

CENTER FOR MENNONITE BRETHREN STUDIES

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NEWS BULLETIN

February 1991

MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION FORMED

With a Board drawn from Canada, Germany, Poland and the United States, the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association is being formed to foster good will and understanding between Mennonites and Poles.

The tragic events associated with World War II and its aftermath have obscured the centuries of mutual support and understanding that characterized much of the Mennonite experience in Poland and Prussia. When Mennonites first arrived in the lowlands along the Vistula River before the middle of the 16th century, Polish kings, bishops and other leaders welcomed them. Prosperous Mennonite communities arose in the Vistula-Nogat Delta, then along the great river all the way to Warsaw and beyond.

In later years, most of this region came under Prussian rule, but the Mennonite communities continued to flourish. Late in the 18th century, large-scale emigration to Russia began. During the next century significant numbers of other Mennonites moved from the Vistula lowlands to America.

In the upheaval of World War II, much of the Mennonite legacy that had helped to shape life along the Vistula was forgotten. In recent years, however, a number of Poles have expressed a desire to create closer ties with Mennonites. A historical symposium, held in Winnipeg in July 1990, dealt with Mennonites in Poland and Prussia, and involved scholars and other interested persons from Poland, Germany, Canada, the United States and Paraguay. Then, in September 1990, a representative of the Pentecostal congregation now meeting in the former Mennonite church in Gdansk, in a letter to Peter J. Klassen, suggested placing a memorial plaque in the church.

In response to this request, and to undertake other efforts designed to stimulate interest in—and appreciation of—the relationship between Poles and Mennonites, the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association is being established. Anticipated activities include placing appropriate historical markers, facilitating study of Mennonite life in Poland and Prussia and helping to preserve tangible evidence of Mennonite life in these areas. All efforts will be closely coordinated with expressed wishes of Polish friends. The unveiling of the plaque in the Gdansk church is scheduled for 25 June 1990. Anyone interested in supporting these goals is invited to join the Association.

Officers of the newly-organized Ad Hoc Organizing Committee are Peter J. Klassen, Fresno, California (Chair); John Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba (Vice Chair); Paul Toews, Fresno, California (Secretary/Treasurer). Members-at-large are John Oyer, Goshen, Indiana; Heinold Fast, Emden Germany; Anatol Matiaszuk, Gdynia, Poland; Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, North Newton, Kansas; Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, Manitoba; Edmund Kizik, Gdansk, Poland; Arkadiusz Rybak, Stare Pole, Poland; Siegfried Bartel, Agassiz, British Columbia; James Satterwhite, Bluffton, Ohio; Janine Wedel, Washington, D.C.

Dues are as follows: Individual memberships: \$20.00; institutional memberships: \$50.00. In Canada, checks may be made out to the Mennonite Heritage Centre, designated for the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, and mailed to the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB, R3P 0M4. In the United States, checks may be made out to the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, designated for the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, and mailed to the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 4824 E. Butler, Fresno, CA 93727-5097.

Inquiries may be addressed to Peter J. Klassen, 1838 S. Bundy, Fresno, CA 93727.

AFFILIATED WITH
MENNONITE BRETHREN BIBLICAL SEMINARY • FRESNO PACIFIC COLLEGE
HISTORICAL COMMISSION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF
MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCHES

THE MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

International, inter-Mennonite, inter-confessional

Purpose

To foster better understanding between Poles and Mennonites.
To encourage study of Mennonites in Poland and Prussia.
To develop greater appreciation and awareness of Mennonite-Polish interaction.
To stimulate cooperation and reconciliation between Mennonites and Poles, especially in connection with the tragedies associated with World War II.

Proposed Activities

Placing appropriate marker and plaques on sites important to the Mennonite story when requested by the Polish community.
Supporting Polish efforts to preserve tangible evidence of Mennonite history, such as caring for Mennonite cemeteries.
Encouraging Polish plans to display Mennonite art, artifacts and various memorabilia in museums and other designated centers.
Facilitating collection, preservation and study of archival and other historical materials related to Polish/Prussian Mennonites.
Assisting academic, cultural and social Mennonite-Polish cooperation and exchange.
Developing other appropriate activities designed to strengthen Polish-Mennonite good will and mutual support.

Membership

Membership in the Association is open to anyone supportive of the expressed goals. Institutions, church bodies, scholarly associations and other interested organizations are also invited to join.

Dues for 1991:

Individual memberships: \$20 US
Institutional memberships: \$50 US

In Canada, membership checks may be made out to the Mennonite Heritage Centre and designated for the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association. Canadians may send their dues to the following address: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4. In the United States, checks may be made out to the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, designated for the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, and mailed to the Center at 4824 E. Butler, Fresno, CA 93727-5097.

Organizing Committee

The Ad Hoc Organizing Committee is assuming responsibility for initial development. Subsequently, members will elect officers of the Association.

Ad Hoc Organizing Committee:

Peter J. Klassen, Fresno, California (Chair); John Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba (Vice-Chair); Paul Toews, Fresno, California (Secretary and Treasurer)

Members-at-large:

John Oyer, Goshen, Indiana; Heinold Fast, Emden, Germany; Anatol Matiaszuk, Gdynia, Poland; Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, North Newton, Kansas; Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, Manitoba; Edmund Kizik, Gdansk, Poland; Arkadiusz Rybak, Stare Pole, Poland; Siegfried Bartel, Agassiz, British Columbia; James Satterwhite, Bluffton, Ohio; Janine Wedel, Washington, D. C.

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