for the young people of the Canadian District to get together for times of devotions, Bible study and fellowship.

In 1937 the District Youth Conferences began, usually a two or three day event. The first one was in New Sarepta, followed by Didsbury in 1938, Bruderheim in 1939 and Gull Lake in 1940. In 1941 the first Summer Youth Conference was held at Camp Van Es. This was a one week camp.

Camp Van Es annual summer camps provided the opportunity for the Youth of the Canadian District to get together from all the different churches. It was a time for Bible studies, devotions, fellowship and recreation. This was a unique experience for the youth of the district. Soon the question arose: Why do this only once a year? And from that, the Quarterly District Youth Rallies had their beginning in the 1940's. There were three Quarterly District Youth Rallies: Fall (Oct.), Winter (Jan.), Spring (April) and then the Summer Youth Conference in July.

The Regional Youth Rallies were held at the different churches on a rotational basis. We also had some rallies in Red Deer, even though there was not a

Moravian church there. It was an opportunity for youth from Calgary to get together with the Edmonton area youth. The rallies were usually on a Sunday afternoon and evening, (3:00 to 9:00pm). Often the spring rally would be on Easter Monday. In those days, Easter Monday was still quite a church day. The young people would car pool to the rallies; this would provide transportation for those youth who were not of driving age. The programming for the rallies was done by the Regional Youth Council with a pastor as an adult advisor.

In 1954, at the summer camp at Van Es, one of the leaders from Bethlehem, Pa. was Helen Dickey. She was the Administrative Assistant for the Moravian Church's Board of Education and Evangelism, as well as a full time youth worker. Her task was to introduce a new youth program to be used by all youth in the Northern Province. In December of 1954, in Watertown Wis. she led a workshop and training session for the youth leaders of the five Regional Youth Councils. It was a good opportunity to meet the other leaders and to share ideas. The five regional councils present were Eastern, Middle States, Western, Canadian and Pacific. The Regional Youth Council was usually elected or re-appointed at the Fall rally.

The themes for the rallies were selected by the Youth Council. Speakers and leaders were chosen to lead the sessions and would include local or visiting pastors, missionaries returning from mission service or on furlough or members of the regional council. The

afternoon rally session would be attended by the youth. Supper was then served by the host congregation. The evening session, adhering to the selected theme or topic, was usually open to the public.

The Regional Youth Rallies were a rich experience of friendship and fellowship for the youth of the Canadian District that has lasted over many years.

REFERENCES

Early Youth Rally history from *Following the Lamb 1941-1991*

YOUTH MINISTRY IN EDMONTON: THE EARLY YEARS

By Mary E. Lange

My confirmation day was April 10, 1949. We were instructed by Rev. Raymond Schultz. We made our personal confession of faith in Christ and promised to serve Christ in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life. The five of us from the Heimtal Moravian congregation—Norman Helm, Kenneth Smith, Elinor Adam, Ruth Stockman and myself, Mary Schattschneider, soon became active in the youth meetings at the church on Sunday or other evenings. Someone shared a topic or showed a film and someone served lunch. On social evenings there would be bowling, skating or volleyball or a birthday celebration with games, sing song and lunch. Sometimes there was a Youth Sunday when the youth led in Sunday worship. We looked forward to Youth Rallies three or four times a year at one of the Moravian churches in the area as it was a time when we met new friends.

In 1952 after graduating from the Commercial business class in grade 11 in high school, I moved to Edmonton to work in an office. I lived a few doors across the street from the Edmonton Moravian church. I attended the youth meetings at Edmonton and Heimtal. I remember in summer there were baseball games between Edmonton and Bruderfeld youth followed with a wiener roast at the Mill Creek. Oct. 20, 1953 I was appointed the editor of the C. E. Circle

(Christian Endeavor) youth newspaper. Many hours were spent with friends at the Edmonton Moravian Church preparing the newspaper to print on the Gestetner copier.

The youth program in Alberta inspired many men to go into ministry. In 1952 and 1953 I saw the following young men graduate from Moravian Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, Pa: Rev. Erwin Boettcher, Rev. Wilton Schwanke, Rev. Lorenz Adam, Rev. Marvin Henkleman, Rev. Eric Schulze and Rev. Herbert Harke. On September 8, 1953 there was a farewell at the Bruderfeld church for more college boys attending Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pa.

Rev. Raymond Schultz, ordained in 1945, spent his next 10 years of ministry at the Heimtal Moravian Church. He married Lydia Getzinger in 1951. Rev. Raymond and Lydia were very much a part of my youth life and that of Art Lange. In fact, Rev. Raymond Schultz performed our wedding ceremony, Oct. 29, 1954.

THE CANADIAN MORAVIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT

Reflections by Eric J. Schulze

The task of recalling the past can be a fleeting exercise, or it can be an extensive prolonged process. For me reflecting on the youth movement in the Canadian District of the Moravian Church took some effort because one memory led to another, one contact with a friend led to another, and looking for one picture led to many more. I do appreciate the opportunity to write of my experiences and thank the Canadian Moravian Historical Society for inviting me to do this. Storytelling and autobiographical assignments are opportunities to be cherished.

My recollection of the years from 1939 to 1967 brings a broad range of memories and deep gratitude to God for the many key people in the development and fruitfulness of this dynamic movement. It was a prominent factor in my social and spiritual development. I feel fortunate to have been in the environment of this vital influencing ministry during my teen years and to be in youth leadership ministry in the district in my 20s and 30s. It affirms for me the importance of a dynamic ministry in the Christian Church for Jr. High, Senior High, and College age youth.

The Canadian Moravian Youth Movement impacted my life:

I As a recipient of its ministry when as a youth I benefitted from it;

II As a leader in its ministry, working together with others in Christian service.

I As a Recipient of Youth Ministry

My first memory of attending a youth event was a service at the Bruderheim Moravian Church when I was 12. The occasion was the end of a one day rally or the final service of the week-long conference in 1939. I sat in the church balcony with a friend, who was also from Heimtal. The guest speaker emphasized the need of a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. He invited the young people to raise their hands if they would like to be included in the closing prayer of commitment. My friend and I both responded by raising our hands, as did many others at that service. I remember this being a step toward a greater spiritual consciousness and personal growth. Instruction in the Moravian Catechism and the confirmation of my Baptismal vows within the next 3 years were subsequent highlights.

