

A NEW CENTER FOR PEACE STUDIES ESTABLISHED BY THE CONFERENCE OF THE MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCH OF INDIA

On March 1 and 2 of this year, a workshop on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution was held on the campus of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Centenary Bible College in Shamshabad near Hyderabad, India as the inaugural event of a new Center for Peace Studies established by the M.B. Church of India. Though located on the campus of the Bible College, the Center significantly is a center of the church and not just the college.

Dalton Reimer, founding co-director and presently senior associate of Fresno Pacific University's Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies, was the key resource person for the workshop.

The two-day workshop was attended by some 80 persons including both village and city pastors, college professors and students from several institutions, and professionals from both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Participants came from as far away as Mumbai (Bombay) and Bangalore. A number of different denominational groups were also represented.

The workshop was planned by a committee consisting of S. Solomon, principal of the M.B. Bible College, and faculty members I.P. and Christina Asheervadam. Faculty, staff and students at the Bible College served as hosts. The workshop was conducted in the Bethany Mennonite Brethren Church on the campus of the Bible College.

The program consisted of a mix of devotionals, singing, dramatic skits prepared by faculty and students portraying a variety of conflict situations, ten lessons in peacemaking and conflict resolution developed and presented by Reimer, and group discussions and reporting. The workshop concluded with an inaugural address by Dr. P.B. Arnold, President of the M.B. Church of India, in which he inventoried the variety of conflicts experienced by the church and society in India, and the need for peacemaking. Final comments were made by Reimer and Principal S. Solomon, and certificates distributed to the participants by Dr. Arnold and other leaders.

Response to the workshop was most positive. A theological student from Bangalore volunteered that he intended to encourage his denominational theological institution also to pursue such an emphasis. A professional volunteered that this kind of workshop should be conducted for professionals in the region. Both village and city pastors expressed appreciation.

The relation between the Fresno Pacific Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies and the M.B. Bible College began in 1999 when Reimer was invited to present a series of lectures on peacemaking at the college. At that time he also helped lead a seminar on peacemaking for pastors, working together with an Indian trainer from Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), with Indian headquarters in Calcutta. Reimer's recent service in India was in response to an invitation from the Governing Council of the Mennonite Brethren Church of India to return to India and assist in establishing a peace center of the

church at the Bible College. Reimer, together with his wife Beverly, accepted the invitation and spent a term of teaching at the institution from November of 2003 to March of 2004. Dalton taught several courses in communication and peace studies, while Beverly taught classes in English. The inaugural workshop on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution served as a climax to their work.

Further development of the center in India is in the hands of a small committee established for this purpose. S. Solomon, principal of the Bible College, serves as chair, and Christina Asheervadam as member. Fresno Pacific's Center for Peacemaking will continue to serve in a supporting role.

On the immediate horizon is a workshop on mediation and peacemaking for pastors from all the Mennonite conferences in India, which is being jointly planned by MCC India and the Center in Shamshabad. The workshop is to take place in Shamshabad at the Bible College in the near future.

Report by Dalton Reimer
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