

External Growth Factors: Mennonite Churches in Winnipeg

Leo Driedger

Before World War II most Mennonites in North America were agricultural farmers, but after the war a large migration occurred, and by 1990 over half the Mennonites in North America lived in the city. In Winnipeg, however, six Mennonite churches were already established by 1940.¹ Why did Mennonites move to the city so much earlier in Manitoba, and why did their churches continue to grow?

Factors in Church Development

The great commission proclaimed by Jesus, to “go into all the world and make disciples,” implies that believers will have a strong urge to spread their message; many will believe, follow, and join the movement. Individuals and the groups they form will generate “internal” and “external” drives to spread the “good news,” and this will result in natural additions and growth. New terms like “missional” seem to imply that these drives to proclaim, share, and demonstrate new life will invite and attract others to join a cause. On the other hand, missions, immigration, migrations, church planting, development of institutions, cultural factors, and conference affiliation are external factors also influencing growth or decline. Growth implies positive dynamics of life, energy, strength, and hope in a future, all of which are valued.

Lyle Schaller’s work as a church growth consultant² has looked at the gains and losses of membership turnover, including new confessions of faith and transfers in, versus deaths, transfers out, dropouts, and the relative effects of these factors. Schaller assesses factors such as active and inactive members, church size, group activity, leadership, youth ministries, and education to get some sense of what changes are occurring. Such intense study soon reveals the complexity and diversity of the factors involved. Here we shall focus on Mennonite church and membership growth in Winnipeg, and sort external factors fostering such growth.

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External Church Growth Factors

External factors influencing church growth are, we assume, specific to local regions and hard to standardize. These factors vary economically, politically, socially, environmentally, and geographically. We examine them in Winnipeg, which has the largest urban concentration of Mennonites in the world and where there are now fifty Mennonite churches. At least seven external factors must be examined: 1) missions, 2) immigration, 3) rural-urban migration, 4) church planting, 5) church institutions, 6) class/cultural backgrounds, and 7) church conferences. See Table 1.

Table 1 External and Internal Church Growth Factors

External Factors	Internal Factors
Missions	Empowering Leadership
Immigration	Gift-Oriented Ministry
Rural-Urban Migrations	Loving Relationships
Church Planting	Passionate Spirituality
Development of Institutions	Functional Structures
Class and Cultural Factors	Inspiring Worship
Church Conferences	Holistic Small Groups
	Need-Based Evangelism

Source: Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 1996: 6-46.

Missions Since most Mennonites before World War II farmed in rural areas, they usually began work in the city by sending someone to do mission work. Individuals concerned with outreach were sent by congregations or a Mennonite conference to share the gospel. Often this was done by a few Mennonites who began Bible study with non-Mennonites in small informal groups, which sometimes became struggling churches. This was so in Winnipeg, when in 1907 German Mennonite immigrants began Bible study in the North End with German Lutherans.

Immigration Immigration saw major waves of inflows into Manitoba in the 1870s, 1920s, 1950s, and 1970s. When Mennonites emigrated from Ukraine in the 1870s (the “1870s Mennonites” as they will be called in this

paper), the more progressive ones moved to the U.S. prairie states and the more conservative ones came to Manitoba. Manitoba Mennonites established rural village life on two reserves (the East Reserve, east of the Red River; and the West Reserve, west of the Red River) and remained conservative culturally, theologically, and geographically. Mennonites who came from Ukraine in the 1920s had modernized technologically, educationally, and culturally, and while some moved to the farms, some stayed in towns and cities, including Winnipeg. Mennonite immigrants who came in the 1950s, who had remained and lived through the communist regime and who were largely uprooted from their rural villages in Ukraine, were scattered in the Soviet Union, and came to the prairies with a diversity of experiences. Many also came in the 1970s from Europe and South America, with another variety of experiences. Mennonites who now live in Winnipeg have emigrated to Canada at different times, have had different cultural experiences, and congregate in a variety of new churches.

Rural-Urban Migrations Mennonites who came to Manitoba in the 1870s settled on the two rural reserves, established scores of villages, and had limited contact with others for many generations. During World War II many Mennonites were forced to serve in alternative service assignments, some in the military. They had seen a larger world, and they began coming to Winnipeg to find work, study, and do business. Thus, a huge rural-urban migration occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, and many new Mennonite churches were started. Church growth and expansion were greatly influenced by this rural-urban migration.

Church Planting The half-dozen Mennonite churches already existing in Winnipeg were inundated by the 1950s influx from the farm and by refugees from Europe. Some churches grew very fast and became very large, some recruiting over 1,000 members in a short time, like First Mennonite Church. Other congregations, like Bethel Mennonite, decided on numerous occasions during the 1950s - 1970s to plant new churches in different parts of the city, releasing some members for that planting. These two strategies brought different results. The First Mennonite strategy, which continued to welcome new members in one place, resulted in a large membership of up to 1,400 - 1,500, so that individual churches needed more space and larger buildings. The Bethel Mennonite strategy kept church membership down to

500 - 700, by planting new “daughter” churches which it helped support. Both strategies resulted in enormous growth, but one plan resulted in a huge congregation, the other in a half-dozen new smaller churches.

Church Institutions Raymond Breton suggests that it is important for minority groups to build some of their own institutions in order to survive.³ He says that the more institutionally complete such a group is, the better it will maintain its identity. The two national colleges of the two largest groups of Mennonites in Canada, Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC) and Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC), were established in Winnipeg in 1944 and 1947 respectively, and when the war was over, their presence legitimized higher Mennonite education in the city. Here students preparing for leadership in their constituencies could learn Anabaptist history and theology. (Recently CMBC, Concord, and Menno Simons colleges have formed Canadian Mennonite University.) Mennonite youth came from across Canada to study in Winnipeg, providing additional momentum for urban church growth there. This factor influenced growth in some churches especially related to the colleges, and it spawned additional high schools, elementary schools, church offices, and businesses, all magnets boosting membership.

Class and Cultural Factors While immigration and migration are input factors, social class and cultural factors have to do with social comfort and spatial residence. We would expect new immigrants from other countries to be less well off, and therefore likely to settle in the older, cheaper parts of the city in order to find affordable housing. Mennonite mission work began in such an area: an older, blue-collar North End part of the city, in 1907. Immigrants of the 1920s settled in the older West End, perpetuating blue-collar, lower socio-economic styles of life. Many immigrant young women of this period worked for the elite as housekeepers. Gibson Winter suggests in *Suburban Captivity of the Churches* that as blue-collar immigrants become more upwardly mobile because of hard work and thrift, they move into newer, more affluent suburbs and take their churches with them.⁴ This shift also involves changes in social and cultural life styles. Such a shift happened to Winnipeg Mennonites, and it affected long-term church growth in different parts of the city.