As a teenager I appreciated the youth activities of the New Sarepta Moravian Church. Those who attended included a broad age range of people, from post confirmation to later 20's and even 30's, single or married. We had enjoyable social events besides the Sunday evening sessions of singing and presentation of topics by young people and guest speakers.

My older brothers were very involved in the congregation's youth events and Canadian District Youth Ministry so I naturally participated in local events and was aware of the effectiveness of the summer district-wide week-long rallies held in New Sarepta in 1937, Didsbury in 1938, Bruderheim in 1939, Gull Lake in 1940, before the purchase of property and development of Camp Van Es. Summer conferences were held there beginning in 1941.

The friendships and fellowship among District Youth were also nurtured with seasonal youth rallies hosted by congregations in rotation on Sundays from about 3:00 to 9:00 p.m. I recall these being held three times a year, in the Fall, Winter, and Spring, planned and conducted by young people on various themes.

During the first three years of the Camp Van Es Conferences I attended only the occasional evening and Sunday sessions, commuting with others from New Sarepta. I was attracted to the atmosphere, the music, and the social environment, but was assigned to chores and summer fallow care at our Hay Lakes farm so my older brothers could attend full time. I became aware of the many pastors and Moravian young people from other congregations whose joyous spirits, Christian witness and gifts impressed me.

Then came my first time as a registered camper. In 1944, at age 17, I paid my full \$2.50 registration fee. I brought my straw tick so when the truck arrived with its load of straw from one of the area farms, I could get

my share. After the initial years, there were other “mattresses” but most of us depended on these prickly straw-ticks for several years, happy not to have to sleep on the ground in our tents. “Oh, du lieber Strohsack” (Oh, you dear straw bag) was heard on the way to the tent or cabin at night. I learned many camping customs from those who had more experience than I.

I remember being impressed by the generous donations from members of the surrounding congregations, especially those on farms, that kept registration costs low. People brought milk, eggs, canned goods, fresh vegetables, meat, potatoes, and baked goods; someone even brought fresh cherries from British Columbia one year. Bread and other groceries had to be purchased. Sugar was still rationed in 1944 and so people were asked to bring sugar and jam if they could, as well as butter. Donations in the offerings were generous. It seemed that in each congregation, old and young alike embraced the value of the Camp Van Es experience, seeing the educational, social and spiritual fruitfulness of the Moravian youth program.

For me, and I know for many others as well, the personal example, catechism instruction, and dedicated leadership of pastors was a significant influence, leading us as young people to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. There was also a constant challenge to missionary service, with congregational mission festivals and visits from missionary personnel.

Congregational pastors attended the week long conferences at Van Es with their young people, providing influencing relationships in formal and informal settings.

A special memory for many of us was the campfire consecration services, usually on Saturday evenings. We were each invited to add a twig to the fire to indicate our commitment to Christ as Savior or to Church ministry or missionary service. Sometimes many lined up to express their personal commitments and some years 10 to 15 young people demonstrated their desire to follow Christ in a particular ministry. Very timely in 1946 was the visit of Dr. Raymond Hauptert, president of Moravian College and Seminary, giving students the opportunity to discuss entrance into college and seminary with him. Elsewhere it has been documented that through the years dozens of Moravian Church leaders, pastors, and missionaries came from the Canadian District as the result of the Youth Movement. I was one who was off to college in 1946, to join 5 other Canadians in preparation for ministry.

Music Ministry

Participation in the ministry of the District's Youth program came quickly for me, being able to sing with the choir in preparation for Camp Sunday services at Van Es. In my second year at camp, 1945, Grace Marx invited me to sing in the octet. I learned about Moravian hymnody, not only in educational classes but in singing from the Moravian Youth Hymnal and

campfire songs. I learned to appreciate hymns, some of which were previously unknown to me, and “choruses” that lent themselves to easy memorization of simple thoughts and harmony. Even now, in my aging years, paging through the Youth Hymnal brings inspiring thoughts and happy memories as I read the words and sing the tunes of great hymns.

Recreational Activity

Sports were enjoyable. I was no stranger to softball and did not have to take a back seat in playing in competitive games. I met Marvin Henkelmann in my first year at Van Es, who became a good friend and my battery partner (usually catcher and pitcher on the same team) at Van Es as well as at Moravian College and Seminary. I was impressed with his ability as a catcher behind home plate and he stimulated me to become a competitive pitcher. At the swimming opportunities in the lake, we country folk admired how well the city folk could swim while we were just learning. Volleyball, ping pong, horseshoes, and badminton were all new to me, but I was glad to learn sports and grow in sportsmanship. I remember Earl Riske being the badminton expert and Jane Wedman winning the ping pong tournament. Elmer and Stan Stelter were good horseshoe pitchers. Jim Weingarh accepted responsibility for every error of his volleyball team. “It’s my fault” he would repeat when the ball hit the ground on his team’s side of the net.

Social Development

I was challenged to more comfortably meet new people at Van Es. There were fellows whose personalities I learned to appreciate and others that I could not befriend easily. Getting acquainted with more girls was challenging for my shy nature, but fun. Broadening my acquaintance with Moravian young people was helpful to my development and expanded my horizons beyond the local youth group.

Spiritual Growth

The camp program provided spiritual enrichment for me. Many Bible classes were conducted and we learned about great saints in church history. We became acquainted with spiritual leaders who visited the District from other areas of the World Wide Moravian Church as well as other denominations. We had professors and teachers from St. Stevens College, Camrose Lutheran College, and Prairie Bible Institute. I was introduced to C. S. Lewis when Gordon Sommers used Screwtape Letters in a series of Vesper Service meditations in 1956.

Hearing testimonies from others at campfire inspired me. Although I had previously made an initial commitment to Christ, there were challenges at evening services and campfire meetings for those commitments to be renewed and to grow deeper. My commitment to Christian ministry in the Moravian Church was made during my first year of College, the

seed for which was sown in the context of the youth ministry at Van Es during the two previous years. The development of a personal quiet time was encouraged as we were given devotional material to read during daily tryst time. I tried to keep a regular schedule of personal devotional time ever since then, some times more successfully than others.

