



**Faith-Based Organizations
Engaged in the Social Economy:
The Example of Catholic Religious Orders
and the Mennonites**

Final Report

August 31, 2011

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Acknowledgments

The researchers wish to thank the many people who agreed to be interviewed for this research project.

This report has been produced as part of the research program of the BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA). Financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) is gratefully acknowledged.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

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Introduction

Today in a time of uncertainty and economic crisis in corporate capitalism, many see the social economy movement¹ as holding great promise for creating a more just, sustainable, participatory and inclusive society in Canada and internationally.² Over the years, local communities in all regions of Canada have organized cooperatives, credit unions, and other types of “third sector” community economic development organizations to provide needed jobs and access to goods and services.³ Often faith-inspired individuals and organizations have been significant players in the initial development, growth and ongoing life of these Canadian social economy (SE) initiatives. Important examples include the Catholic-inspired Antigonish and Caisses Desjardins movements and the Protestant Social Gospel movement.

This research project is the second part of a two-part research program investigating the recent contributions of faith communities to SE initiatives in Canada. This research is being conducted through the B.C-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA), and is funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). This project has also received financial support from the Catherine Donnelly Foundation.

The first part of this research “Faith-Based Organizations in the Social Economy in Western Canada” was completed in 2009.⁴ This first paper described a growing consensus among major Christian churches in Canada around issues of economic justice and community participation. This consensus was seen in shared ecumenical statements and social action

¹ For a discussion of definitions of the term “Social Economy,” see “What is the Social Economy/” www.socialeconomy-bcalberta.ca/socialeconomy

² John Restakis, *Humanizing the Economy: Cooperatives in the Age of Capital* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society, 2011).

³ Jack Quarter, Laurie Mook, and Ann Armstrong, *Understanding the Social Economy: A Canadian Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2009).

⁴ “Faith-Based Organizations Engaged in the Social Economy in Western Canada” 14 November 2009. Available at the BALTA website www.socialeconomy-bcalberta.ca

organizations and coalitions. These church statements provided a critique of dominant economic systems and ideologies in Canada, and called for creative alternatives with new approaches that could better incorporate Christian ethical values. Commentators, such as Gregory Baum,⁵ saw SE approaches as being good examples of creative alternatives that embodied Christian ethical values better than other economic models. Writing in 1998, Murray MacAdam documented the involvement of Canadian Christian churches and religious organizations in community economic development, in a book containing several case studies of SE projects.⁶ In recent years, there are examples of an emerging interfaith collaboration in Canada around issues of economic justice that involve representatives from Christian and other major faith communities.⁷

In 2009 the first research project studied 37 Western Canadian social economy organizations with a connection to faith communities. The research showed that faith-based organizations (FBOs) engaged in the social economy played different roles, serving as funders, lenders, housing providers, job creators, service providers, “fair trade” retailers and employment trainers.

**The Research Project: “Faith-Based Organizations in the Social Economy: Part II
The Role of Catholic Religious Orders and the Mennonite Community”**

The research in the first study indicated that some of the most consistently successful faith-based approaches to the social economy over the past fifty years were those of Catholic religious orders and Mennonite organizations. While these represent two quite different religious traditions with distinct histories, theologies, and church organizational structures, they are similar in that their SE FBOs appeared consistently across different SE sectors and

⁵ Gregory Baum, “The Social Economy: An Alternative Model of Economic Development,” Journal of Catholic Social Thought Vol. 6, No. 1 (2009), 253-263.

⁶ Murray MacAdam, From Corporate Greed to Common Good: Canadian Churches and Community Economic Development (Ottawa: Novalis, 1998).

⁷ Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC), Ontario www.isarc.ca; Interfaith Declaration on Poverty in Canada, 8 March 2011 www.councilofchurches.ca; Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative, Edmonton, 17 March 2011 www.caedm.ca/sj/news-events.

geographical regions. The SE initiatives coming from both of these faith traditions have stood the test of time and have been replicated in many different settings, both in Canada and internationally.

A major goal of this project is to try to understand why the SE approaches of these two faith traditions have been so consistently successful. What do the individuals and organizations from these faith communities consistently bring to their social economy work? What is their approach? How does their grounding in religious faith sustain their social economy work?

The research proceeds through three stages: 1) a literature review and online search; 2) semi-structured interviews with representatives of specific Catholic religious orders and Mennonite organizations; 3) semi-structured interviews with representatives from specific social economy projects that have been initiated and supported from within these two faith traditions.

Both the Mennonite organizations and the Catholic religious orders have dynamic histories of change and ongoing development that are linked to the histories of their respective church traditions. The decade of the 1960s was a key time of transformed social economy engagement in both religious traditions.

Catholic Religious Orders and the Social Economy

Male and female Catholic religious orders have existed in Canada since the earliest days of New France in the 1600s. While existing under a single system of international church law, each specific order is unique with its own founder, charism (founding vision), area of ministry, and internal constitution and rule. Religious orders are self-governing to a large extent, control their own financial resources, and generally make decisions about their types of ministry and locations for ministry. Historically, religious orders have been founded to meet the social and spiritual needs of their specific time and place.