Church Conferences Ever since Anabaptists began 500 years ago in Europe, Mennonites have been diverse. Different conferences do not communicate very much because of their strong congregational politics. Thus,

Mennonites in Manitoba and Canada have historically developed many cultural expressions in different contexts and have followed many conference divisions. The two largest groups, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (abbreviated as CMC in this paper, but now called MC-Canada) and the Mennonite Brethren (MB), split into two groups in 1860 in Ukraine and have continued on separate denominational tracks here. Many smaller groups have also begun along separate conference lines. Thus, churches, schools, and other institutions have to this day adhered tenaciously to these lines, although there is evidence of some changes recently. This factionalism has continued in Manitoba and is a factor influencing church growth trends in Winnipeg as well.

We suggest that these seven *external* factors greatly influence church growth, and we will examine evidence of their influence in Winnipeg. To create more context, however, we need to add eight *internal* growth factors, listed in Table 1, which are also important context but cannot be examined at length here.

Internal Church Development Factors

Christian Schwarz and his Institute for Church Development conducted thorough scientific studies of church development between 1994 and 1996, taking 1,000 churches in 32 countries.⁵ They developed eight growth factors: 1) empowering leadership, 2) gift-oriented ministry, 3) loving relationships, 4) passionate spirituality, 5) functional structures, 6) inspiring worship, 7) holistic small groups, and 8) need-based evangelism. These factors are strongly related to “natural internal church development” that will inspire existing members and attract new ones. Researchers found that effective leaders, who can work with a team of gifted members in a loving relationship, are important. Passionate spiritual commitments inspired by creative worship, and small groups where members can communicate and organize themselves, are also crucial. Schwarz and associates found that growing churches displayed more of these eight characteristics than declining churches. Churches scoring high on all eight inevitably grew in membership.⁶ While most growing churches could not score positively on all eight, those which did were sure to grow. The question therefore became not how to attract more people to worship, but how churches can grow in each of the eight areas so as to become more attractive to outsiders. Researchers also found that when size increases, the growth rate rapidly decreases, presumably because leadership, effective small

groups, and involvement of all members becomes increasingly more difficult.

Ronald Waters compiled a set of readings titled “An Anabaptist Look at Natural Church Development” by editing the contributions of six writers who presented papers at an Anabaptist Evangelism Council conference in 1999.⁷ Mennonites studied Schwarz’s “Natural Church Development” plan to see whether Mennonites should make use of the research. The Franconia and Virginia conferences are using the Schwarz plan, as are the Mennonite Brethren in Canada.⁸ Debra Dyck reports that about 25 percent of Canadian MB churches have sent in congregational questionnaires using the Schwarz methods and are doing research in their individual congregations.⁹ Further, five CMC leaders recently attended a Natural Church Development training seminar in Saskatoon to consider using Schwarz’s plan.¹⁰

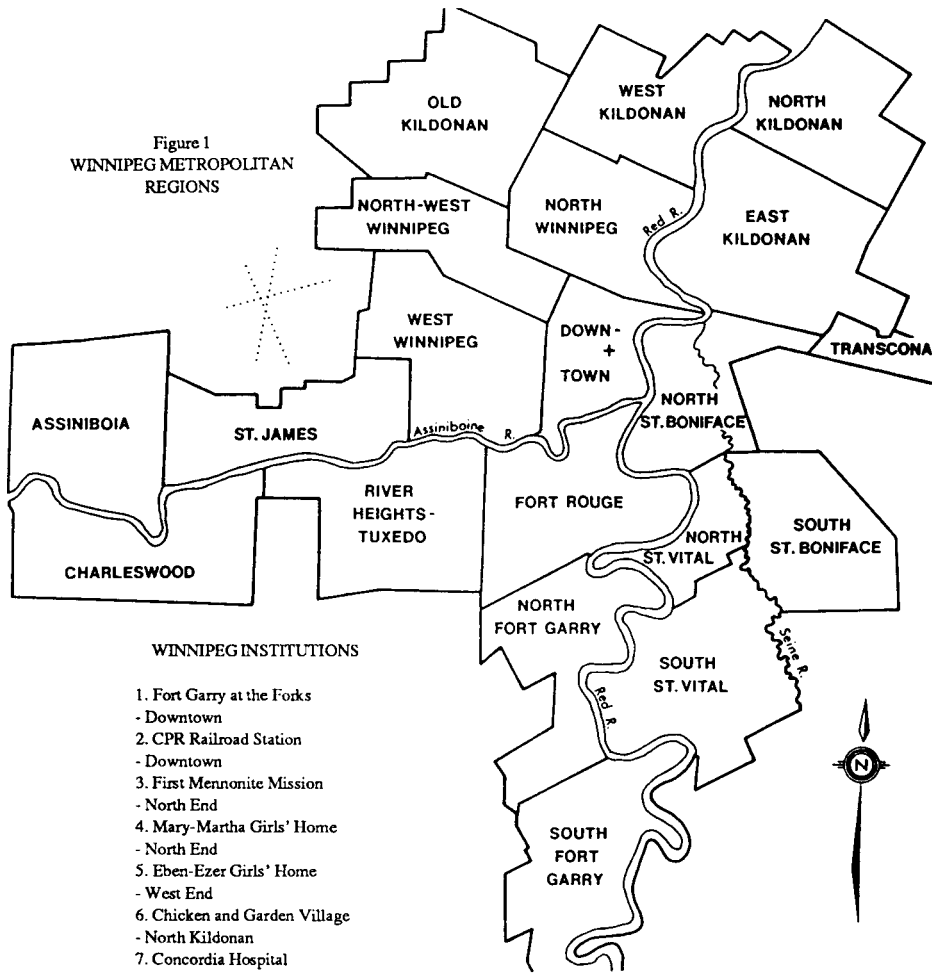
Here we cannot examine these internal growth factors, because as yet, some Winnipeg churches are only beginning to study them. And in a short paper we have more than enough variables to deal with, in focusing on the seven external growth factors to which we turn now. We will look first at missions, immigration, rural migration, and institutional extensions.¹¹

Early Beginnings: Pre-1950s

Missions in the North End

As early as 1907, German immigrants were having Bible studies in the North End of the city (see Figure 1). They had come from Russia, had heard of Mennonite Brethren “pietists,” and sent a call to Mennonite Brethren in Winkler, Manitoba to “come and help them.” Johann Warkentin and Peter Neufeld responded, bought a small chapel in St. Vital, and moved it to the corner of Burrows and Andrews, and they began to meet together in the northwestern part of the city.¹² In 1913 Wilhelm Bestvater became the first pastor of a membership of mostly German Lutheran background. A high musical standard was set by the Horch family, which later led to the well-known ministry of music by Ben and Esther Horch. When the small chapel filled, members moved farther north in 1929 to 621 College Avenue. So services among German Lutherans in the North End represented the earliest beginnings of Mennonite church growth in the city.¹³ Missions, as an external growth factor, was operating.