Opportunities for participation in worship leadership were provided as each congregational group led in morning watch before breakfast. Having received so much inspiration and enjoying in the environment, I wanted to participate in the camp program and the entire District Youth Ministry.

II As a Leader in Youth Ministry

My interest and ability in music, nurtured in my family, at Camrose Lutheran College, and Moravian College, led to my leadership in music at Van Es summer camps, at quarterly Youth Rallies, and later in congregational choirs and District wide choral groups. I especially enjoyed leading an octet at Van Es. Many of the young people had outstanding musical abilities and could easily read and sing music without accompaniment. All who wished could sing in the choir, which I also led several years, but we needed a smaller group, an octet, to be able to sing hymns and other songs unaccompanied, in 4 part harmony, especially for Vespers, Camp fire, Love Feasts, and for “lights out” at night. Grace Hoppe, my brother Rudy, and Irene Dreger had been mentors for me for this

music leadership ministry. My first year at leading the octet was 1949.

The octet for each conference was selected on the first day and rehearsals began as soon as possible. At rehearsals we emphasized effective pronunciation of words and learned appropriate dynamics to bring out the message of the hymns. Selections from the Moravian Youth Hymnal provided our repertoire. "Hark The Vesper Hymn is Stealing" and "Day is Dying in the West" were often used for early evening Vespers. "Jesus Makes My Heart Rejoice" was, for many years, sung antiphonally with the rest of the campers at the close of campfires, followed by taps - "Day is Done, Gone the Sun". Hymns on God's love for us and ours for Him and one another were used for Love Feasts. By flashlight we toured the cabin areas at 10:30 p.m. to sing hymns like "Now the Day is Over" or "Now God Be With Us". I thank God for the privilege that was mine of providing leadership in this way, and I have deep appreciation for those who sang in the octets over the years. I remember a good number of those whose voices graced the environment at Van Es and expressed appreciation for this experience of broadening their musical involvement.

I was first elected to the conference executive in 1949 to help lay plans for the summer conference. The executive met several times during the course of the year and selected themes and contacted speakers and teachers. As Youth Camp Director for several years in the mid 1950s it was delightful to work with capable

young people on the executive and planning committees. To see them accept speaking assignments and organizational responsibilities gave me great satisfaction. Then there were special ministers like Siggie Harke who kindled the fire in the outdoor kitchen range at 5:00 a.m. so we had hot water for washing and shaving.

Many changes happened during the 1950s, decreasing the number of young people at Youth camp. Adult and children' camps were begun and the ministers and young people of the district were involved in their leadership. Many young people left farm life and were gainfully employed and it was decided to have weekend Camps – Canada Day and Labor Day. We went to a decentralized format, forming small groups for activities and classes. As pastors we rotated for camping responsibilities from year to year, leading Jr. Camp, Jr. High Camp, Youth Camp, and Adult Camp. While fewer persons attended the Youth camp weekends, the participation in the overall camping program expanded dynamically, with young people stepping into counseling positions, teaching classes, and leading children and younger teens.

Newsletters

Two district wide youth newsletters were circulated during the years I was involved with district youth. The “C.E. Circle” (named from the Christian Endeavor movement) was published by J.I.M. (Jane Wedman, Irene Dreger, and Marian Kittlitz) and others for about

8 years, my guess being 1943-1950. The “Mileposts” circulated from about 1954 to 1961 under the direction of the Regional Youth Council. These attempted to review activities and keep the young people informed of coming events. The faithful Gestetner mimeograph of the Edmonton Moravian Church was used for printing the newsletters as well as much of the Van Es youth camping material.

Provincial Youth Council

Part of leadership responsibility was to help us in the Canadian District identify ourselves as part of a larger group of young people of the Moravian Church in the United States. Regional Youth Councils were elected with representatives to the Provincial Youth Councils. In 1949 Marvin Henkelmann and I attended Camp Chetek in Wisconsin, representing the Canadian District on the Inter-Provincial Youth Council at this initial meeting. Representatives from the Southern Province as well as the Eastern and Western Districts were also present. That Council met annually for many years and gave strength to youth ministry in the Canadian District.

Convocation

In 1957 Canadian District Youth participated in the first continent wide Moravian Youth Convocation. On August 15 about 35 young people left Edmonton for Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, with Bill and Rita Brese as adult advisors and chaperones. The 6,000 mile round

trip, four days each way, required day and night traveling, with limited overnight stops. Visits to Niagara Falls and New York City were touristy side benefits, but incorrectly read directions by a bus driver caused a delayed and inconvenient 3 a.m. arrival in Bethlehem. But the hospitality and fellowship with several hundred other Moravians was a unique experience.

The theme of the four-day convocation, “To Serve the Present Age”, was introduced by a memorable musical drama written by David Henkelmann. The variety of large group inspirational sessions and small discussion and prayer groups on the Moravian College Campus were interspersed with site seeing in historic Bethlehem.

Convocation dates coincided with the Unity Synod of the Moravian Church, providing young people opportunity to meet Moravians from around the world. Some remember the emphatic instructions to be on their best behavior in the presence of the church leaders from different cultures and countries. The convocation experience gave the Canadian young people an awareness of the deeper and broader dimensions of the Church.

Connie’s Family Involvement

I could not review my Canadian Moravian Youth Ministry without mentioning my wife, Connie and her family’s involvement. Connie’s first year at Van Es

was in 1947 at age 15. Her mother, Martha Fenske, was a great supporter of Youth ministry and its leaders. Her years of cooking and being a “mother” to some of the staff contributed much to the environment at Camp Van Es. Connie’s father, Helmund Fenske, spent long hours of many days in work on the Van Es grounds. All four daughters were campers for one or more years during their teens, Bernice and Connie were each conference presidents, Bernice in 1951 and Connie in 1952, during her nurses’ training years. Bernice, Connie, and Marian contributed to the music ministry at Van Es.

During our ministry together Connie taught Young People’s Sunday School classes and was supportive during my many years of involvement in local and district youth work. We recall the many times our home was the setting of formal meetings and informal gatherings. At other times I was away from home and family for leadership meetings, camps, or other functions.