The decade of the 1960s was a time of major change for religious orders and the whole Catholic Church. Much of this change was associated with the Second Vatican Council. One of the outcomes of Vatican II was a call for Catholic religious orders around the world to embark on a process of reform and transformation. They were asked to review their present organizational structures and practices in light of the foundational message of scripture and their founding charism, and to do this in conversation with the needs of today's world. This review was to be far reaching, including models of governance and decision-making, priority areas for ministry, ways of community living, religious habits, and use of financial resources.⁸

Another outcome of Vatican II was a call contained in "Gaudium et spes" for the church to be more present in contemporary society. This engagement was closely tied to Vatican II's affirmation of Catholic social teaching and its emphasis on action for social justice and a special concern for the poor. As part of a global Catholic focus on mission to the Global South in the early 1960s, religious orders in North America took on assignments in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, often in very poor communities struggling with major issues of social injustice.

Many of the religious orders that went back to their founder's vision discovered that concern for the poor was a priority from the start, but that sometimes over the years this concern had been forgotten. As the religious orders revised and rewrote their constitutions, a corporate commitment to social justice and concern for the poor was often emphasized.⁹ This emphasis was strongly encouraged by Pope Paul VI:

How then will the cry of the poor find an echo in your lives? That cry must, first of all bar you from whatever would be a compromise with any form of social injustice. It obliges you also to awaken consciences to the drama of

⁸ Second Vatican Council, "Perfectae Caritatis," #2,3.

⁹ For examples of a justice focus in revised Statements of Mission and Constitutions in womens' communities (mostly from the US), see Marie Augusta Neal, From Nuns to Sisters: An Expanding Vocation (Mystic, Ct: Twenty Third, 1990): 59-65..

misery and to the demands of social justice made by the Gospel and the Church.¹⁰

Many of the women's orders moved away from their historic commitments to schools and hospitals, and explored new ministry options, often relating to the poor, and more closely aligned to the founding charism of the order. For the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, these new ministry options included "ministries tobattered women, single parents, abused children, victims of alcohol, drug abuse and AIDS, the unemployed, the lonely, the aged, immigrants, prisoners, visible minorities, illiterate adults."¹¹ While this concern for the poor often involved urgently needed short term charitable outreach, it also came to include more proactive community organizing and SE initiatives as well as participation in public advocacy and protest around issues of social justice.

The Vatican II call for religious orders to enter a time of corporate revisioning and transformation was challenging. Commentators use the term "refounding"¹² and "paradigm change" for this process. Often there were deeply held differences of opinion among members within the order and between the order's leaders and Vatican officials in Rome. This was often a very difficult and painful process with members in significant numbers choosing to leave their religious orders because of the changes. This process called for the members of these religious orders to develop skills in group process, facilitation and decision-making, member participation, conflict resolution and organizational change.¹³

¹⁰ Pope Paul VI, "Evangelica testificatio" (Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life), 29 June 1971, paragraph 18.

¹¹ Mary Olga McKenna. Paradigm Shifts in a Women's Religious Institute: The Sisters of Charity, Halifax 1950-1979, CCHA Historical Studies 61 (1995): 151.

¹² Gerald R. Arbuckle. Out of Chaos: Refounding of Religious Congregations (New York: Paulist, 1988); McKenna, "Paradigm Change" 135-151.

¹³ For a leadership view of this refounding process, see Geraldine Anthony, Rebel, Reformer, Religious Extraordinaire: The Life of Sister Irene Farmer (Calgary: Univ. of Calgary, 1997): 129-218; Margaret R. Brennan, What There Was for Me Once: A Memoir (Toronto: Novalis, 2009).

The superiors of the religious orders in Canada,¹⁴ the U.S.¹⁵ and internationally¹⁶ formed umbrella organizations that provided a peer support and information sharing forum for the leaders of the religious orders in this renewal process. In the meetings of these umbrella organizations, social justice was often named as a shared priority, including the formation of justice and peace commissions, and naming staff animators for these commissions.

Stories of Canadian Religious Orders

In this research, we researched ten religious orders. Nine of the ten were women's orders. In this report, we will look at the work of the Sisters of St. Joseph, London, the Sisters of Providence and the Sisters of Service and make brief mention of several other religious orders. The Sisters of St. Joseph (CSJ) of London, Ontario traces its origins initially to France (1659) and to London, Ontario (1869). As the community grew, sisters moved to Edmonton (1922), Yellowknife (1953) and later overseas to Peru (1962). In the years after Vatican II, many sisters moved out of the traditional works of education and hospital ministry into parish and local community social service outreach. The CSJs were one of the founding members and investors in the Canadian Alternate Investment Cooperative (CAIC).

They were involved in the startup and ongoing support of several social housing organizations in Edmonton in the 1980s and 1990s. Sr. Mary Leo Kirwin CSJ, the Edmonton Regional Superior, was the Board Treasurer for Edmonton Inner City Housing Society during its early years. The Edmonton sisters opened Elizabeth House (1988) for women released from prison and the regional mental hospital and Kirwin-Lucier House (1993) for people with chronic mental illness. Both these projects started by Sisters of St. Joseph transitioned into ongoing projects operated by secular community non-profits. Sr. Kitty Stafford CSJ, with support from

¹⁴ Canadian Religious Conference founded in 1954 <www.crc-canada.org>

¹⁵ Conference of Major Superiors of Women which later split into two organizations.

