

Pastoral Report

Submitted by Chuck Neufeld, January 26, 2003

It is with deep joy that I reflect on our pastoral ministry in Markham. Speaking personally, Community Mennonite has truly been a spiritual haven — for me, as I know it has been for others too. I know that Pastors Bonnie and Horace share similar sentiments. What honor we all feel in having been asked to offer our gifts in this way. Thank you for your trust and love.

The past six months have been filled with many different events, ministries and activities. A small and thoroughly incomplete sampling includes:

- Youth, Men's and Women's Retreats
- Thanksgiving Celebration & Dinner
- Peace Sunday
- Visiting speakers (Steve Bustos, Peter J. Dyck, Rev. Horace McMillon Sr., Abe Neufeld)
- Veteran's Day Service
- Memorial Services for Florence Ekstrom and Eva Bell
- Church Picnic (August 4)
- Vacation Bible School (August 5-9)
- Mission & Service Trip to Rehoboth (August 23-25). A special thanks to Steve and Mechelle Mares for organizing this event. It was a wonderful experience; especially for the youth that participated. Several people of CMC had previously attended Rehoboth's annual Anniversary Celebration on July 28.
- PADS meals have been prepared by CMC and delivered to the "meal site" in Chicago Heights. Mertis Odom has been giving leadership to this ministry.
- AAMA (African American Mennonite Association) meetings in California — August 9-10 — Pastor Horace and family attended.
- Healthy Congregation Workshop, Nov. 8-9. Pastors Chuck & Bonnie, Pastor Horace and Chuck & Gwen Kozlowsky attended.
- Advent & Christmas Celebrations, including the annual Christmas Program.
- There are literally countless other acts of faithful service and evidences of God's Spirit among us that are not listed here. Whether the gifts given are public or private, big or small, short-term or long-term, loud or quiet, visible or invisible, they are all incredibly important — all gratefully received!

While we were in Virginia last week, I awoke from sleep with a deep sense that I need to say something very specific to CMC. That something is this: "You are lovely and loved just the way you are!" I believe this was a word from the Holy Spirit. Simply put, we need to make certain that we celebrate the life-giving beauty of CMC. To be sure, that is precisely why **I** am here! Because of

your luring and healing nature — because of your welcoming spirit. So, "I love you just the way you are. In fact, I love you *because* of who you are." That said, I would like to remind us of what is written in Luke 12:48 — "*From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*" Given who we are — given our calling — given what has been entrusted to us — we have quite an assignment ahead. An assignment that includes using the gifts that are ours. The challenge is to always look for ways of becoming even better at what we already are good at. A church that is alive to its calling will be eager to adjust itself to the changes that invariably are a part of its life. So, my challenge is this: While we bask in the knowledge of God's lavish blessing, while we rest in the knowledge that we have good reason to be thankful for who we are, let us commit ourselves to **grow** even more in the areas that require our attention — whatever those areas may be! I believe strongly that it is out of this center of **gratitude** that we can embark on the year that lies ahead with certainty, with hope, with joy, and with a resolute conviction that God will not leave us alone. Remember that God loves us just the way we are — but, let us also remember that God desires our improved health, our strengthened faith, our focused and refocused living.

I pray that the *Congregational Review* will assist us in the above mentioned challenge. May we as a congregation be given the insight to know what aspects of our corporate life require attention.

Look out for each other! Look for each other! One gift that we give each other is "support." There are two aspects to this: Firstly, we should pray and care for each other. Secondly, when any are absent from the community, we should check on each other — go look for each other! Each one of us has the privilege and the obligation to do our part in keeping the body together. Every single one of us deserves the care and attention of the rest of us. Let us love each other even as Christ loves us: unconditionally and continuously. May we also be open and welcoming of every new person God sends our way!

As said at the outset, we praise God for CMC and for the chance to serve you in this way. We, your pastoral team — Chuck & Bonnie Neufeld and Horace McMillon — are ready and willing to serve you in ways that honor CMC's call to be a faithful and vibrant demonstration of God's Kingdom.

May God's richest blessings be ours in 2003!