Chicken Thief

Leadership includes many tasks. During one of the camps in the mid 1950s the Liedtke family at New Sarepta, where I was serving at the time, promised to provide hens for the Friday evening banquet. Thursday afternoon I was to pick up the prepared chickens from their farm yard and deliver them to Camp Van Es. The day arrived, but the Liedtkes were not home. There was no other choice for me than to “do the job” in

order for the commitment to be kept. I was acquainted with the Liedtke farm yard and where the chickens that were eligible for the banquet were kept. I knew that an axe was used for more than chopping wood and I also knew from experience where to apply the axe to provide the quickest relief from life for these hens. I caught them one by one, successfully performed my duty and took them back to the parsonage where Connie and I cleaned and dressed them. No neighbors lived within a half mile, and the chicken barn was well hidden from passing traffic, so my “theft” was undetected. When the Liedtkes came home and realized that they had forgotten their commitment they thanked me for helping them fill their obligation. They were wonderful neighbors and faithful devoted members of the congregation.

We Sang Choruses

My experience with learning, singing, and leading choruses at camp and other youth gatherings has been very beneficial to my worship in recent aging years. As young people we brought back to our home congregations the campfire songs and choruses, singing them in the Sunday School sessions that included children and adults. The children sang along very well and learned the choruses in Vacation Bible School. My experience was that most of the middle and older adults sang along as best they could even though the choruses were new and not as “solid theologically” as the hymns or the psalms.

In my recent aging years in discussion with other chronologically gifted persons, it was obvious that in the contemporary worship services the younger generation was more inclined to use “Praise and Worship Songs”. We elderly worshipers miss the use of the “good old hymns” and don’t understand why they cannot be used more in contemporary worship.

In my older adult ministry I shared that as a teenager I experienced how gracious many older people were in singing the choruses with us without complaint. I want to accept the challenge to be as gracious now as the older people were when I was a teenager. Could we be tolerant of the youthful style of worship today as parents and grandparents were of the youth 60-70 years ago? Can we focus more on the Eternal God whom we worship than on the style we use?

Family Events

For Connie and me, the influence of the varied experiences at Camp Van Es, as participants and leaders, made it a place dear to our hearts. Marvin Henkelmann, Herb Harke, and I were ordained there as Deacons in the Ministry of the Moravian Church on July 12, 1953, by Bishop Helmich. Connie and I chose Van Es as the location for our wedding on June 3, 1954, the first of a number of weddings held there. Our oldest daughter, Edith Miriam (Edee), was baptized by Bishop Kenneth Hamilton on June 24, 1958, at Van Es. On July 13, 1961, I was consecrated there as Presbyter by Bishop Helmich. Our daughters,

Edee and Dianne, attended the Van Es Junior High Camp in 1972.

Return Visits to Van Es

The effective District Youth Ministry, of which Camp Van Es was the center for many years, was brought to mind on return celebratory visits to Van Es. It became the venue at which a number of older adults gathered in 1987 for a Creative Maturity Conference. Connie and I came from Wisconsin to lead major sessions at this conference and share what we had learned about aging and how we can better prepare for its challenges.

In 1991 it was our privilege to be present at the Camp Van Es 50th Anniversary to meet many who gathered for worship and fellowship. Percy Henkelman and Bill Brese led Services of Worship and Reminiscence. My brother Rudy spoke at the morning service, Peter Redberger led a Mass Choir, Bev Kadatz directed the noon band concert. Picnic lunch and evening Barbecue were meal highlights, and I had part in the evening Lakeside Vesper Service, sharing some memories.

In 2004, Connie and I returned to Van Es as a part of our 50th wedding Anniversary to renew our vows and take pictures that represented memories of a significant segment of our life's journey during our youth. Alone on the campus we walked the path to the lake, stood at the campfire site and enjoyed the signs of the camp's development over the years. We could

reflect on the development of our own personal lives as well as of our relationship.

Concluding Thoughts

When I review the development of the Canadian Moravian Youth Movement I sense that the creative power, the redemptive work, and the vitalizing presence of our Triune God were the foundation of the individual lives of the pioneering immigrants as well as of the District Churches in the first half of the 20th Century. Dedicated pastoral leadership in the first 60 years of the Canadian District, with the supportiveness of the Provincial administration and the influence of a variety of Christian institutions molded the character of the movement. I am grateful to have been influenced by and participated in the leadership of this Youth Movement.

Certainly key individual persons stand out among the young people and their leaders as important individuals in the Youth Movement. The Van Es property, needed because the vitality of the Movement produced the need for a place, was an important geographic central location for the Youth Movement. This center of program activity expanded to meeting the needs of a variety of conference, camping, and retreat events. Hopefully that kind of ministry will continue, as does the influence of those who have been a part of the Canadian Moravian Youth Movement and their children. To God be Praise and Glory.

REFLECTIONS ON YOUTH IN THE CANADIAN DISTRICT

By Gordon Sommers

Is our memory to be trusted? This is an appropriate question to ask for one who dips 60 years and more into the past. Memory can be awesome, but perhaps also deceptive. Here goes with my remembrances of formative spiritual experiences for me growing up in the Bruderfeld (now Millwoods) congregation and the Canadian District of the Moravian Church, Northern Province.

Most moving of those experiences came through Camp Van Es. I recall the building of the Camp as a lad. We had a special Sunday for all congregations to gather at its completion and for years to follow. At first we packed a lunch and ate with others near our cars parked in the trees. Entry was on a lane that paralleled the lakeshore. It could be muddy if rain had fallen, and I recall pushing cars out of deep mud holes to get everyone there. The later, more direct, and all-weather road was a significant addition. Two other memories of the formative days are prominent. My Aunt, Olga Williams, along with her husband, Uncle John, contributed the initial land for Van Es. Her roots were in the Bruderfeld congregation, although subsequently they attended a small, English-speaking United Church near to their home and also had

Anglican Church connections. The other memory was that of my father, Henry Sommers, working in the construction of the initial buildings. Since our farm was only 10 miles from the Camp site, in later years we provided tractor assistance in the spring preparations for the summer camp program.