¹⁶ International Union of Superiors General (women) and Union of Superiors General (men). In 1974 these two international organizations set up a Joint Working Group of Justice and Peace. www.jpjc.it

community partners, opened Crossroads House Too (1994) for women leaving the sex trade and their children.¹⁷

The Sisters of St. Joseph are presently involved in the startup of a MicroLoan and Matched Savings pilot project for low income women and men in London, Ontario. They currently operate a one million dollar a year donations fund to support projects that foster inclusive communities, environmental initiatives, and collaborative efforts to address issues of systemic injustice, especially projects relating to women and children experiencing poverty. Their Community Directional Statement (2007-2011) speaks of integrating “contemplative spirituality and systemic justice as a foundation for transformation in all relationships.”¹⁸

The Sisters of Providence have served as key community animators in Edmonton. In 1971 two elderly Sisters of Providence, working through Sacred Heart Parish in inner city Edmonton, started a ministry of visiting inner city seniors. A year later three of the sisters moved into a rented basement apartment in the neighbourhood. Soon they joined with ecumenical partners and staff from local community agencies to bring the seniors together and to work together to organize a community agency to serve inner city seniors. Two years later Operation Friendship, a local community non-profit agency, was started to provide a drop in centre for these seniors. With many of the seniors living in substandard rooming house accommodations, safe, affordable housing was identified as a priority issue. The efforts of the sisters, working closely with their community partners, led to the opening in 1977 of Pioneer Place, a new high-rise seniors residence. These efforts further led to a new community centre for seniors and additional housing projects in subsequent years. The Sisters of Providence strengthened their commitment to the Edmonton’s inner city when they purchased a

¹⁷ “In the Spirit of The Sisters of St. Joseph: A Tribute to the Regional House in Edmonton, Alberta,” brochure published by the Sisters of St. Joseph, n.p., n.d.;

¹⁸ Phone interview Sr. Kitty Stafford CSJ, April 2011.

large house, where the sisters have continued to reside for the past 25 years.¹⁹ In 1987, the Sisters of Providence served as the Founding Sponsor of Wings of Providence in Edmonton, a community agency operating a second-stage shelter for women and their children fleeing domestic violence. The sisters have supported this agency as board members, direct service volunteers and financial contributors.²⁰

The Sisters of Service were founded in 1922 to serve newly arrived immigrants in the Canadian West. Since many of those they sought to serve lived far from urban centres, the sisters received permission to live outside of traditional convents and wear contemporary dress so they could teach in public schools, work in other public institutions and become part of the life of local towns and rural communities.²¹ For over 80 years they have made major contributions to local communities all across Canada's west and north in the areas of education, health care, and social services. In 2003, facing declining numbers of sisters, the Sisters of Service established the Catherine Donnelly Foundation, named after their foundress, as a legacy project to honour and extend the mission of the Sisters of Service. The Catherine Donnelly Foundation Society's mission statement speaks to a continuation of the charism of the Sisters of Service:

Motivated by biblical tradition of the "preferential option for the poor" and the principles of economic, social and ecological justice, the Foundation encourages innovative projects, initiatives and programs that offer the greatest possibility of change while advancing the interests of the poor in the areas of transitional housing, adult education and the environment.²²

¹⁹ Sr. Mary Zuscar S.P., Ten Years on Boyle Street: The Real Cost of Urban Renewal (Edmonton:, Sisters of Providence, 1987.

²⁰ www.wingsofprovidence.ca accessed 19 May 2011)

²¹ Sr. Ella Zink SOS, "The Sisters of Service -1920-1930," CCHA, Study Sessions 43 (1976): 23-38; Jeanne R.Beck, "Sisters of Service: Breaking Free of the Monastic tradition To Serve the Abandoned Ones," CCHA, Historical Studies, 66 (2000): 9-33.

²² www.catherinedonnellyfoundation.org

Much could be said about other religious orders contacted in this study. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate have been in Western and Northern Canada since the 1840s. While they have been builders of the church, they have worked hard to support local community development, in both aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities. Examples include Fr. Henri Tardy who helped to start the Holman Island Eskimo Cooperative (now part of the Arctic Coop) to produce and market crafts to strengthen local economic development.²³ Other Oblates worked to establish cultural centres and museums. Two present examples of their SE work include the St. Joseph's Women's Centre in Ottawa²⁴ and the Imagine community development project in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood.²⁵

The Sisters of Charity of Saint John, New Brunswick (SCIC) live out the founding charism of Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul (1638) and Elizabeth Seton (1814). The sisters reach out in local communities across the country, including housing and care for pregnant women in the sex trade, affordable housing support, inner city outreach, prison chaplaincy, and a northern St. Vincent de Paul Centre.²⁶

The Ursulines of Prelate (OSU), while historically serving primarily as school teachers, are engaged in community outreach projects that have a richness of diversity to communities across Western Canada. Some examples of this work that brings the Ursulines into the SE include socially-oriented language programs for immigrant families, elder care, university student housing provision, and the operation of a Holistic Health Centre. Sr. Teresita Kambeitz OSU points to the 90-plus years of teaching ministry of the Ursulines as supportive of the social

²³ David Howell, "Fr. Henri Tardy," Edmonton Journal, 3 March 2004.

