

The MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER
December 2010

Dear members and friends,

It is a pleasure to see that the Mennonite story in Poland continues to attract interest and attention. During the past year, groups from North America, Germany, and the Netherlands again visited ancestral homes along the Vistula River and beyond. It is refreshing to see bonds of friendship and joint endeavors build mutual understanding and support.

Unveiling of historical marker at former Mennonite church

On June 26, 2010, friends from Poland, Germany, and the Netherlands gathered to unveil a marker at the former Mennonite city church in Elblag, built in 1590. Until a new church was built in 1900, this building served as the local Mennonite church. It is worth noting that Elblag (then Elbing) allowed a church to be built in the city, while other cities did not. Elbing also allowed Mennonites to become citizens, a privilege denied by other towns and cities. Today, a museum in the city depicts some of the Mennonite story.



Marker at former Elbing church
(photo courtesy of Frank Wiehler)

Support for local historical efforts

This past spring, flooding led to significant damage in a number of Polish communities. In the case of the outdoor museum and lapidary being developed near the former Tiegenhagen Mennonite Church, there was significant flooding. For that site, for the Zuławy Mennonite Museum in Nowy Dwór (Tiegenhof), and for care of cemeteries, our association provided \$1500 this summer. This gift was presented to our long-time friend Bolek Klein by the California Mennonite Historical Society tour group to aid these and other restoration/development efforts.

Helping a primary school

The recent floods also damaged a primary school in Swiniary, one of the villages in the Wymysle area. The flooding actually prevented the 2010 tour group from visiting the Wymysle church. In this context, it is especially noteworthy that students from the Swiniary primary school, near Wymysle, had helped to care for the former Mennonite church, as reported in a local paper. In a generous act of support, our friend Andrzej Puchacz, the founder and owner of the travel agency Travpol, made a gift of \$700 to the school to aid in restoration. Thanks, Andrzej! I should point out that Travpol arranges our Poland tours, always with great care and knowledge. A personal note from Andrzej, received in January 2011, describes how our dear friend feels about his work: *"In 1991, when I knew nothing about Mennonite culture and history; you made me know more about my own country, and have more international friends."*

Elblag high school presents study of Mennonites

For several years, students at Elblag Technical High School have cooperated with students at Weierhof High School in Germany as they have jointly studied the history of Mennonites in the Elblag region. An attractive hardcover book has been published to record a variety of joint endeavors, including interviews, study trips, compiling of historical photographic records, and gathering of historical materials. This study, prepared by four instructors from the Elblag school, has been translated into German by Malgorzata Rysicka, one of the participating instructors, under the title, *Mennoniten in Deutschland und Polen*. The MPFA provided financial support for this effort.

2011 Historical Tours of the Mennonite Story in Poland

Last year's tour to the former Mennonite communities in Poland sponsored by the California Mennonite Historical Society, with Alan Peters as tour leader, received very positive reviews. Because this endeavor continues to be of great interest and historical significance, Alan is offering a similar tour this year, with Beverly Reimer again making travel arrangements.

Dates: **June 18 - June 25, 2011** (with optional Krakow extension from June 25 - June 29 available). For details, contact Alan Peters (lnptrs@comcast.net; 559-222-5554) or Beverly Reimer (bvreimer@yahoo.com; 559-251-2714).

Our friends in the Netherlands have asked me also to post a notice about their tours this summer. Ayold Fanoy, friend of Piet Visser known to many of you, is organizing two tours covering the Mennonite story from the Netherlands to Poland. Dates: **June 25-July 10** and **August 6-21, 2011**. For information, contact Ayold at <http://www.mennoniteheritagetours.eu>.

The Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, founded in 1988, is open to all who share the association's goals of building friendship and understanding between Poles and Mennonites. Its Advisory Board has members from Poland, the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, and United States. The executive committee consists of Peter Klassen, Fresno (chair); John Friesen, Winnipeg (vice-chair); Paul Toews, Fresno (secretary-treasurer).

Gifts for projects in Poland and annual dues (\$20.00) may be sent to the addresses below. Previous reports of the MPFA are available at calmenno.org/mpfa

Checks for the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association should be made payable to the MPFA, and sent to one of the following agencies:

In Canada:
Mennonite Heritage Centre
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

In United States:
Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies
1717 S. Chestnut Ave.
Fresno, CA 93702

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