I acquired two life-skills at Camp: I learned to play ping pong and to sing. In the first instance, a small program for the adolescents was combined with older folks, and expansion of the initial “youth only” emphasis. I was 14. Not too many participated that year, and it happened to be a rainy July. However, that’s where my ping pong interests were sparked. It has been a life-long activity. I recall, in my missionary vocation in a very remote village of Guyana, encouraging the youth in three separate villages by helping them to construct ping pong tables and teaching them the game.

At 16, I joined the octet. The octet rehearsed each day and sang at morning devotions (especially “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY LORD GOD ALMIGHTY” and “DAY IS DONE”) to close the Campfire. The Rev. Eric Schulze, then a theological student and Youth Camp leader, invited me to sing. Although I could read music and had been playing the violin for 7 years, I had never connected musical notes to the human voice before. A bass voice was needed and my singing

began. Singing became a life-long source of enjoyment and spiritual satisfaction. What a wonderful and lasting gift from Camp Van Es! Thank you, Eric. That was the beginning of your spiritual mentoring of me, which continues until this day.

Of course, all this was incidental to the more complete and deeper spiritual enrichment that came through Camp Van Es. The sounds of “Now the Day is Over” and “Jesus Makes My Heart Rejoice” as the setting sun gloriously colored the lake at Campfire was a visual reflection of my drawing near to the Lord. The earlier Vespers program with the Rev. Jacob Redberger, speaking out of his warm pastoral heart, brought a new perspective on faith. And the Saturday night consecration service was at once scary but challenging, when we stood up to speak and place our “faggot” on the fire. It was there when I was 17 and publicly announced my decision to spend my life in the service of Christ and the Church. It was a decision that began to shape my life of faith, as well as my vocation, in a manner I could never have imagined or predicted.

The Spring Youth Rally event came in later youth. I recall that we gathered at one of the district congregations soon after Easter. That the Rally came along with the most welcome Spring after a long winter enhanced the enjoyment of the experience.

Eating together with peers is memorable. A Youth Council planned the event. In my last year of High School I served on the Council, and planning Youth Camp was a delight.

I was 18 when I left home to begin my preparation for the Ministry. I hated to leave my church contacts and friendships. But attending University at home seemed not to be an option. It was a full 7 years away -- undergraduate study at Moravian College (4 years) and 3 years of Seminary. (A year-long internship in Nicaragua before my final year extended this time of preparation.) Thus I lost contact with Canadian District Youth – except for 4 summer camping programs and one other event, and I must speak about that.

The first Inter-Provincial North American Moravian Youth Convocation took place in 1957. It was planned for the 500th Anniversary year of the Unitas Fratrum, the Moravian Church, world-wide, and took place in Bethlehem, Pa, USA on the campus of Moravian College. It gathered at the same time as the first Unity Synod following World War II, a significant synod in recognizing the autonomy of the world-wide Moravian Mission areas. Since I was a student at Moravian College, I had participated in the planning of the Convocation and needed to attend. I was very pleased

to encourage the participation of youth from the Canadian District.

We engaged a bus and filled it. Rita and Bill Brese were the official chaperones. We set out on a 4-day journey, with a one-night stop in south-eastern Minnesota where we stopped at a Moravian congregation, ate dinner they provided and stayed in the homes of Moravians for our only shower, change of clothes and sleep in a bed for the entire trip. The long trip was otherwise uneventful, except for the singing, games and fellowship on the bus. When we reached Bethlehem we discovered that the registration for the Convo was so much larger than expected that we had to be transported to Lehigh University (across the river) for additional dormitory lodging. It was a grand gathering of nearly 500 youth from Canada and the U.S. Thus began a tradition of YOUTH CONVO that continues today. I had arranged for a side trip to New York City, for me a “must-see” when it was likely no one else in the group had previously been there (recall that air transportation was just getting started). The boat cruise around Manhattan and the visit to the Empire State Building were especially appealing.

I recall also the MILEPOST publication, run off on the old Gestetner. It was a great way to keep youth connected. Our congregation had sporadic youth

gatherings. A far-more engaging effort was the ORCHESTRA. There were violins, several accordions and trumpets, perhaps a clarinet and we met frequently to rehearse in each other's homes for worship on Sunday. The practice always ended with "lunch" and that is where I learned to drink coffee. Far more significant was the fellowship and the nurturing I received from older and caring colleagues. Being in homes was necessary since the Church was heated only on Sunday.

I've learned that we find ways to express our faith and to grow in our walk with the Lord as opportunity and resources provide. These change with time, varied personalities and occasions. The principles of commitment to the Lord Jesus and to the community of faith remain – across time, culture and location. I praise the Lord for the lasting impact my heritage in the Canadian District of the Moravian Church made on me out of which I have been able to find resources and enjoyment in serving Christ and the Church.

WOW! ALREADY?

By Betty M. Voelker

We had arrived in Edmonton on Thursday, May 29, 1975. It wasn't long after our arrival that Rev. Bob Grey held a meeting of the people in charge of the upcoming summer Church Camps. (I was sitting in the background, so I could get a 'feel' of what the Moravian camping program in Alberta was like.) I had no intention of going to camp because three of our four children were not old enough and we were still getting settled in.

As the meeting progressed Pastor Grey said they still needed a lifeguard, so he led in prayer asking God's blessing on the summer camps and in finding a lifeguard. When he finished I quietly, (me?), said I was a qualified lifeguard and swimming instructor in the U.S. and Canada. Pastor Grey pronounced me an answer to prayer!! (How "cool" was that?)

That summer was an exciting one for our children and me. First we went to the camp for grades 5/6 since our oldest son, Bruce, had just finished grade 5. 'My' Bob was settling into his new work at Millwoods and wouldn't have been able to look after Brian, 5 ½, Britt, 4; and Beth, 2. So, we all went to camp. In the Wedman Lodge the large room to the left of the kitchen and next to the outside door, (later the

‘library’), had two full-sized bunks and that’s where we four spent our nights and Beth’s nap-time. People working in the lodge, or the camp grandma, Emma Wudel, would keep an eye on Beth while I was teaching swimming and canoeing. We had to carry the canoes from the back of the old dining hall all the way to the lake and back again at the end of camp. Then, during the camps, we hid them in the long grass and rushes. There was this tall lifeguard chair, which the men would place in the water and, to the best of their ability, would push down into the sandy bottom. It felt like sitting on Italy’s leaning tower of Pizza! We could still canoe around the ‘point’ and saw so much wildlife including the beaver’s house.