Figure 1. Municipalities of Winnipeg



1. Fort Garry at the Forks
- Downtown
2. CPR Railroad Station
- Downtown
3. First Mennonite Mission
- North End
4. Mary-Martha Girls' Home
- North End
5. Eben-Ezer Girls' Home
- West End
6. Chicken and Garden Village
- North Kildonan
7. Concordia Hospital
- East Kildonan
8. Elmwood MB Institutions
- Elmwood
9. MB Bible College - Elmwood
10. MB Collegiate Institute
- Elmwood
11. CM Bible College - Tuxedo
12. Westgate Mennonite
Collegiate - Downtown
13. Mennonite Elementary
School - St. James

14. University of Winnipeg
- Downtown
15. University of Manitoba
- Fort Garry
16. Mennonite Central
Committee - Fort Garry
17. Mennonite Mediation
Services - Downtown

Coming of Immigrants from Ukraine

Immigration was also a factor. As early as 1917 Benjamin Ewert began visiting Mennonites in Winnipeg for the Mission Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC).¹⁴ In 1921 the Ewerts moved to Winnipeg and started meeting with Mennonites in Zion Reformed Church on Alexander and Ellen in the West End (West Winnipeg, Figure 1). Mennonite immigrants from Ukraine arrived and became a dominant group in Ewert's small congregation. This group became First Mennonite Church, the city's largest "immigrant" Mennonite church. With the coming of these Mennonites, services were conducted increasingly in German, and more institutional ways of church work were emphasized, so that the original mission work changed considerably. Work with immigrants became a major factor in the growth of a Mennonite presence. Reverend John Enns, a teacher who was bishop of First Mennonite Church for years, was a 1920s immigrant from Ukraine himself, and he and his wife opened the ministry to young Mennonite women who worked as maids for elite households in the city. Enns and his wife were the houseparents of a Maedchenheim, or "Girls Home," in the West End, where young women came on weekends for support and spiritual services.¹⁵

While Mennonite immigrants were gathering in the North and West End, they also began meeting in the Kildonans in the northwest during the 1920s. The MBs and CMCs began meeting in the same church in 1928. By 1935 the two groups started their separate churches: MB North Kildonan and North Kildonan Mennonite. North Kildonan, on the east side of the Red River and not yet a part of Winnipeg, saw Mennonites start small farms, raising chickens, hogs, and garden produce which many peddled in the city. Most of these farmers were new immigrants who arrived in the 1920s. Their entrepreneurial pursuits led to factories, printing, lumber sales, building construction, and other businesses. These efforts have since expanded and Mennonites have entered all facets of commerce. North Kildonan has since become a northeast suburb of the city. By 1936 some North End MBs crossed the railroad and began a church further south, in the center of the city, called South End MB Church.

Rural-Urban Migrants

Bethel Mennonite Church is the best example of church growth through rural-urban migration of 1870s Mennonites from the rural reserves. By 1937, Benjamin Ewert had started Bethel Church, located on Furby Avenue, gathering

rural migrants who did not feel culturally comfortable in First Mennonite Church because of its emphasis on the high German language.¹⁶ Services were held mostly in English at Bethel, especially for younger people who had not learned German well. Bethel has since planted a half-dozen churches more open to English culture. These churches, which mushroomed in the 1960s, are examined in our discussion of CMC church growth.

Institutional Extensions

In 1923, while Mennonites were meeting in the North End, the West End, and the Kildonans, editors of *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, which had been published in Scottdale, Pennsylvania, transferred the German language newspaper to Winnipeg, where they hoped to find more German immigrant readers.¹⁷ This weekly paper became an important means of communication among recent immigrants, and it began an institutional presence in Winnipeg, first locating in the West End and then moving to Henderson Highway in North Kildonan, where it is published today. The fifth external factor – institutional support – became an additional growth factor.

Concordia Hospital, located in northeast Winnipeg, was also begun in the latter 1920s to minister to Mennonite health needs. By 1944, Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC) was established in Elmwood in the northeastern Kildonan area (close to Mennonite Christian Press on Henderson), offering for the first time higher education for Mennonites in Canada. By 1947, Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) was also begun, in Bethel Church. Establishment of these national colleges sounded the call for higher education to the two largest Mennonite denominations in Canada and beckoned Mennonites to study in the city and not just at its two universities. Mennonite institutions, including businesses, have since expanded enormously in Winnipeg, and have tended to act as a magnet, drawing rural Mennonites to shop, study, and find jobs as transportation became more affordable.

The seven external church growth factors were all operating in the pre-1950s Mennonite church beginnings. Three of the first churches were MB, and three were CMC. It all began as mission work, followed by the arrival of Mennonite immigrants. In the 1920s Mennonite immigrants turned North End MB Church (now Elmwood MB) from a struggling mission to a German immigrant church. This was also true for First Mennonite Church, which changed from a small struggling rural-urban migrant church to a 1920s

German immigrant congregation. *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* provided German news for these immigrants. The two colleges drew rural Mennonites and boosted growth, especially in North End MB and Bethel Mennonite Churches. South End MB (later Central MB) Church was a branch of North End MB Church. Church planting had begun. The movement of North End MB church to College Avenue and then to Henderson Highway as Elmwood MB, clearly illustrates Gibson Winter's notion of class and cultural factors as major influences.

Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church Growth

To trace the membership growth of Winnipeg churches, Bruno Dyck and associates visited all the churches, examined records, and talked to leaders to get their membership figures for 1948 - 1992. We present these figures by denomination, so that readers can compare the growth patterns of each church. Since the Mennonite Brethren began first, we start with them.