²⁴ Marsha Wilson, "St. Joseph's Women's Centre," Info Lacombe Vol. 8, No. 14 (15 April 2011) www.omilacombe.ca

²⁵ Nestor Gregoire OMI, "What Are Our Oblates Doing in eastside Vancouver?" Info Lacombe Vol.8, No. 11 (25 March 2011) www.omilacombe.ca

²⁶ Sr. Marion Garneau SCIC and Sr. Fay Trombley SCIC, interview 12 May 2011. www.sistersofcharityic.com

economy in terms of influencing the moral values, social conscience, and cultural creativity of their students.²⁷

Social Economy Projects Supported by Catholic Religious Orders

In this paper we will focus on two social economy projects. One is the Canadian Alternate Investment Cooperative (CAIC), which was founded by Catholic religious in the early 1980s and now has grown to include ecumenical partners. CAIC was formed to create a social investment fund “to support positive social change and promote alternative economic structures.” Today, CAIC has 48 lender members, including over 30 Catholic religious order members. CAIC has a loan capital fund in excess of \$7 million dollars, and has provided loans to affordable housing projects, community loans funds, cooperatives, and community economic development initiatives all across the country. Projects supported by CAIC include the Yellowknife Glass Recyclers Worker Co-operative, Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation (mortgage for stable housing for 10 low income women with mental illness), Saint. John, New Brunswick Community Loan Fund, and the Working Centre in Kitchener (job training and job creation). One priority for lending has been to support local community loan funds in different communities across Canada. Over the past 20 years, CAIC has provided financing to eleven community loan funds, and over that time has not experienced any losses with these community loan fund investments.²⁸ Representatives from CAIC lender-member organizations who serve as board members, get to review loan applications regularly, and gain grass roots knowledge about the Canadian social economy.²⁹

²⁷ Sr, Teresta Kambeitz OSU phone interview, April 2011.

²⁸ CAIC Newsletter “Update,” Vol. 16, No. 2, June 2011.

²⁹ CAIC website www.caic.ca ;

Another example is Edmonton Inner City Housing Society (EICHS). This is a community non-profit society, which has been supported by several religious orders over its 28-year life. Medical Mission Sisters helped facilitate the initial organizing and visioning, and one member was a signer of the initial incorporation papers. The Oblates (OMI) provided a loan for a mortgage for an inner city rooming house in the Society's early days when support from government and commercial lenders was not available. The initial EICHS Board Treasurer was a Sister of St. Joseph (London), and sisters from several other orders have served on the board and made significant financial contributions over the years. Cam MacDonald, the present EICHS Executive Director, tells an interesting story about this support. "Ten years ago the Sisters of Service came forward with a \$100,000 donation for the Rotary Millenium House." The economic downturn had increased the number of homeless persons. Eventually EICHS secured enough government funding to build this project so this donation money was not needed specifically to build the project. But the Sisters of Service let EICHS keep the money. Part of it was put into a replacement reserve fund for the Rotary Millenium House, and the rest was put towards the purchase of a local bank building that was to become the EICHS administrative building. MacDonald noted that: "The sisters had the foresight to know what it took to administer such an organization," and felt that the outright purchase of the bank building was important enough for their financial support. A sister then sat on the board of directors for the next term at their request.³⁰

Another consistent emerging theme that appeared with the initiatives of several religious orders was an increasing focus on ecological sustainability. This can be seen in individual

³⁰ Cam MacDonald, phone interview, April 2011.

ministries as well in mission statements, education programs, financial support for ecological projects, construction and retrofits of buildings and use of lands owned by religious orders.³¹

Mennonites

There are about 200,000 Mennonites in Canada. The first Mennonites to arrive in Canada came to Ontario in 1786. Between the 1870s and the years after World War II several waves of Mennonite immigrants came to Canada from Europe to escape the social disruptions of European wars and revolutions. Many Mennonites in Europe and in North America lived in self-contained, economically self-sufficient rural communities, seeking to live separate from the dominant culture. Mennonites sought to live a life with a radical Christian ethic, including a commitment to non-violence and exemption from military service. Mennonites have lived with a strong sense of community and mutual assistance, seeking to follow the model of the early church in scripture. Generations ago this meant informal systems of sharing to assist fellow Mennonites facing crises through natural disasters or assisting widows and orphans in the community. More recently this commitment to mutual assistance was institutionalized through the creation of Mennonite insurance companies, hospitals, old age residences and other community services. This mutual assistance also included financial assistance for Mennonites migrating from Europe to start new lives in North America and Latin America.

In the twentieth century, Canadian Mennonites often established social economy organizations including cooperatives and credit unions within their communities. By the 1950s,

³¹ Sarah McFarland, Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology (Cambridge, Harvard, 2007); Christina Vanin, "Canadian Women's Religious Communities: Models of Contextual Theology." In Feminist Theology with a Canadian Accent. Ed. Mary Ann Beavis with Elaine Guilliemin and Barbara Pell (Toronto: Novalis, 2007), 273-290; Margaret R. Brennan, What Was There for Me Once: A Memoir (Toronto: 178-181).

Canadian Mennonites were moving into urban settings, and increasingly participated in Canadian mainstream economic, political and cultural institutions.³²

Mennonite Service Organizations

While all Mennonites share a foundational Anabaptist theology, there are many distinct Mennonite churches, conferences and groupings of local congregations in Canada. Many members of these different Mennonite churches have come together to create inter-Mennonite service organizations.