This was the first time I’d met Emma and found her to be a loving, caring and happy person. One day there was a camper who had a bandaged arm and I didn’t want to let him go swimming or canoeing in the chance that he would get an infection from the not-so-clean Cooking Lake! I didn’t know what I was up against! He turned out to be Emma’s grandson! So, she came to me and asked why I wouldn’t let Parker go in the water. I explained my concerns, but Emma said she would take responsibility in case anything happened to his arm. He went swimming and canoeing. 😊 There were more camps to come where I was lifeguard, swimming and canoeing instructor.

(Come to think of it, I never got paid. I should apply for back wages!)

There was ‘bushman’ who turned out to be Doug Snider, Jr. When I asked why he was called ‘bushman’ the kids explained that he lived ‘way’ up north in the bush!! Years later I found out that Fairview wasn’t quite in the ‘bush’.

The year 1975 was the summer of hauling, shoveling, and raking gravel around the grounds. I got my directions from the camp leader and then passed them on to the work crews. The young people worked hard and had a great spirit among them. They put their backs and sweat into making themselves a part of the on-going improvements and ministry of camp. I also had the honor (?) of choosing the neatest cabin each day – talk about stress-on-the-job!! Oh, yes, I also led the music at mealtime

Then one year Rev. Ed Ullrich asked if I would like to help him start a camp for grades 1-2. Since my degree had been in elementary I was happy to say ‘yes’. My responsibility was to look after the music, and devotions for the ‘family’ groups. It was a great experience. A few years later, Wayne/Tabea Schiewe and I co-chaired another grade 1-2 camp.

In those early days of my Van Es camping experience we had lots of children. (I wonder where all their

children and grandchildren have gone.) Many lives were challenged and changed for the better. For some it was their only experience of Christian influence. Campfires by the lake were a time for these young people to reflect on what camp meant to them and many made their commitment to live for Christ. We need to keep up our calling to Camp Van Es so that more lives may be touched by the Holy Spirit.

To GOD be the Glory!

MY YOUTH AS A CANADIAN MORAVIAN

By Gary Straughan

I think that I can say without much hesitation that the direction for my life and the underpinnings of my philosophy were formulated for me at the Junior Camp at Van Es during the summer of 1954. Prior to that week of camp, I had no real church background. My parents had come out of church backgrounds that were at opposite ends of the spectrum – my father out of an Anglican background in England and my mother out of Mennonite background in Saskatchewan. As a result, my siblings and I were not a part of a church experience. In addition, my parents had a poverty stricken life and, although most of our neighbors were also relatively poor, our family struggled mightily to make ends meet. I can remember how our Saturday grocery purchase depended a great deal on how well the chickens did in laying their eggs that week. Our milk check went in total to pay the mortgage on the farm. My brothers and my dad worked extremely hard to grow grain and hay to be able to feed the cows all winter and to have enough seed grain left for next year's planting. We tried to grow much of our own vegetables and fruits and my mother did a lot of canning. In addition to that, I, as a child, was one who was bullied and picked on a lot and so I was not always willing to be in places where I was with other

kids. As an example – even though I was a fairly good athlete and specifically a good softball player, I was often chosen last to be on someone’s team. My ego suffered a lot.

Then, in the spring of 1954, the Klapstein family talked with my mother about allowing me to go to Junior Camp at Camp Van Es and my mother encouraged me to go. I went with trepidation and that week (actually ten days back then) was a life-changing experience for me. I experienced acceptance and love and grace that I had never before experienced from anyone other than my own family. I found adults (mainly the clergy of the Canadian District – all of whom in those days were at camp) who took an interest in who I was. I found that other kids would appreciate who I was and would treat me as an equal when they did not have to prove anything to bullies. I cannot say that I had a Damascus Road experience but I also discovered that what I was experiencing was because folks were trying to follow the calling of a God who is a God of love and acceptance (my previous experiences about faith were confined to some narrow fundamentalist relatives who only talked about a God of vengeance and condemnation).

I returned home from camp determined that I wanted more of that kind of life and asked my parents if we could become involved with some of those people at

the nearest church that helped to sponsor that camp, the Heimtal Moravian Church. My mother was ecstatic and my lifelong Moravian journey was begun. My involvement with the Moravian camping program as a direct participant, either as a camper or a staff person, became a 50 year love affair (in other words, I was involved in a Moravian camp for at least one full week and many times for two and three and even four weeks every year from then through 1993). I participated in every program that the Heimtal church held or sponsored from that time forward until I left for college. I was baptized into the faith at the Heimtal church on Palm Sunday, 1957, following a two year confirmation instruction program with Rev. Eric Schulze, someone who has always been a mentor for me.

During those years, I would look for every opportunity to get together with Moravian youth from across the district at youth rallies. I was not able to afford to go to the very first youth convocation held in 1957 in Bethlehem but was asked to do some liaison work for the Canadian District in preparation for that event (I was part of the planning committee for the following convocation held in 1962 and helped plan the next several Convos including the directorship of the California Youth Convo that I believe was held in 1991). Every Sunday evening would see me involved with the youth fellowship at Heimtal, most of the time

just getting together to play volleyball. I helped with several Vacation Bible School events at Heimtal and at the other Moravian congregations in Canada. I served on the Regional Youth Council but it had a different name back then and I cannot remember that name today.

I can probably count on one hand the number of times in these 57 years when I have not been in worship somewhere on a Sunday morning, 99.9% of the time in a Moravian setting. But even more significant was the fact that my initial Camp Van Es experience laid the groundwork for a calling that eventually took me into ordained ministry and the only life I have known my entire adult life. God began to tug at my heart that week and within months I was making plans to become an ordained Moravian clergy person, something that was accomplished on June 10, 1966, after I had finished my theological training at Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, PA (I had also received my undergraduate degree at Moravian College on the same campus).