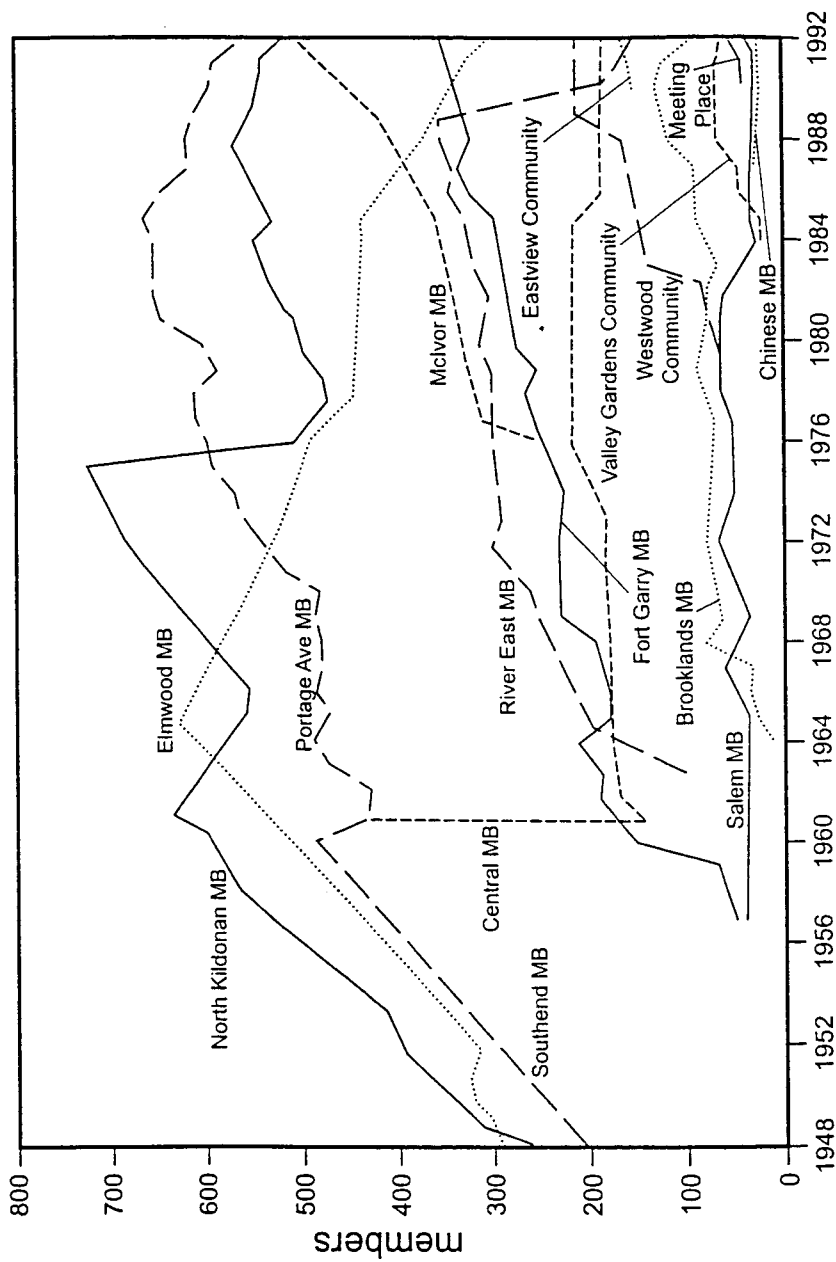
Early Pre-1950 Missions and Immigration

Figure 2 plots the membership of the three North End, North Kildonan, and South End Churches. By 1948, all three had grown to over 200 members, but none had over 300. While the North End Church began as a mission, it and North Kildonan Church had grown largely because of immigrants from Ukraine in the 1920s. South End Church was a daughter extension of North End Church, but it too was heavily influenced by immigration and received a boost when more immigrants came in the 1950s. All three of these first churches continued to grow until the early 1960s, with a steep incline, more than doubling in 20 years to roughly 500 - 600 members. This extensive growth was again due to a second influx of immigrants after World War II. All three churches tended to level off after the early 1960s.

New Churches of the Fifties and Sixties

As seen in Figure 2, the earliest three MB churches did not grow as fast after 1960, largely because of new church planting – the fourth external factor. North Kildonan MB membership declined after 1961 because some members left to start River East MB. North Kildonan again grew quite steeply until

Figure 2. Membership Growth of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Winnipeg, 1950-1992



1975 to over 700 members, but dropped to under 500 when about 250 started McIvor MB Church in the same area. South End MB Church in 1961 decided to relocate to Portage Avenue, and had a drop in its ranks because 134 members chose to stay in the old building at Central MB Church. Portage Avenue MB grew after that but not as sharply, and declined somewhat after 1985, because many other new churches were started in the 1980s. North End (Elmwood) reached a membership high of over 600 in 1965 but declined to half as many by 1992.

The class and cultural factor seems to be operating with the planting of the suburban Fort Garry MB Church, while a few members remained behind in the original inner city Salem MB Church. It clearly illustrates Winter's "suburban captivity" thesis. In 1956 the Gospel Light Mission at Logan and Ellen was started in the inner city by John Schmidt and MBBC students. Others from South End MB Church (Portage Avenue MB) joined the mission people, and they all moved to a vacant church on McMillan and Arbuthnot in 1959. In 1963 they moved to the suburbs to build Fort Garry MB Church at 1771 Pembina Highway, close to the University of Manitoba, where they wanted to minister to Mennonite students. It was the first MB church in southwestern Fort Garry, the southern part of Winnipeg. From the beginning, services were in English, and many young people attended. Membership grew very steadily, beginning with 47 in 1957 and growing to 353 by 1992. A few members were lost in the 1960s when two other MB churches were planted.

