

MCC Low German Programs Newsletter

Volume 4, Number 2

May 2006

Mennonite Central Committee Canada, 134 Plaza Dr., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 5K9

Long ago, the apostle Paul wrote in one of his letters that Christians should respect the diversity among believers, recognizing that each one has been created by God with a unique gift. In 1. Corinthians 12:11 we read: "*All these gifts are the work of one and the same Spirit, distributing them separately to each individual at will.*" We are gifted with different abilities, different aptitudes, different physical characteristics and different spiritual callings. Our goal is not to be all alike but to bring all different kinds of people together with varied understandings and backgrounds. This is also our goal as MCC staff working with Low German Mennonites (LGM) in different regions: we want to learn from each other as we share our experiences and work together. Once again this Newsletter highlights some of the activities in different MCC programs with LGMs. -- *Mary Friesen, MCCC*

Taber, Alberta: A new staff member joined the MCC Alberta Low German office in Taber in December 2005. *Eva Klassen* was born in Taber, AB, and raised in a Mennonite family who spoke Low German at home. Eva enjoys interacting with people as she provides LGM families with newcomer services when they come into the Taber MCCA office.

Cuauhtemoc, Mexico: MCC service workers *John and Ruth Janzen* have returned to Winkler, MB, after a three-month service assignment in Cuauhtemoc. MCC Canada is inviting applications for the position of local program director in Mexico. Sarah Giesbrecht from Cuauhtemoc, MX, who has worked with MCC in Mexico for almost 10 years has agreed to take on the responsibility of office administrator in Cuauhtemoc until local director(s) have been appointed. Please see attached listing for other service opportunities with LGMs in Mexico, USA and Bolivia.

Durango, Mexico: Once again the MCC staff in Durango, Mexico, organized a LGM learning tour to Cuauhtemoc. Margie Giesbrecht coordinated this visit in Durango and Sarah Giesbrecht together with other MCC staff and local LGMs hosted the group in Cuauhtemoc. The group consisted of 18 LGMs from Durango which included a few teachers and several staff from the Pflegeheim. One of the highlights for the group was the visit with the Vorstehers (colony leaders) in Cuauhtemoc and the meeting with members from the Old Colony School Committee. For others the highlight was the visit to the Rehabilitation centre Luz en mi Camino. We believe that seeing what is done in another colony and establishing new connections will benefit all participants.

Winnipeg, Manitoba: Ten members of the MCC LGM Advisory Committee participated in a learning tour and a meeting at the end of April. The group arrived in Newton, Kansas, on April 24, travelled to Paris, Texas, on April 26 and on to Seminole, Texas, on April 27. In addition to the Advisory Committee members, Kennert Giesbrecht, editor of the Mennonitische Post, participated in the learning tour. The three public meetings when Kennert reported about the Post ministry and showed pictures, were very valuable as an opportunity to interact with LGM people in the three different areas (Newton, KS; Tigertown, TX; Seminole, TX). Through these "Post-Evenings" he promoted the overall ministry of the Post/Blatt/Books, but it was also an opportunity to demonstrate how the Post connects to the other work MCC does in LGM communities.

In Newton, KS, members of the Advisory Committee spent several hours with the MCC Central States staff and had an opportunity to learn more about the different services offered through this office. MCC Central States has placed one service worker couple as teacher/principle in Honey Grove, TX, in the Old Colony Mennonite school.

Advisory Committee members were hosted in Newton by members of the Western District Mennonite Support Committee. Since no direct services are offered out of the MCC office for LGM newcomers in Kansas, this committee has been organized in an attempt to support LGM newcomers in Kansas. It was inspiring to see the connections some of these committee members have established with LGM

families in the area. One of the local LGM community support workers in this region is *Elisabeth Harder*.

Members of the Advisory Committee considered the visit to the Paris, TX, area to be a definite highlight. Most of the LGMs in this community have come in the last few years and many of them are undocumented immigrants. It was their first experience to have an official visit from MCC and they certainly welcomed the group with open arms. Members of the Old Colony school committee expressed their appreciation for the work of *Otto and Lois Loepky* and for the fact that MCC is willing to help them with placing a teacher/principal in their school.

The Advisory Committee members also experienced generous hospitality in Seminole, Texas. Most of the planning and preparation for the meeting had been done by the representatives from Texas (Isaak and Lisa Wiebe) who worked together with the local Old Colony church to host the Advisory Committee for the meetings in their school and also to host members for night in their homes. On April 28 the group toured the Seminole area, learnt something about the history of the LGMs in the area and visited the Old Colony School. April 29 was a meeting day when each regional representative had opportunity to report about the program challenges in their LGM community. Most Advisory Committee members worshipped with the local LGMs in Seminole on Sunday, April 30.

During the sharing session at the Advisory Committee meeting, Peter Enns from Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, shared about their involvement with MCC Mexico in the disaster relief project in southern Mexico. Others shared about their challenges as they attempt to improve the educational opportunities for their children. Some of the discussions at the meeting related to the mental health assessment done by Dr. John Elias in Cuauhtemoc, MX. Another discussion focused on the revised guidelines for MCC's documentation work for LGMs. Everyone acknowledged that the legal issues can be very complex for LGMs when they want to travel, or just claim Canadian citizenship. Many of the LGMs in Texas and Kansas have found jobs on farms but they are still undocumented immigrants.

Santa Cruz, Bolivia: MCC service workers reported that they had been in church in Las Piedras Colony on a Sunday when the colony had a collection for the flood victims of the San Ramon area. A few months

ago the Rio Grande flooded the area and many Bolivian families were displaced. Dick writes: "We heard of one Mennonite from a near-by colony who went to the town of San Ramon and gave away 1700 eggs to the refugees." It is also reported that a few of the LGM colonies in Bolivia have had some land disputes with their Bolivian neighbours, but so far they have settled this peacefully.

Nuevo Casas Grandes, Mexico: *Henry Wiebe and Maria Klassen Wiebe* completed their term of service in Nuevo Casas Grandes on May 8. During the last 15 months they have served the LGM colonies in the area and established many positive relationships. On May 1 the MCC program officers in Nuevo Casas Grandes, *Ernesto and Tena Wall* from Winkler, MB, began their new assignment. They have three young children and are excited about this opportunity to work at the MCC resource centre in Nuevo Casas Grandes.

Cuauhtemoc, Mexico: MCC staff in Cuauhtemoc hosted another MCC Orientation tour in April 2006. Participants of this study tour were Marsha Jones, MCCC Human Resources staff; Rick Cober Bauman, MCCO program director; Eve Isaak, MCCA community support staff with LGMs; and Eckhard Goerz, Executive Director of Eden Mental Health (Winkler, MB). The group visited local LGM institutions and schools, worshipped in local LGM churches, participated in meetings with local leaders and connected with local LGM families in different colonies.

Winnipeg, Manitoba: The LGM program coordinator Mary Friesen has just returned from a trip to Bolivia and Paraguay. One of the challenges for the MCC service workers in Santa Cruz is the fact that they still do not have a Centro Menno program coordinator. Dick and Kathy Braun have taken on some of these responsibilities on an interim basis but their term will end in August of this year. Phil Bender has accepted a part-time position as Centro Menno coordinator to assist the Centro Menno team starting immediately. Another transition within MCC Bolivia will be when the present Country Representatives (CR's) Mark Epp and Cathy Wismer end their term in July and the new CR's *Cesar Flores and Lizette Miranda* will begin their assignment with MCC Bolivia.

Compiled and edited by Mary Friesen, MCCC
E-mail: maryf@mennonitecc.ca
MCC web page: www.mcc.org