When I was ordained, every congregation in the Canadian District was fully staffed and so I was called to become the pastor at the Freedom Moravian Church, located half way between Green Bay and Appleton in Northeast Wisconsin, following a summer working for the Canadian District and the District

President, the Rt. Rev. Percy Henkelman. My pastoral journey has taken me to five different congregations in Wisconsin, to California, to Indiana, and to Pennsylvania, before bringing me back to Northeast Wisconsin as the final pastor in the life of the East Green Bay congregation. In between time, I also was elected and served full time for six years as the District President for the Eastern District. Of course, as is the case with all Moravian clergy I have served on many Inter-Provincial, Provincial, and District boards and committees of the church over the years, including two terms as the President of the former Southwest District. I now live in retirement in Green Bay.

My ministry has always focused on justice and social issues and I believe that it is mainly because I learned during my first camp experience that God has called us, in the words of Micah, “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” The clergy, staff and campers of the Junior Camp at Camp Van Es in 1954 did not preach those words to me but they exhibited those words to me. In the words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “preach the gospel wherever you go and use words if you must,” the implication being that how we conduct ourselves becomes much more a telling of the gospel than the words we speak, much more indicative of who we are than what we say we are. I truly am grateful for the grounding in the faith that came to me as a result of the

camping program of the Canadian District at Camp Van Es and the youth ministry of the Canadian District.

YOUTH CONVOCATIONS – CONNECTING WITH THE WORLD

By Laurie Ward

In 1957, the face of the youth movement in the Moravian Church of North America changed with the first Youth Convocation that was held in Bethlehem, PA. No longer were there mass youth rallies or activities that would include youths of all ages: the new age of “Convo” had begun. In fact, the Rev. Gary Straughan was then just a newly baptized Moravian of the Heimtal congregation and he was asked to participate as the liaison for the Canadian District! By the 1970’s, the Moravian youth of North America, aged 13 to 18, would gather together at convocations every 2 – 4 years. Subsequently Young Adult Convos for those aged 18 to 25 were created.

A unique opportunity came in 1978 for the Canadian District to shine as they hosted the very first North American Youth Convo to be held in Canada. In July of that year, approximately 250 youth gathered at Sunshine Village. The first 4 days of Convo were spent revelling in the splendour of one of God’s great creations, the Rocky Mountains. Participants were then transported by bus to Edmonton where they were billeted by host families from the Edmonton area churches and provided the opportunity of continuing

their spiritual journeys while experiencing our beloved Camp Van Es.

At the outset of planning for the very large number of participants, the Rev. Gerald Befus (Rio Terrace Church, Edmonton) was an excellent choice to act as the regional coordinator for Canada. His expertise as a youth pastor and coordinator was invaluable in providing these young people with an experience they would never forget in the majestic setting of the Canadian Rockies. When Rev. Befus accepted a call to return to a position back in the United States prior to the completion and commencement of this Convo, the planning was then successfully carried out by numerous pastors and members of the District Board, including the Rev. John Henry Weinlick (Rio Terrace), as well as with tremendous help from both individual and congregational support.

Since then, only one other Convo has been held in Canada, which took place at the University of Calgary, during the summer of 2005. The faith commitment of the members of our Canadian District once again shone forth as we hosted youth from across North America. The program included a one-day trip through the Rockies to beautiful Lake Louise, and worship and Lovefeast celebrations were held at the two Calgary churches (Good Shepherd and Christ Church). The Reverends Wendy & Rick Beck (Good

Shepherd, Calgary), the Rev. Steve Gohdes (Christ Church, Calgary), and the Rev. Don Michaels (Rio Terrace, Edmonton) all played key roles in ensuring that this Convo would be as successful as their 1978 predecessor.

The face of the Young Adult Convo experience has continued to evolve and change during the 21st century to provide international (and broader) opportunities to expand upon spiritual journeys. In 2007 some of our Canadian youth were fortunate enough to be able to participate in the exploration of their roots as Moravians as they travelled to Germany and the Czech Republic, visiting both Herrnhut and Prague. Our three most recent 2010/11 Young Adult Convo participants had the incredible opportunity to enhance their own faith journeys by experiencing the roots of Christianity itself as they followed in Christ's footsteps in the Holy Land of Israel.

May our young people in the Canadian District continue to be upheld, challenged, encouraged, and given the opportunities to grow in their own spiritual awareness through events such as Youth Convos. Our continued offering of individual, congregational and District support to our youth in these endeavours, even in the face of economic downturns or loss of congregational numbers, is vital. As a faith community within the Canadian District of the

Moravian Church that journeys together, may we continue to support them in all of their fundraising efforts in order that they may attend the Convos of the future. Whether it be through cookbook and bake sales, bottle drives or silent dinner auctions, our financial support and encouragement will continue to be needed in order to ensure that as many of our youth as possible (these are our “leaders of tomorrow”) are able to participate in these life-altering, spiritually-filled events.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON CONVO 2010-11

(A Journey to the Holy Land)

By Meghan Ward (Rio Terrace Moravian Church)

I should start by thanking everyone who helped me to get to Israel for Convo. It was a trip of a lifetime and was so awesome. Ordinary words can't really describe all that I saw, learned and felt when I was there. It was amazing to actually see where Christ was born and to walk in all the places that he walked. We followed the life of Christ from birth to death and at every site we went to we would hear the stories of what took place there. We had so many amazing experiences. It would take way too long to tell about everything that we saw and did, and to try to describe how beautiful Israel is, but I hope this article will give everyone an idea of what I experienced over there.

We had a little worship service and sang hymns at just about every place we visited and some of those songs, along with others I grew up with, mean a lot more to me now. I think these worship services helped give me a sense of belonging – being able to share our same faith together made me feel like I was contributing to something and I don't exactly know how to say it, but it just felt like I belonged there. I was even asked to read the scripture when we were in the Church of the

Holy Sepulcher (which is the church that was built over the site of Christ's crucifixion). At the Garden Tomb we took part in a full communion service. Our guide, who was a Palestinian Christian, blessed all 50 of us by presenting us with little hand carved olive wood communion cups that we were able to bring home with us.

