

## **How is the Réseau mennonite francophone - or Francophone Mennonite Network - faring as of the beginning of 2013?**

Well, it's chugging along quietly, but quite efficiently!

International francophone Mennonite organizations carry out many activities which align easily with the Network's objective. Some of these activities are directly initiated by the Network and their main purpose is to link together francophone Mennonites from many different horizons. Others are initiated by the various francophone organizations. There again, the main objective is to foster cooperation among francophone Mennonites. All of these actions converge toward the Network's goal to create an international web of complementary activities to serve our common master, Jesus Christ.

### **Activities initiated by the Network**

#### **- Meetings**

On the institutional front, not much has changed. Europeans created CERF (Comité Européen du Réseau Francophone or European committee of the francophone network) which meets twice a year. This committee regroups most organizations of the Mennonite churches in France and Switzerland. It is a place where they share information about their outreach activities toward the other francophone Mennonite churches. This exchange helps inform each organization's decisions as well as the decisions they make as a group.

CERF also initiates activities as a committee. Since it strives to reflect the main objectives of the Network, it devotes a lot of efforts to creating relationships. That's why it seeks to attend all major events organized by the churches worldwide. In 2012, they sent Daniel GEISER of Switzerland as a delegate to the festivities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). They also send a delegate as often as possible to the Conseil de partenariat de la RDC (or Partnership Council of DRC), and occasionally to the Partnership Council of Burkina Faso (see below).

#### **- Franco-congolesse camps**

A former French "coopérant" who went to DRC with MCC for his civic service, brought back from his experience a deep affection for the country, its Mennonite churches and, in particular, the churches' youth. When he returned to France, he assembled a team of volunteers who organized several franco-congolesse youth



camps. There, young people from Mennonite churches of both countries worked, played and worshipped together. Another similar



camp is in the works for the summer of 2013. This collaboration also generated the creation of a cybercafé managed by young people in DRC. Its objective is to motivate the youth of the 3 Mennonite communities of DRC to cooperate on a specific project. The groups' organizers and members stay in touch on a regular basis.



#### **- Consultation on theological training**

The Network's meetings and correspondence gave francophone Anabaptist theologians many contact opportunities. As a result, they expressed a desire to get better acquainted and to collaborate more closely. Through the Network, they were given a chance to set up a consultation on theological training with an Anabaptist focus. A meeting is being planned for February 2014 at the Centre universitaire de missiologie in Kinshasa. The goal is to reflect on the need for theological training worldwide. This project has sparked a lot of interest among francophone Mennonites all over the world. A planning committee is being formed. This is a first step toward the realization of a vision expressed by pastor Siaka Traoré of Burkina Faso (see below).

#### **- Publications**

One of our dreams – and at this point, it is just a dream - is to develop a common catechism manual for all francophone Mennonite churches.



Our main project - a joint venture of CERF and Editions mennonites - has been the publication of a "Dossier de Christ Seul" booklet entitled Vivre l'Eglise au-delà des frontières or Living the Church beyond borders. It is available from Editions mennonites for 8 € ([www.editions-mennonites.fr](http://www.editions-mennonites.fr)).

CERF has also decided to continue publication of a column which is common to all francophone Mennonite periodicals (see articles below).

#### **Our partners' activities**

We are not aware of all international activities of the different Mennonite organizations, but we'll list the ones we know about:

#### **–“Action France” camps**



The first Action France camp was organized in 2012 by Mennonite youth organizations in Quebec (Mennonite Brethren) and in France. It involved 16 participants - 8 from France and 8 from Quebec. After an initial training period, they were sent to work in a variety of programs in France, Romania and Burkina Faso. This camp will operate again in the next 2 years and will target a variety of programs.

#### **- Conseil de Partenariat du Burkina Faso**

In several African countries, for example in DRC and Burkina Faso, Conseils de partenariat or Partnership



Councils have been created, which regroup churches and missions in order to coordinate decision making. One such cooperation currently links the Eglise évangélique Mennonite of Burkina Faso and the Comité de mission mennonite français, who now sends a delegate every year to the working meetings of this Partnership Council.

#### **- MCC**

MCC also plays a role in international exchanges. MCC Africa created a program for young Africans to help victims of the Haiti earthquake.



As a result, members of L'Eglise évangélique Mennonite of Burkina Faso spent 15 days in Haiti, helping with practical needs and getting

acquainted with Anabaptist churches in Haiti. One of the participants summed up his experience with these words: "In the end, I came to see every Haitian as a long-lost cousin, whom I met again in this far-away land, and I'm very happy about our encounter".



#### **Conclusion: a vision for the future**

All of these activities are meant to support the vision expressed by Siaka Traoré, a pastor from Burkina Faso, in the postface of the Dossier de Christ Seul booklet: "It is hard for francophone Mennonites to meet because of their geographical dispersion: from the Democratic

Republic of the Congo to Europe and from Burkina Faso to Quebec (not to mention Haitians who don't belong to the Network yet). Thus, the goal of the Network is not self-promotion nor opposition to any other language, but simply offering a means of communication to all its member churches."

The Network has already achieved a lot, but we plan to explore other areas to strengthen it further.

- One of the churches' current priorities is **training**. The Network could be a launching pad for a theological training program. The churches included in the Network have in their midst many resource people in the field of education. They could be the faculty of this program and a francophone Anabaptist/Mennonite curriculum could thus be developed.
- Our societies all benefit from **cultural exchanges**. It would be quite feasible to develop our exchange program through the Network, so that its members could work in various ministries. Training could be part of the program in order to enhance skills in the fields of education, theology, technology, agriculture and administration
- The very creation of the Network was made possible through MWC. It is important for the continued existence of the Network to remain integrated to MWC. **During large events of MWC, longer time slots should be set aside** for the Network's members to get together.
- Inside the churches which comprise the Network, there are currently **pioneers and leaders** who don't originate from

francophone countries. These people, as well as others who like to speak our language, are most welcome in the Network.

- It would be wise for the Network to focus even more on an important part of its constituency, namely our youth. The article about youth in this booklet indicates that they want to contribute to the Church and want to see it grow. They wish that their potential be recognized in order to "continue to show the world that the Church is a place where reconciliation can be attained in Jesus Christ".
- It is possible to envision the Network's development in such a way that it will be able to participate in the concrete management of various crises arising in its component communities. This would be an antidote to indifference.

Just as in the apostle Paul's days the zeal of the Corinthians had motivated many others, we wish that the zeal manifested in the aforementioned activities may inspire many others to achieve our vision. Even more importantly, may it inspire us all to follow our calling to do God's work together, each according to his/her own mission: one plants, another waters, but God gives the increase.

As for our foundation, no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have – Jesus Christ.

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Jean Paul Pelsy