

Global project to celebrate MB church

Paul Hiebert to co-edit anniversary history book

Paul Hiebert has been appointed co-editor of a Mennonite Brethren global history project that will coincide with the 2010 celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the MB church in 1860. The North American MB Historical Commission and the International Committee of Mennonite Brethren announced Hiebert's appointment in May.

The history project grew out of discussions more than a year ago when ICOMB first considered how best to celebrate the anniversary of the MB church. Their initial vision included the possibility of producing a history in a variety of formats, including multilingual DVDs and web-based media. The main and initial project would be a book in several languages and written in popular style that could be used for group

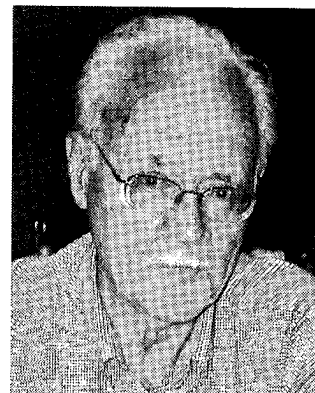
study purposes.

Hiebert is a well-known missiologist and anthropologist who has taught at a number of institutions in North America and abroad, including MB Biblical Seminary in Fresno, Calif., Fuller Theological Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago and Osmania University in Hyderabad, India. He has published many books and articles and was the general editor of a book series on MB missions and church growth.

The last comprehensive book on MB church history, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: A Pilgrim People* by John A. Toews, was published in 1975. Since then many books and articles have been published on aspects of MB history, much of it produced by the Historical Commission and published by Kindred Productions.

An editorial committee including Peter Klassen, Abe Dueck and Bruce Guenther will assist Hiebert, who has requested that a co-editor be appointed. Writers for different sections will be selected

from the various regions of the world where the MB church has become established. The project's sponsors hope to produce a book which does not simply reflect the work and perspective of North American MB missionaries and institutions abroad, but which allows the church in various cultures to introduce itself to the global MB community.—HC



MBBS adds program

MB Biblical Seminary of Fresno, Calif., is adding a new program this fall in which graduates will receive a diploma in congregational care. The program was developed to meet the need for peer caregiving within congregations.

"As our culture copes with stress, change and the breakdown of relationships, the community and the church are increasingly filled with hurting people," says Mary Shamshoian, director of MBBS's on-site counseling program.

The 30-unit diploma in congregational care will equip lay people for service in their congregation and the wider community. It will help them develop skills in care giving and provide an understanding of their role within the mission of the church and the caregiving professions of society.

"Many church leaders are recognizing that they are not equipped to handle the increasing volume of wounded people within their congregations and are looking for options to assist those who are hurting," says registrar Lori James.

The diploma in congregational care is one of four offered by the seminary, including diplomas in evangelism and church planting, Christian studies and integration. Courses in these diploma programs are accredited as part of the regular MBBS graduate program and can be included within a master of divinity degree or one of the seminary's master of arts degrees.—MBBS

50th anniversary celebration

The Conference of MB Churches in Paraguay held 50th anniversary celebrations in Asuncion during Holy Week 2005. Festivities included worship services and special presentations by various sectors of the conference.

A highlight of the week was a special service March 27 attended by people from all Mennonite Brethren churches in Paraguay as well as former missionaries. Paraguay's President Nicanor Duarte Frutos and his family also attended. First lady Maria Gloria Penayo de Duarte Frutos is a member of the MB church.

Latin American MB churches have a membership of over 2,600. In Paraguay there are 50 autonomous congregations and many new church plants. MBs also operate a Bible institute, several schools and share in operating a radio station.—MWC

NEWSCLIPS

India MB development agency works with MCC

The Mennonite Brethren Development Organization in India's Andhra Pradesh province, an area where the Dec. 26, 2004, tsunami badly damaged the local economy, is working with Mennonite Central Committee to help survivors once again support their families. MCC is providing some \$139,000 to MBDO and Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India for the joint project.