I was scared about going to Convo at first because I didn't know any one - not even the other 2 girls from Edmonton that I had only met once before (when we baked Moravian Sugar Cakes for one of Pastor Matt Gillard's Convo fundraisers). But I connected with a few people right away and the pastors and bishops on the trip made me feel at home. I have made many new friendships that I hope will last a lifetime – some from Pennsylvania and Brooklyn, but mostly with the people from the Bronx. It felt good to be able to share my thoughts and feelings and to be truly connected to everyone around me, and to also sense, I think, a more personal connection to God and Jesus too.

I think I appreciate being a Canadian more now. After seeing a 3rd world country last year (when my mom and I went to Nicaragua) and now experiencing a country with so much conflict and corruptness, it is so good to know that I have family and friends supporting me in a country where I have the right and the freedom to get an education, which makes me feel like I am

“somebody”. I learned a lot about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict through our visit with Father Elias Chacour (a Palestinian Melkite priest who has become the Archbishop of the Greek Catholic Church in Haifa, Nazareth & the Galilee region). I even bought his book (something I don’t usually do). I also heard more personal stories of the hardships faced by the Palestinians (both Christian and Muslim) after our visit to Star Mountain Moravian Rehabilitation Centre. I want to be able to help in some way and be able to support others around the world who do not have the means to do so themselves (like maybe do some fundraising for Star Mountain or travel once again to help in Nicaragua!)

People have asked me what it felt like to be in the Holy City of Jerusalem and if it affected my faith in any way. I never really thought about my own faith or spiritual journey until I went to Convo, and when I heard about some people feeling Jesus’ or God’s presence in certain places in Jerusalem, I never thought anything like that would happen to me. I have now learned to never say ‘never’ because what I felt at two particular spots was something so extraordinary and touching that a few words can never fully describe how I felt!

The first place was when we were entering the Via Dolorosa (the Way of the Cross) at the spot where

Jesus took his first few steps after having the cross put on his back. I stepped on the original rock that he had stepped on. I immediately felt very cold and got goose-bumps and the shivers - it was like He was running his hand down my body! I had to walk a little way away from the group and be by myself for a few minutes to take it all in.

The second place was at the Western (Wailing) Wall of Old Jerusalem. In any place of prayer in Israel, the men and women are divided. When I was walking toward the wall, I could see how much the wall was affecting some of the people and realized how much this wall really meant to them. I didn't want to touch the wall at first because I didn't want to be disrespectful, but something was telling me that I had to do it. I got to the wall and bowed my head to pray and as soon as I touched it I began to cry for no reason and it was hard to stop crying! I was not expecting that at all and I realized that the power that surges through this wall is like a current running through the body.

I really felt the presence of God – or perhaps the Holy Spirit – and I felt like God Himself was crying through me for His people – all people. God doesn't care what religion you are in that place. This is a place where anyone can connect to the awesome power of God. It is really sad to see that because of religious

differences, this sacred and Holy land is being torn apart. While I did feel that God was all around me, I also felt a sadness and despair. I used to take the word “PEACE” for granted, but now I realize how important that word really is and find myself wishing for peace – not just in Israel but for the rest of the world too.

I’m not 100% sure of what I exactly learned about my faith, but what I do know is that it was very weak and rocky before I went to Convo and when I returned it felt more strong and solid. To be able to connect the places I had seen to the readings in the Bible was amazing and helped me to believe in my faith so much more. Convo in Israel was an amazing experience and is something that I will never forget. I can’t honestly say that it will help get me to church every Sunday, but I can say that it will certainly help me to grow and learn more about my own spirituality, our Moravian Church and Christianity itself.

Thank you so much for helping me on this journey.

SHALOM & SALAAM !!

TODAY'S YOUTH CULTURE: WHAT'S NEW IN YOUTH MINISTRY?

By Matt Gillard

The *Unitas Fratrum*, from the time of Comenius, has always made education, in all its senses, a priority. Learning has always been an unofficial pillar of our denomination, and although it has taken on a number of different forms throughout the centuries, it is still foundational in building up young students as people of faith.

The idea that there is anything new to talk about when it comes to youth ministry is somewhat laughable. The Teacher tells us that there is nothing new under the sun. I always believe this to be true, and no matter how much we want to believe, I cannot say to you that there is anything new going on in youth ministry. Yes, the tools continue to change: we use social networking like Facebook and texting to keep in contact with one another. We make our brochures using the latest Photoshop program. And we seek to do our best to stay on top of the latest technology in order that we don't look completely out of touch.

Even though the technology is new, the ministry we offer is, as Ecclesiastes notes, nothing new. The truth of the matter is that there are a number of us who are in their 20's from a few local congregations who get

together in order to offer the chance for youth to come and hang out with their friends. The ministry we offer comes from the fact that we all have had some mentors in the past who have cared deeply about us, so much so that they used up their most valuable resources, that of love and time, to spend time with the younger generation.

Indulge me for a moment to take a small journey to Van Es. My favourite place at camp isn't a tree or the pool or the camp in general, but a wall. It is the wall inside Wedman lodge which has the story of the beginnings of the camp. The wall tells the story of young Moravians (today they are many of our older Moravians) banding together in order to fellowship, to worship, and to create a place of peace in their world. It tells the story of youth leaders who worked incredibly hard in order to show the youth of the day that they were important, loved, and listened to.

And while it is true that there is nothing new under the sun, it is also true that we worship and follow Jesus Christ who claims that we are to behold him, for he makes all things new. The things which Christ makes new is people. He redeems us and loves us and makes us new creatures each and every day, and it is our responsibility as leaders of young people to help them see this in action—first by the way that we treat them,

and secondly by allowing them to see their mentors live out their own lives as disciples.

When we take the kids to an event outside of the church, sometimes we grab a meal before, during, or after the event, and it is important for them to see that we pray for our meal outside of the comfort of our homes. When we go bowling or to play laser tag or go to the water park, it is important that we show them what it means to have a positive social life and how to interact with the world around us. And in all things, our youth ministry is about sharing our lives together when we can, and being there to listen, care, and support one another as brothers and sisters in faith.

Forming these relationships is as old as time itself, and it is something new each and every day. And I will be so bold as to speak for all of our current youth leaders that we serve in this capacity because we once had youth leaders who cared about us. So we continue on with this cycle of teaching, mentoring, and caring for the youngest of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

