

Feed-back of *Beyond our Fears* Sunday School Sessions Lethbridge Mennonite Church

As part of our Pandemic Plan, in January-February 2010, all Sunday School classes took a four-week break of their normal curriculum to study “Beyond our Fears – Following Jesus in Times of Crisis”.

The lessons came at a very appropriate time, since Lethbridge had had an outbreak of H1N1 a few weeks prior to the study time, and since the Haiti earthquake had just happened. In addition, we recently had a late winter storm, where most of Lethbridge was without power for several hours.

Everyone (teachers and students) had very positive feed-back on the material; they felt that the material presented was very relevant. The suggestions were easy to use, and there were enough options to adapt to a variety of settings. We had approximately 50 minutes for each class, but could have easily doubled that time, in order to cover all the material presented.

We had three classes: a children and youth class, and two adult classes. We chose to have one consistent teacher for each of the classes throughout the four sessions. Participants were encouraged to stay with the same teacher for all four sessions. Thoughts compiled by Fred Unruh, one of the two adult teachers, are presented at the end of this document.

Because several of our church members have worked with or have strong links with emergency and relief organizations (Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Disaster Service, Mennonite Economic Development Associates), classes also heard first hand stories from people who have experienced disaster and/or were involved in post-emergency support.

All classes met at the beginning of the sessions for a joint opening. We used material presented in the last two chapters of *Beyond our Fears – Guide for leaders* for the opening session.

Teachers consulted with each other in preparation of the classes, and shared thoughts after each of the lessons.

Sunday School attendance was higher than usual for this four-weeks series, and it was great to have the youth discussing the same material as adults.

Participants felt that the material was useful both for emergency preparedness, as for everyday response to health and other needs of church members.

Participants agreed that our connection to many local organizations, as well as to MCC, MEDA, MDS will be a great help in case of local or international emergencies.

As a follow-up of the study, two specific suggestions were made:

- Offering the option of having emergency contact information on file for church members. (This may be particularly useful for people who don't have close family in Lethbridge, and could include neighbours, next of kin, and/or relatives). We have implemented this recommendation, while updating our church directory
- “Know your neighbour” initiative. In case of emergency / natural disaster, normal communication channels, such as telephone, internet, driving could be disrupted. If church members knew who lives in their neighbourhoods, they could at least walk to each other's house. Two practical suggestions on how to move forward with that idea are to map the church people on a City and a Regional map, and to organize a “Guess who is your neighbour” supper. Both of these recommendations were implemented.

Feed-back from Fred Unruh, one of the two adult teachers:

- The lessons and supporting resources were well written, with very good teaching guides.
- The stories were very inspiring.
- We had lively interaction, including from guests.
- Several times people reminded us that caring for our neighbours is just as important as caring for ourselves.
- We noted there is a wide disparity in our culture with its focus on extreme individualism and self interest, and the Christian ethic of caring for our neighbours as much as ourselves. We may not find much support from popular culture to help our neighbours.
- Appreciation was expressed for nurses and caregiver in our congregation who help us understand health, and care, and faith issues in a crisis.
- We were reminded that we may need to depend on our neighbours in a crisis, and we should become good friends with them now.
- Some people were somewhat disappointed in what they learned about themselves.
- We affirmed that there are many, many good people doing good things in a crisis, who may not have any faith connections. We want to affirm them and stand with them as people of faith.
- In the H1N1 crisis last Fall we encountered some people who did not use common sense or informed action. That will be a part of any crisis experience.
- Personal experiences (ourselves, our friends) during the H1N1 crisis offered important perspectives to this study.
- We may benefit from more “practical coaching” on what to do in a crisis, as an expression of helping each other cope with fears and danger.
- The worship rituals were an important part of this study unit, as they affirmed faith in God’s care and supporting presence.
- [My group didn’t do much in discussing how we would organize to respond in a crisis. One important expression reminded us that in a severe crisis like the earthquake in Haiti, all infrastructure is immobilised, and “we will be on our own”.]