Although only two villagers in the area died in the tsunami, the waters destroyed fishing boats and nets, ruined salt farmers' stockpiles of salt and damaged or destroyed local shops and other small businesses, says MCC India representative Twila Miller, who visited the area in late April.

The project will benefit more than 1,562 families in a dozen different villages. It will

provide money, food and new fishing boats and nets to families, as well as help families repair fishing boats, nets and thatch roofing for houses. The project began in March, and distributions were to be finished by the end of May.

Miller was on hand when distributions were made in several communities. For example, in Kradu Peddpalem 241 salt farmers received \$40 each to help them return to harvesting salt from the sea. Quite a few salt farmers were already indebted to moneylenders when the tsunami struck and will use these funds to help repay debts, Miller says.

Some farmers lost their stockpiled dried salt to the tsunami waves; all of them lost their salt beds, which are flat areas of land surrounded by two-foot mud walls into which underground water is pumped and from which salt is harvested.—MCC

CENTRAL STATES NAMES DIRECTOR

John Stoesz, of Philadelphia, Penn., has been appointed the executive director of Mennonite Central Committee Central States. Stoesz, a graduate of Bethel College in Newton, Kan., who grew up in Mountain Lake, Minn., will begin work at MCC's North Newton office in September. Stoesz most recently served as executive director of the Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia, where he was active in the council's dismantling racism team and peacemaking committee and also focused on staff and board development.—MCC

CHRISTIANS HARASSED

Amnesty International reports that government security forces raided a May 28 wedding celebration in Asmara, Eritrea, and detained over 200 guests. All are reported to be members of Meserete Kristos, an evangelical Anabaptist church banned by the current government of Eritrea. According to Amnesty International, this kind of harassment and persecution is a feature of life in Eritrea. Since 2002 only Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran churches have been allowed to operate and evangelical churches have been banned. Amnesty International reports that harassment of those defying the 2002 ban has intensified recently. Many members and leaders of these churches have been imprisoned and tortured.—MWC

MB IN LEAD ROLE

This month Don Martens of Winkler, Man., and a member of Winkler MB Church, will assume the role of Christ in *The Carpenter*, Manitoba's outdoor Passion Play staged in Pembina Valley near La Riviere. Commenting on the role Martens says, "Playing Christ onstage for me is relatively easy. For me, it's playing the part of Christ off the stage that's very difficult...in my workplace and in home." This year the play, staged by volunteer actors and crew, runs July 8 and 15-17.—Canadian Mennonite

MDS ready for hurricanes

Recent investments in equipment and staff may soon pay off for Mennonite Disaster Service, headquartered in Akron, Penn., given that the 2005 hurricane season is predicted to be above average. The improvements will aid the agency as it responds to new needs and continues current projects.

"I'm encouraged by our constituents' response in spite of four major hurricanes last year," says executive coordinator Kevin King. "Our largest challenge is to maintain our current projects and meet needs that might arise in future disasters."

Currently MDS has five active projects, including two in Florida in response to Hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jeanne, and another that will reopen in the northern Florida panhandle in September in response to ongoing needs created by Hurricane Ivan.

MDS has invested more than \$350,000 in equipment purchases over the past year.

Purchases included upgraded vehicles, pickups, dump trailers, an industrial chipper and a specialized tracked skid loader with a grappler for dragging heavy trees.

The agency also invested in personnel and training. Staff members were hired in communications and logistics and regular leadership training sessions were organized in Canada and the U.S. MDS hosted a regional directors' meeting, worked at investigation strategies and is holding an Experienced Project Leadership Forum next month to develop greater consistency between projects.

"I'm more comfortable now (that) we've firmed up our structure and know our roles in disaster investigation," says logistics coordinator Karla Amstutz.

To address the long-term need for volunteers, MDS has partnered with Hesston (Kan.) College to start a disaster management program. The program will provide disaster response education and on-site experience.—MDS