North American Mennonites organized the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in 1920 to assist fellow Mennonites in Russia suffering in the social turmoil following years of war and revolution. MCC sent relief and redevelopment assistance to Europe after World War II and assisted refugees moving from Europe to Canada and Paraguay to start a new life. MCC Canada (MCCC) was founded in 1963 through the merger of nine historic peace church organizations and regional inter-Mennonite service agencies. Five provincial MCC organizations were also established extending from BC to Ontario. Around this time, the focus of MCC shifted from primarily serving fellow Mennonites in need to a broader commitment to serving all in need internationally as well as at home. MCCC has had a strong international development focus, including a well-respected volunteer service program.³³ After 1963, MCCC and provincial affiliates established a Canadian program, which often included social economy approaches. Canadian MCC volunteers serving overseas returned to their home communities and became part of local development initiatives. There were debates within the MCCs about the relative priority of overseas and local development funding. In what is known as the Red

³² Ted D. Regehr. "Canada." Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. June 2010. Web. 15 May 2011. www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/C301ME.html : Ted D. Regehr. Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970: A People Transformed. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996).

³³ Richard A. Yoder, Clavin W. Redekop and Vernon E. Jantzi, Development to a Different Drummer: Anabaptist/Mennonite Experiences and Perspectives (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004), 46-56.

River Accord, Canadian MCCs decided to allocate 2/3 of the MCC funds raised in Canada to overseas projects and 1/3 to projects in Canada. Some projects have had both a local Canadian and overseas components. One example is MCC's pioneering work establishing international fair trade networks through the development and rapid growth of Ten Thousand Villages, fair trade retail gift shops located throughout Canada and the US.

The MCC Canadian program included a Native Concerns committee which supported community economic development initiatives in Native communities, such as a highly successful native owned and operated wild rice project in Wabigoon, Ontario, and a public advocacy program addressing issues of Native Rights.³⁴ By the 1980s, Canadian projects often included a community development approach, where MCC organizations sought to gather local resources to address local issues with the MCC organization seeking to step back at the appropriate time.³⁵ MCC has been a pioneer in organizing urban recycling programs including Canada's first curbside recycling in Kitchener Ontario in 1978 and the Edmonton Recycling Society in 1988. The Edmonton program was quite innovative as it developed new markets for recycled materials and included a special employment program for mentally challenged adults.³⁶ MCCC has joined together with Catholic organizations and other ecumenical partners in the national KAIROS Canada ecumenical social justice coalition and in other ecumenical justice projects.³⁷

³⁴ Menno Wiebe, "From Bloodvein to Cross Lake: A 25 Year Synthesis," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 19 (2001), 13-24. Neil Funk-Unrau, "Exploring the Gap Between Mennonite and Indigenous Neighbours: Snapshots from the Story of Native Concerns Canada," *Conrad Grebel Review* 29:1 (2011), 56.

³⁵ Lucille Marr, *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and Its Evolution in Ontario*. (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001); Lucille Marr, "The History of Mennonite Central Committee: Developing a Genre," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* Vol. 23 (2005), 47-58; John J. Friesen, *Building Communities: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2007): 110-111, 162-168.

³⁶ John Bird, "Edmonton Recycling Society Mixing a Mission with Bottom-line Success." In *From Corporate Greed to Common Good: Canadian Churches and Community Economic Development*. Ed. Murray MacAdam (Toronto: Novalis, 1998), 57-65; Cornelius Guenther, "The Edmonton Recycling Society: Cutting Edge Business with a Social Mission," *Making Waves* Vol. 6, No. 1 (1995), 71-74.

³⁷ KAIROS Canada website <www.kairoscanada.org>

Another inter-Mennonite service organization is the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA). MEDA was set up in 1952 to assist Mennonite settlements in Paraguay with economic development projects, many of which were to follow a social economy cooperative model. In subsequent years, MEDA has expanded to countries around the world. In the early 1970s, MEDA stepped away from only helping Mennonites, and moved to helping anyone who needed help. Initially, funding for projects came entirely from MEDA members. MEDA now receives public grants from government funding agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency.

In the 1970s, MEDA was a pioneer in extending credit to poor men and women through the development of micro-credit and character lending programs.³⁸ While much of MEDA's work is international, MEDA has organized programs for job readiness in Vancouver and Winnipeg and small business startup support for new immigrants in Saskatoon. For MEDA members with business skills, support of local economic development is seen as a form of ministry.³⁹

Social Economy Projects Supported by Mennonite Service Organizations

Momentum in Calgary was organized in 1991 as an employment program of MCC Alberta. It grew and expanded its activities to include small business training, a micro loan program, financial literacy programs and personal development accounts. Additional government and charitable program funders were brought on board. In 2009 Momentum offered 17 community economic development programs and employed 40 staff members. The organization started as a faith-based organization with supporters and partners from the wider community and has grown into a secular organization that continues to adhere to core Mennonite

³⁸ MEDA Website www.meda.org accessed 21 May 2011.

³⁹ Phone interview with Wally Kroeker, MEDA, 9 May 2011; Richard A. Yoder, Calvin W. Redekop and Vernon Jantzi, Development to a Different Drummer. (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004), 56-66.

values in the life of the organization. What started as “MCC Employment Development” is now named “Momentum.”⁴⁰

A smaller scale example is Sam’s Place in Winnipeg supported by MCC Manitoba. Sam’s Place grew out of a network of MCC thrift shops. There was an abundance of donated books, so the idea of a used book store arose. This developed into a neighbourhood community centre. MCC Manitoba bought and renovated a building and Sam’s Place became a community centre with books, food, local musicians, storytellers and speakers. A social economy approach is being used to expand services such as community catering.⁴¹ The Sam’s Place website tells the story of Sam:

“Sam” is a Komodo Dragon carved out of a single tree that sits as a permanent resident and greeter to Sam’s. For years he stood sentry outside the offices of MCC at Place Drive. He was a good choice for this job as he embodied the fact that MCC’s good works stretch to every part of the globe, including Sam’s original home.⁴²