In 1961 the majority of South End MB (Central MB) members began an English church, Portage Avenue MB Church, in a large new building. After World War II many Mennonite Brethren had become stranded in Europe, and some of them came to South End, doubling its size. Membership comprised two large groups, one that had recently come from Europe and wanted to retain German services, and the original group that was more comfortable with Canadian culture and wanted more English services, which their youth preferred. This more acculturated group of 429 members moved to Portage Avenue MB in the West End. Figure 2 shows that the group grew rapidly to 490 members by 1966. Then they leveled off for a few years, with some members leaving to start new churches.¹⁸

Salem MB Church began as the Gospel Light Mission in the inner city. When a large group left to begin the Fort Rouge and then the Fort Garry MB Church, the building remained empty until a small group of MBBC students,

leaders of the Gospel Light Mission, and others began meeting there again. In 1964 this group became Salem MB Church. It has seen a high turnover in members, and attendance is always higher than actual membership. Membership fluctuated from a high of 71 in 1972 to a low of 35 in 1984-86, with 42 members in 1992.

In 1964 twelve charter members from South End MB Church started Brooklands Community Church in the city's western part – another suburban move. It was a young group who wanted to reach out to others that began Sunday and Vacation Bible schools by canvassing in the community. They built a church in 1965 after meeting in schools earlier, and membership rose from 31 in 1965 to 116 in 1990. In the late 1980s new members joined from Maples MB Church, boosting their roll.

New Churches Since the Late 1970s

The big spurt of new MB church planting in the 1960s led to a lull of more than a decade, until more churches were started in the late 1970s. In 1974 North Kildonan MB Church was bursting at the seams with 737 members when it decided to start a new church. In 1976, 248 members began McIvor MB Church in North Kildonan. It was a young, educated, middle-class church which had moved further into the newer northeastern suburbs. When members left, it was difficult for the mother church because a whole young generation of leaders had moved out. A new style of leadership and services began, new additions were built in the 1980s, and new members joined, so that by 1992 the new church had grown to 514 members in just seventeen years. Growth seemed to be endless, without any decline whatsoever. The sixth factor of Winter's suburban captivity thesis spawned cultural changes, upward social class mobility, and geographical relocation.

Westwood Community Church, another example of expansion to the suburbs, was planted by Portage Avenue MB Church in 1979. Services were first held in Bedson School, beginning with 59 charter members, who later erected their own church on 401 Westwood Drive in western Winnipeg. Membership grew steadily from 59 in 1979 to 208 in 1992. It is a fairly mixed age group, and community outreach is significant.

In 1982 Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), the Mennonite Brethren, and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada began work with Asians in the city, holding services in Vietnamese and Chinese. In 1986 the

Vietnamese and Chinese split, the Vietnamese joining the CMCs, the Chinese joining the MBs. In 1987 there were 40 members in the Chinese MB Church, but by 1992 only 35. They first met in homes and moved around a lot.

In 1984, 25 people mostly from River East MB began a church in Valley Gardens Junior High School, under the leadership of four couples designated by the River East congregation. They called a pastor in 1985 and continue to worship. By 1989 membership in Valley Gardens Community Church rose to 69, and in 1992 stood at 65. It is the third MB church to use “Community” in its name, not “Mennonite Brethren.” In 1995 Valley Gardens Church moved to 365 Edelweiss, to merge with Northdale CMC Church. There were 75 members in 1995, 109 in 2000. It is an example of denominational cooperation.

In 1990 Eastview Community Church split from River East MB Church. Members were conservative theologically and interested in more expansion, taking the Boys and Girls Clubs and the Morning Out for Mothers programs with them. There had been differences in opinion as to how the church should be run, so 152 members left in 1990, about half the roll. The new church grew to 164 members in 1992. This seems to be a “counter cultural” move.

A self-started group of about nine or ten MBs, who had a desire for a more contemporary worship service and were disillusioned with their own congregations, began meeting in 1990 as The Meeting Place in the heart of Winnipeg. They wanted to reach out to non-Christians. They started in a partially finished office building, then moved to 139 Smith Street. The membership of 34 grew to 50 in 1990 and 117 by 1994. Since then they have grown enormously, with 271 members in 2004 and an average attendance of 1,300. Christian Schwarz’s natural church development study is needed to see to what extent internal factors are operating here.

Some MB churches are struggling to survive. St. Boniface Evangelical Christian Church held its first service in 1982. The group shared a building with the Spanish Christian Church on 231 Kitson but dissolved in the mid-1990s. St. Vital MB Church held its first service in 1987, beginning with some 20 founding members, many coming from Fort Garry MB Church. The purpose of starting these churches was to reach people in predominantly Catholic areas of the city.

Three MB churches were started and have closed. Maples MB Church began with 13 charter members in 1980, partially supported by the Manitoba MB Conference. Membership in 1981 was 25; in 1989, 19; by 1990 it had

closed. Cornerstone Christian Fellowship opened in 1977 as an inner city resource centre for counseling, in the hope that a congregation would develop. There were 28 members in 1984, then 38, dropping to 30 by 1990. It closed in 1991. Transcona Community Church began in 1983, under the combined efforts of McIvor, River East, Elmwood, and North Kildonan Churches. There were 51 members in 1984, 41 in 1986, and only 21 in 1991. It closed in 1992.

This examination of the membership growth of 18 MB churches since 1907 reveals that many have flourished and are still going strong, while some have struggled and a few have closed. Many external growth factors were operating, especially immigration and church planting.

Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC)