Communitas in the Fraser Valley, initiated by MCC-BC, is a social enterprise which provides supportive housing and job creation for men and women with physical and mental disabilities. The organization started in the early 1970s with a single group home as a response to the requests of parents of sons and daughters with physical disabilities. Over the years it has grown in size and has expanded the scope of programs. Today it provides supportive services to those with physical and mental disabilities, seniors, and those living with FASD. What started as a direct program of MCC-BC, became a separate legal entity in 1992, and in 2007 changed its name from MCC Supportive Care Services to Communitas Supportive Care Society. It is still seeking to maintain a Mennonite identity and ethos. While strongly rooted in Anabaptist values, it also draws inspiration from other Christian spiritual leaders including Jean Vanier, Mother

⁴⁰ Momentum Website www.momentum.org accessed 3 April 2011.

⁴¹ Phone interview with Jennifer Dijk, Sam’s Place, 30 March 2011.

⁴² Sam’s Place website www.samsplacebooks.com accessed 19 May 2011

Theresa, and Henri Nouwen. Board members are recruited from local Mennonite churches, but there is not an explicit faith requirement for staff hiring.

In order to provide personal and economic development opportunities for those they serve, *Communitas* has created social enterprises. In the 1980s, they operated a greenhouse business. Today, *Communitas* creates jobs for those with employment challenges through social enterprises providing recycling, document shredding, and curbside yard waste collections.⁴³

Mennonite Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Saskatchewan (MMFIS) started in the 1890s as a mutual aid society within the early Saskatchewan Mennonite communities. The mutual aid society provided basic fire insurance protect for church-affiliated Mennonites. It also made provision for “the social needs of the people when there was sickness of death within the group, and for the well-being of the widows and orphans.”⁴⁴ The fire insurance was expanded to include other insurance products needed in an agricultural community such as flood and hail insurance. The social service outreach became incorporated into a different organization, Mennonite Trust Limited. Over time, MMFIS incorporated under Saskatchewan laws, expanded through commercial success and corporate mergers. In 1947, MMFIS started selling insurance to non-Mennonites. As it expanded it became more secular and less tied to the Mennonite community. Today MMFIS is faced with a major decision about its identity, and the continued presence of the word “Mennonite” in its corporate name. Valerie Fehr of MMFIS puts the challenge this way: “Do they go forward as an organization with strong faith-based ideals, or do they break away from any faith background whatsoever, or do they break away from any faith background whatsoever and charge fully into the secular economy.”⁴⁵

⁴³ *Communitas* website; phone interview Steve Thiessen, Executive Director. 30 March 2011

⁴⁴ MMFIS website accessed 30 March 2011

⁴⁵ Valerie Fehr phone interview, 20 April 2011

Winnipeg has had a vibrant community economic development sector for many years, including faith-based and secular community organizations. In the late 1980s, MCC-Manitoba and community partners organized SEED Winnipeg, a non-profit organization that provided micro-loans and community economic development for low income women and men. MEDA volunteers helped as mentors for those funded by SEED.⁴⁶

Mennonites and Catholic Religious Orders Working Together in the Social Economy

The vision for the ecumenical Jubilee Fund came out of a 1997 Winnipeg workshop for community activists, organized through the KAIROS “Moral Economy” project. It received substantial startup funds from two Catholic religious orders, the Grey Nuns and the Missionary Oblate Sisters of St. Boniface, MCC Manitoba, and other ecumenical partners. The Jubilee Fund is a social investment loan fund with a mission to “advocate economic opportunity for all members of society through ethical and socially responsible financing of community economic development.” The Fund supports community housing, small businesses and other community initiatives. It has broad ecumenical support with Mennonite, Anglican, Lutheran, United, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic organizational members, including several Catholic religious orders. Presently, two Catholic sisters and an Oblate priest serve on the Board of Directors.⁴⁷ The 2010 Annual Meeting highlighted recent loans to a community day care centre to purchase and renovate their building and to Neechi Foods, an aboriginal, inner-city worker owned cooperative.⁴⁸

Conclusions

Both the Mennonite organizations and the Catholic religious orders have been successful in drawing from traditions of strong religious beliefs and values to engage in community

⁴⁶ John Loxley, *Aboriginal, Northern and Community Economic Development: Papers and Perspectives*, Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2010, 197-198.

⁴⁷ Phone interview, Gary Loewen, member of founding committee, 11 April 2011; Jubilee Fund website www.jubileefund.ca accessed 20 May 2011.

⁴⁸ James Buchok, “Jubilee Fund” *Prairie Messenger*, 03 November 2011.

development initiatives, involving a wide group of community players leading to viable social economy projects. The organizations from these two distinct Christian faith traditions have shown themselves to be dynamic and open to transformation in order to find new ways of engaging an ever-changing world. By the 1960s both groups were well positioned to become important participants in social economy projects in Canada and internationally.

Both religious traditions, while primarily organized through networks of local congregations and church leadership structures, have set up diverse, special purpose organizations that engage in different forms of social outreach. Members of these organizations, while staying grounded in and drawing strength from their respective religious traditions, have developed ways of joining with those of other religions and of no religion to participate in common projects oriented towards the common good. These organizations have consistently been able to bring significant resources to these community development projects including trained personnel, funding, public credibility, links to wider social networks and knowledge of the community development process. They provide a support system for the individuals assigned to these projects, and often succession strategies for replacement personnel.

The Mennonite organizations and the Catholic religious orders have been engaged in successful social economy initiatives in different sectors (eg. housing, job creation, environmental, lending, funding, job training, etc.) and in different geographic regions for more than forty years. It will be helpful to try to identify some of the factors associated with this successful track record.

1. Local and International Experience. Both groups have been involved in community development projects in the global south, so that each has employed key leaders and SE practitioners with international experience back into their Canadian SE projects. The Mennonites have sent thousands of volunteers to overseas assignments through MCC. Since the

1960s, the Catholic religious orders have consistently sent some of their members to missions in the global south. Often this international work has had a community development focus. The story of Sr. Marion Garneau SCIC illustrates this. As a young sister, she started as a high-school science teacher in Canada. Her next assignment was to her order's mission in Peru. After working for several years in Peru, doing grass-roots community work with a liberation theology approach, she was recalled to Canada to serve as the Superior of her religious order. After her time as Superior, she moved on to work in community ministry in inner city Edmonton.⁴⁹

Mennonites who organized micro financing opportunities in Jamaica and Bolivia came home and introduced these fine-tuned ideas to Mennonite sponsored organizations in Canada, such as Momentum in Calgary and the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers in Edmonton. Those who have community experience in the global south often approach their community development work in Canada with new perspectives and insights.⁵⁰

2. SE involvement as part of wider social change perspective. Both the Mennonite organizations and the Catholic religious orders approach their SE work from within a broader social change perspective. This perspective includes a critical social analysis of the dominant social, economic, political and cultural structures of our world today, and a commitment to challenge systemic injustices in Canada and internationally. The Mennonites have a historic tradition of non-violence, peace-making and community care that goes back centuries. The Catholic religious orders, especially since the 1960s, have deepened and broadened their social justice commitments in different areas including civil rights, anti-war protests, civil disobedience, corporate social responsibility, and environmental concerns. Both religious traditions have developed academic institutions, public policy research centres, and advocacy education

⁴⁹ Personal interview with Sr. Marion Garneau SCIC, 12 May 2011

⁵⁰ Personal interview with Dave Hubert 25 August 2011

networks to support their front-line social justice commitments. Both traditions have dedicated significant human and financial resources to support these different dimensions of social justice work. A good Canadian example of this broad social change commitment is the active participation and support by MCC and Catholic religious orders in the national KAIROS ecumenical justice coalition.⁵¹

3. Community as shared organizational value. Both Mennonites and Catholic religious orders have long made building community among their own members a high priority. They have affirmed building community theologically around a shared spiritual vision or charism. They have also developed time-tested practical mechanisms and practices for the day-to-day challenges of living in community.

The religious orders have developed spiritual exercises in communal discernment around important decisions that actually engage all community members. Religious order members meet regularly in “chapters” to set community priorities, make key decisions, and elect leaders from among their own membership. Creative conflict resolution and consensus seeking has been an important part of this community process. In the last forty years, there has been a major effort within many religious orders to explore and experiment with leadership models that support these participatory community processes.

Mennonites throughout their history have developed practical ways of mutual community support for their members, especially for those in financial distress. Mennonite communities have been highly creative in looking at developing new community support practices and organizations as social and economic conditions changed over time and through migration to new lands.

⁵¹ www.kairoscanada.org accessed 10 July 2010

Over the last 40 years, members of both the Mennonite organizations and the Catholic orders made the transition to work intentionally at community development initiatives in the wider society, engaging participants beyond their own community membership. Their extensive experience of working at building community “within” became an important support and resource for community development practice in the wider society. This would include a basic confidence and trust in a developmental, participatory, open-ended community development process. Both the Mennonite organizations and the religious orders have learned to trust the community development process to the point where they are willing to hand over projects they had initiated, and invested substantial human and financial resources to local community organizations.

One key community skill is active listening. Funk-Unrau speaks of the importance of personal presence and listening in local communities in the MCC native programs.⁵² The members of the religious orders who were interviewed in this project spoke of the importance of being physically present and listening to members of local communities:

What we do is what we are called to do, both individually and collectively. We move into a community, listen to the people and say YES!⁵³

Where there is a need that nobody is listening to? Where is there marginalization? Whose words do we listen to and act upon?⁵⁴

4. Community development as a moral, spiritual work. SE commentators speak of community development having a moral foundation, especially with respect to the individual working for and with members of a wider community working for the good of that community. Lotz puts it this way: “As a profoundly moral pursuit, it (community development) seeks to break down barriers, transcend the arbitrary categories to which people are assigned, and direct human

⁵² Funk-Unrau. “Exploring the Gap,” 58.

⁵³ Personal interview, Sr. Ada Toner SCIC, March 2011.