Pre-1950 Immigration and Rural-Urban Migration

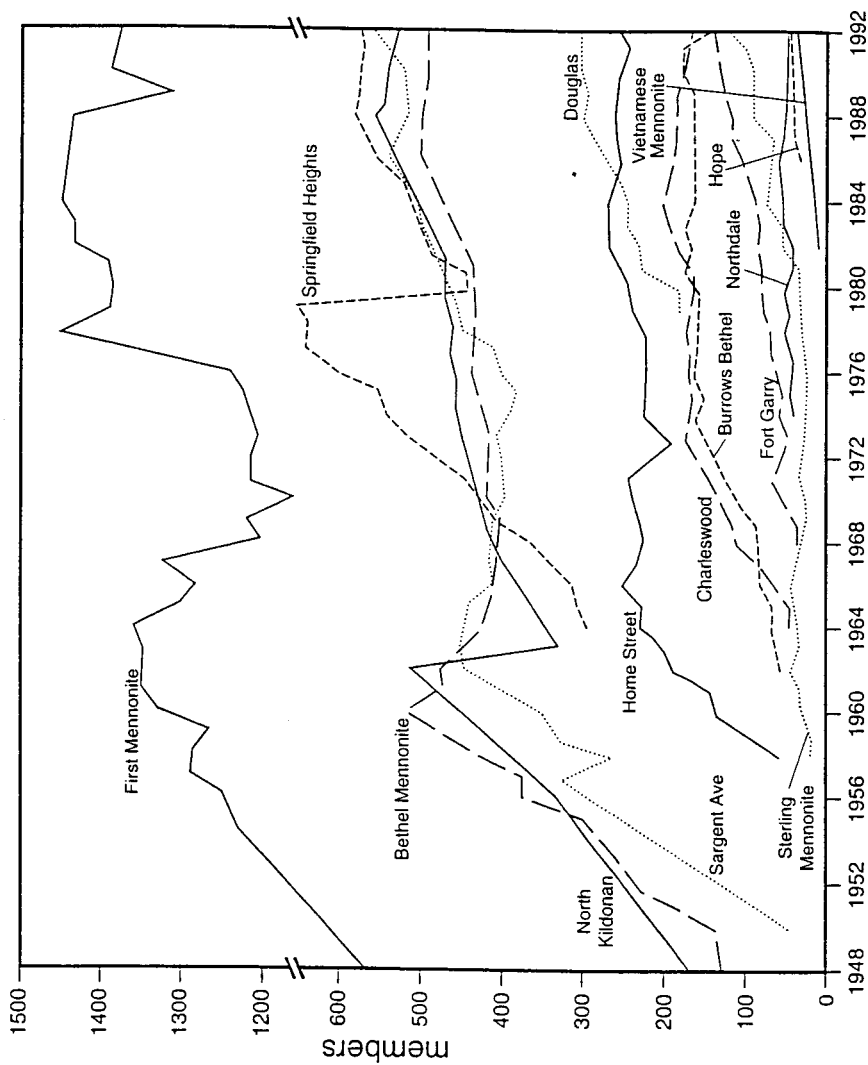
Schoenwieser Mennonite Church (First Mennonite), which the CMC started in 1926, grew to over 400 members by 1948, due largely to immigrants from Ukraine in the 1920s (see Figure 3). Steep growth continued until 1964 because of postwar immigrants. By 1964 First Mennonite Church had become the city's largest Mennonite congregation – 1,350 members – and had voted several times on planting new churches but always decided against it. Membership declined for a decade when several new churches began and some First Mennonite members left.¹⁹

Immigration was also a major growth factor for North Kildonan Mennonite Church, but its steep incline was due largely to postwar immigrants and others who came as migrants from rural Manitoba.²⁰ Almost 200 members were lost in 1962, when the Springfield Heights congregation began in the same area. Growth after that continued, but not as sharply, as rural-urban migration continued.

A third immigrant church began in 1950 as Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, composed mostly of newcomers from Europe. Sargent grew very fast until 1962, after which membership leveled off because a number of new churches began, some of which were started by members.

Bethel Mennonite Church, which began in 1937, grew because of rural-urban migration from rural Manitoba rather than immigration.²¹ Bethel held English services from the beginning, and grew to over 500 members in less

Figure 3. Membership Growth of Conference of Mennonites in Canada Churches in Winnipeg, 1950-1992



than 25 years. It has not grown larger than 550 members because of a major commitment to planting other churches. If the Bethel congregation had decided to stay together like First Mennonite Church did, it too would be over 1,000 members, if you add members of Bethel and its daughter churches.

Church Planting and Rural-Urban Migration, 1950-1969

As with the MBs, seven CMC churches were begun in the 1950-1969 period. While Sargent Avenue Church was an immigrant church, the other six started after 1957 because of rural-urban migration of 1870s Mennonites, with the exception of Springfield Heights Church.²² None of the five migrant churches had grown over 300 members by 1992.

In 1957 about 55 persons gathered to worship as Bergthaler Mennonite Church in the vacated MB church in North Kildonan. Members moved three more times to the West End before buying a United Church in 1973, after which they changed their name to Home Street Mennonite Church. In 1960 there were 136 members, growing to 246 in 1966. That year a group left to start Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship. Home Street membership remained between 200 and 250 for a dozen years, when many new CMC churches were started in the sixties and seventies. It reached a high of 277 members in 1983 and remained in that range, with 260 in 1992.

Interest in Mennonites meeting in St. Vital began in the 1940s, and by 1948 this had led to teaching Sunday school in homes. In 1951 the congregation moved into a community hall, and by 1953 began meeting in the basement of a new structure they built at 18 Sterling Avenue. Those who met were of conservative Bergthaler, Sommerfelder, and Rudnerweide (Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church) heritage, with each group fairly evenly represented. By 1955 the EMMCs separated to begin their own church because they disagreed about which mission boards to support. A sanctuary was built in 1956 by Sterling members on top of the basement. They began a formal church in 1958, when 18 people became charter members of a CMC church. They moved several more times until locating in a new building at 1008 Dakota in 1981. Membership grew very slowly to 31 in 1970, 46 in 1980, 86 in 1990, and 107 in 1992.

Burrows Bethel Church began when some members of Bethel Church started worshipping together. They dedicated a building at 384 Talbot Avenue

in Elmwood in 1961, the first English Mennonite church in the Kildonans on the northeast side of the Red River. It was called Elmwood Bethel Mennonite Church, and reported 66 members in 1962. Because of overcrowding, members purchased the St. Giles United Church at Burrows and Charles in the North End in 1973 and moved to the west side of the river. The original membership of 156 hardly grew, reaching a high of 174 in 1991 and declining to 152 in 1992. The church has closed since then because it is in an older area of the city, few Mennonites live in that area, and “Mennonite” was deleted from their new name. It was a church of young members, mostly under 40, many having attended Briercrest or Winnipeg Bible College (Providence College), with a strong evangelical and missionary emphasis.

Charleswood Mennonite Church was also planted largely by Bethel Mennonite Church members, because there were no Mennonite (CMC) churches in the city’s western and southern area. Seven couples from Bethel and five couples from Sargent Avenue founded the church, with 37 charter members in 1963, meeting in Chapman School. An educational wing was built at 699 Haney in 1965, when there were 65 members. By 1973 there were 176 members; in 1984, 198. Membership declined to 160 in 1992, when some left due to controversial leadership. A change in leadership resulted in a rise to 270 members in 2002. Charleswood gained an addition for the third time in 2003. For years it was a very young church, engaged in experimental worship, involving leadership teams where at least six co-pastors were women over a period of 35 years.

In 1966 Winnipeg Bergthaler Church became overcrowded and a group in Fort Garry, where there were no CMC churches, began meeting at Nazarene College in 1967, gathered from the Bergthaler, Bethel, and Sterling Avenue Churches, which represented mostly 1870s Mennonites. They built a new church at 150 Bayridge in 1985. They began with 34 members, a number which grew slowly to 92 when they moved into a newly-built church in 1985, and to 142 members in 1992. They have no salaried staff; four lay ministers, including women, organize the work and lead the preaching and services.

What is striking is that none of the five rural-urban migration churches grew to more than 300 members in over 30 years, perhaps because they either had scattered into so many little congregations or were culturally conservative and could not attract more members. Churches where immigrants

were dominant often grew much faster and larger. Springfield Heights Mennonite Church is another example of the importance of the immigrant factor. It began in 1964, when 156 members of North Kildonan Church and 34 from Sargent Avenue started a new congregation in Springfield Heights School, including many who had come from South America (over half from Paraguay). They built a new church in 1965. Membership grew steadily to 656 in 1979, until more than 200 left to found Douglas Mennonite Church. Since many of these 200 were younger and potential leaders, membership grew more slowly to a high of 575 but did not regain the former level. In 1992 there were 552 members.

CMC Extension After the Seventies

Northdale Mennonite Fellowship began when Springfield Heights Church got quite full in the early 1970s and some members needed English services (Springfield Heights services were all in German). A group of married couples with children began to meet at River East High School and started as a church in 1975 with a charter membership of 43, another example of church planting. Membership grew to a high of 56 in 1985 but dropped to 45 in 1992. Members built a new church in 1978 at 365 Edelweiss, but found difficulty in keeping the building going with so few supporters. However, Valley Gardens Community Church (MB), which had 65 members by 1992, did not have a church facility, so they merged with the Northdale in 1994 and now worship as a joint Jubilee Mennonite Church in the Northdale building, with 75 members in 1995 and 109 in 2000. This is one of the few instances where the Mennonite conference factor was ignored, as was also true of the early beginnings of MB and CMC churches in North Kildonan.

Douglas Mennonite Church became an independent congregation in 1980 after a period of joint work with the parent Springfield Heights Church. In 1979, 185 members, mostly from Springfield Heights, transferred to a property they had purchased in 1977, located at 1517 Rothesay in North Kildonan. In the 1990s they were planning to build more education and fellowship space. There was steady membership growth to 300 in 1992. Church planting is evident here.

The Vietnamese Mennonite Church is located at 183 Euclid in the Point Douglas area near Main Street, north of the CPR tracks. As we saw earlier, a joint effort in 1982 by MCC Canada, the CMCs, and the MBs

gathered recent immigrants to worship in Vietnamese and Chinese. In 1986 the two language groups separated, the Chinese sponsored by the MBs, the Vietnamese by the CMCs. They first met in homes and then worshiped in various churches, including Home Street, Central MB, Calvary Temple, and Sargent Mennonite. Finally they bought a lot with two houses on 183 Euclid, where in 1992 forty members and 35 children worshiped. Joint MB and CMC church planting began here.

In 1986 Bethel Mennonite Church commissioned seven persons to plan for a new church. In 1987 they first worshipped in the Wolesley area, in Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, with 47 founding members who began Hope Mennonite Church. This group was young, under 40 years of age, many had jobs in the social services, and half of them came from Bethel Church. They soon decided to move to Crossways, part of Young United Church Services at Broadway and Sherbrook downtown, where they also wanted to serve the community. Membership had grown to only 53 members by 1992.

The Good News Fellowship began in 1993, when 80 members and 20 children split from Home Street Mennonite Church. They bought their first building from the Presbyterians, at 2764 Ness in St. James in western Winnipeg. They left Home Street because they opposed liberal biblical interpretation, felt there was a lack of trust among members, opposed some conference policies, and were dissatisfied with inconsistent decision-making. They wanted more gospel songs. It was a church split, which used to be common in rural churches but has been less so in the city.

Comparing the MB and CMC conferences, we found that they mostly developed their own churches, with a few exceptions. Immigration was a dominant factor in church growth, especially in the earlier years. Rural-urban migration was an even stronger growth factor for half the CMC congregations. Church planting was important in about half of the churches. Church growth was enhanced by the two MB and GC national colleges located in Winnipeg. There is also evidence of the influence of social class and culture, where some churches reflect Gibson Winter's thesis about movement from inner city to suburbs.