⁵⁴ Personal interview, Sr. Fay Trombley SCIC, 12 May 2011

energy into fruitful and rewarding outlets.”⁵⁵ Lotz also speaks of the important role of hope for participants engaged in community development.⁵⁶ Chile and Simpson speak of the important links between community development and spirituality (broadly understood) in the lives of many people engaged in community development initiatives.⁵⁷

Both the Mennonites and the Catholic religious orders bring a distinctive, shared moral vision which grounds their social economy work. The Catholic orders work within the communitarian ethic of Catholic social teaching, and the charism of their religious order. Mennonites seek to live the moral vision of the early Christian community in the New Testament, especially as articulated in the Sermon on the Mount. Members from both religious traditions have consistently found ways of successfully sharing this moral vision with others outside of their religious constituency so that it can help serve as an important grounding for community development initiatives and SE projects in the wider community. Suderman sees the “dual conversation” in the Old Testament where the people by being faithful to the specific demands of the Covenant as described in Deuteronomy were able to participate with other ancient peoples in the Wisdom conversation described in Proverbs. He sees this as a model for contemporary Mennonites, so that being faithful to the specific beliefs and practice of Mennonite Christianity today makes possible participation in a broader “wisdom conversation” today which in terms of this study, includes community development and SE animation.⁵⁸

5. Freedom from pre-determined outcomes. This was named explicitly by religious order members, but is present in the SE work of the Mennonite organizations also. Both groups work

⁵⁵ James Lotz, Sustainable People: A New Approach to Community Development (Sydney,NS: Cape Breton University Press, 2003), 173.

⁵⁶ Lotz, p. 173.

⁵⁷ Love M. Chile and Gareth Simpson, “Spirituality and Community Development: Exploring the Link between the Individual and the Collective,” Community Development Journal Vol. 39, No. 4 (2004), pp,318-331.

⁵⁸ W. Derek Suderman, “In Search of Divine Wisdom: Perspectives on the Church and MCC from Old Testament Wisdom,” Conrad Grebel Review 29:1 (2011), 71-89.

from within a stance of religious faith, with a trust that God is present and working in the world today. This means that the work of specific members of religious orders is seen in a wider context, and allows for a certain non-attachment to certain predetermined results from a community development process and a freedom from a fear of failure. This non-attachment to outcomes means that religious orders can move in and out of projects without fear of failure. They can listen to people, try something out, and discern the next course of action. Sr. Teresita Kambeitz OSU gives an example of this approach. She speaks of a program organized by the Ursuline Sisters that started as a lunchtime program to support immigrant students with English language skills and evolved into a program of social support, English language skills, and greater quality of life for family members, especially for mothers.⁵⁹ The story of MCC-BC and *Communitas* is similar. It starts with the challenges being faced by parents of mentally challenged sons and daughters and changes over time into an organization for housing and job creation for individuals with a wide range of challenges and disabilities.

6. The “Greening” of Social Economy Initiatives. The Mennonites have always felt a responsibility to protect and care for creation that has been entrusted to humankind. Throughout the years, Mennonites have been key players in preserving the environment both locally in Canada and abroad. One recent example is the pioneering role of Mennonites in animating urban recycling programs in Kitchener and Edmonton. There is an increased attention to ecological concerns manifested in the community life and spirituality of religious orders in Canada and in their social economy projects.⁶⁰ This includes ecological literacy educational programs, funding for community-based environmental initiatives addressing systemic change, and using sustainable building principles in housing developments.

⁵⁹ Phone interview Sr Teresita Kambeitz OSU, date

⁶⁰ References listed in Footnote #18.

Future Challenges for Mennonite Organizations and Catholic Religious Orders

The Mennonite organizations (MCCs and MEDA) are still continuing to build on the Anabaptist cornerstones established at their creation; however, several of these organizations are now in a time of generational change as long time leaders are now retire. Although there is no shortage of personnel to fill positions, there is a challenge of passing on the torch to a new generation of leaders whose experience of being Mennonite is often urban and more influenced by the secular world than that of their predecessors. Some of the long serving Mennonite leaders interviewed spoke of the importance of personal mentorship for these future leaders.

Another continuing challenge facing Mennonite organizations is the allocation of human and financial resources between international and Canadian community development projects. There is a risk that urgent needs of the international work could lead to a marginalization and de-emphasis of the Canadian work, so that social economy animation is seen as appropriate for people in distant lands, and yet not a priority for the transformation of the injustices of Canadian society. Menno Wiebe of MCCC speaks to the importance of this point: “our overseas witness to people in desperation is made credible to the extent that we address the desperate conditions in our own back yard.”⁶¹

All of the Catholic religious orders in this study are facing a future of shrinking membership and reduced organizational capacity for social outreach. The religious orders that are showing some growth are more conservative theologically and in their social engagement, and likely would not see SE animation as a priority for their members. Some of the orders in this study are looking to lay associate members to continue their mission and charism into the future, albeit in a much- reduced manner. A major question is whether the wider Catholic community

⁶¹ Funk-Unrau, “Exploring the Gap,” 64.

can find a way to continue this social economy animation and support in a future time of significant reductions in the presence of religious orders.

Mennonite Organizations and Catholic Religious Orders and Other Social Economy Players

This study has identified some key elements of the distinctive approaches of the Mennonite organizations and Catholic religious orders in the SE work. These include an integrated local-global approach, working from within a critical social-analysis and a wider commitment for social change, working from within a community of shared value and support, respecting the ethical and spiritual dimensions of community development work, trusting the community development process, and not being overly attached to pre-determined outcomes. It will be of benefit for the wider community of social economy practitioners to reflect on how these “success factors” are lived out in their social economy practice. These key elements hold lessons for those in secular society engaged with the SE and point to positive approaches for enriching human life through community cooperation and solidarity.

Two hoped for outcomes of this project are that participants in the wider social economy network will see Mennonite organizations and Catholic religious orders (and other faith-based organizations) engaged in SE work as valued partners and co-workers, and that the wider Catholic and Mennonites church communities will continue to see community development and SE animation as a major dimension of their social justice work.

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