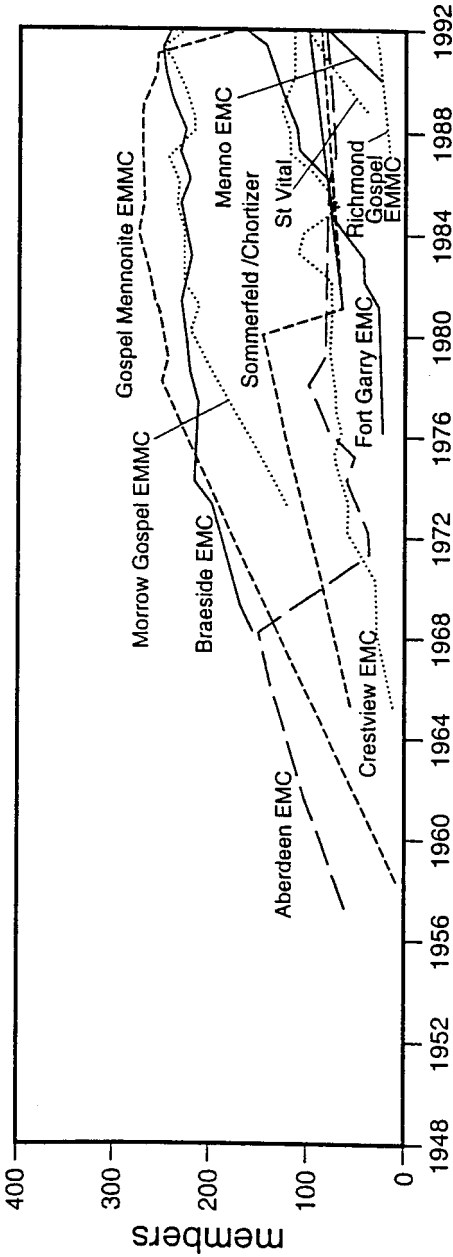
Rural Mennonites Who Came Later

The two conferences, Mennonite Brethren and Conference of Mennonites in Canada, are the largest conferences in Canada, in Manitoba, and in Winnipeg. Since Mennonites are highly congregational, they tend to be very pluralistic, so there are many smaller groups such as the Evangelical Mennonite Church (EMC), the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (EMMC), the Sommerfelder Church, the Chortitzer Mennonites, and the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (EMB) which have also started churches in Winnipeg. These smaller groups have continued to perpetuate their own conferences, and we trace their growth below. These smaller conferences, largely of 1870s background, were not as influenced by immigrants from Ukraine as the larger two were. Immigrants of the 1920s, 1950s, and 1970s had become industrialized and modernized, so few joined the smaller, more conservative groups. Institutions are not a large factor either, because the smaller groups came to Winnipeg late and were too small to start schools and hospitals. Some attended schools run by the larger groups. In terms of attitude and social class, they were more conservative and tended to live in the older inner parts of the city. Two major growth factors, rural-urban migration and church planting, seem mostly operative here, so let us discuss them by conferences.

Evangelical Mennonite (EMC) Move to Winnipeg

The East Reserve was the stronghold of the Kleingemeinde Mennonites, now the Evangelical Mennonite Church (EMC), established in 1875 and located 40 miles east of Winnipeg. Steinbach became the business hub and required considerable contact and trade with the city. By the 1950s EMCs had moved to Winnipeg and in 1951 some began to meet for worship. By 1954 they purchased their first building at 741 Redwood, and in 1956 moved to 533 Aberdeen in the North End, north of the CPR, close to the older inner city where many other European immigrants had settled. By 1957 membership stood at 55, which grew to 157 in 1968 (Figure 4). Unfortunately, Aberdeen Church burned in 1967. A large number of members moved across the river to start Braeside EMC Church in East Kildonan (closer to Steinbach, where many of the members' relatives were located). Others, fewer than 100, used the fire insurance to repair Aberdeen Church and continued to worship there. Membership has remained small.

Figure 4. Membership Growth of Other Mennonite Churches in Winnipeg, 1950-1992



By 1963 some EMCs began a Sunday school program in St. Charles School in western Winnipeg. In 1965 there were nine charter members. They began building at 271 Hamilton, where they started Crestview Evangelical Mennonite Church, the city's second EMC church. They completed it in 1982. In 1985 a few members left to help start the new St. Vital Church, and in the 1980s some families left because they wanted more charismatic emphasis. Membership rose to 123 in 1989 and declined slightly to 110 in 1992. In 1967, after Aberdeen Church burned, Braeside EMC Church was started in East Kildonan. There were 157 members at Braeside in 1968, 260 in 1991, and a slight dip in 1992 to 246.

A fourth Evangelical Mennonite Church started in 1976, with 26 charter members in the Fort Garry area. They began meeting for Bible study in 1974 and started services in Agassiz Drive School near the University of Manitoba. It was a mixed age group. They bought an old convenience store a block from campus and began meeting there in 1977. By 1983 they had demolished the store and started a new church at 602 Pasadena, finishing it in 1985. In 1990 a dozen members left to help start the St. Vital EMC congregation. They began with 26 members in 1976, growing steadily to 178 in 1992. They have had effective leadership, and many members have college training. They see ministry to university students as part of their mission.

EMCs began their fifth church, at St. Vital, in 1990. Al Friesen, former pastor at Fort Garry EMC, felt called to start this one. The charter service started with 35 members in 1990, in a building purchased at 11 Avalon Road. In 1992 there were 85 members, with more than that number attending services. Five EMC Churches were now located in five distinct areas of the city. Rural-urban migration was a major factor in this development.

Evangelical Mennonite Mission (EMMC) Plantings

While EMCs extended their churches into Winnipeg from Steinbach and the East Reserve, the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (EMMC) development extended from the West Reserve (Altona, Winkler area) into Winnipeg. Each of these two smaller conferences followed their own members to the city.

In the early 1950s Bergthaler members and EMMCs met in St. Vital for Bible study in Sterling Avenue Mennonite Church, but they parted ways over differences as to which mission projects to support. In 1957 they moved

into the abandoned former Evangelical Mennonite Brethren chapel at 232 Nassau Street. In 1959 they built an addition and in 1979 added a foyer. In 1976 membership was 225. It grew to a high of 284 and remained fairly steady until 1988, when more than a dozen members left to help Richmond Gospel Fellowship. In 1991 there was a purge of members, dropping the number from 252 to 179, a decrease of 73 or more than a quarter of the membership at the time. This drop affected giving very little, so it must have been mostly a write-off of inactive or absent members who no longer attended or supported the church.

In 1967 Morrow Gospel Church began on Morrow Street because the original Gospel Church had become too crowded. The Morrow Church had 122 members in 1973. In 1976 they moved into a new building on 755 St. Anne's Road. This second EMMC congregation grew by 1980 to 218 members, with a high of 255 in 1987. Richmond Gospel Fellowship, a third EMMC Church, was begun in 1987 by the Gospel Mennonite and Morrow Gospel Churches, when they first met at Canadian Nazarene College with a founding membership of 18. They soon moved to Fort Richmond Collegiate, where they have worshiped since. Average attendance is about 55, including children.

Looking at the growth of the smaller denominations, we see that none grew as fast as the larger ones in the beginning because immigration was not a factor. Since they depended on rural-urban migrants, the earliest two churches, Aberdeen (EMC) and Gospel Mennonite (EMMC), grew steadily, but none reached a membership of 300 over the period of 35 years. Since their rural churches were also small, and their demographic mass was light, rural-urban migration was also limited. The EMC, EMMC, and EMB all have "evangelical" in their denominational names, but there is limited evidence that they were able to win many non-Mennonites to their fold. In fact, since 1992 the two Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (EMB) churches (Christian Fellowship Chapel at 465 Osborne, and St. Vital Community Church), are no longer Mennonite churches. The EMB denomination has now declared itself non-Mennonite.

Three conservative congregations, the Sommerfelder Church, the Chortitzer Church, and the River East Menno Gemeinde all began as recently as 30 years ago. In 1970 the conservative Chortitzer and Sommerfelder groups met together, but they separated ten years later and continued meeting

separately for twenty years, the Sommerfelder at 345 Simcoe and the Chortitzer at Callsbeck Fellowship Chapel, with fewer than 100 members each. The River East Menno Gemeinde, at 825 Panet in North Kildonan, is exclusively German and was formed by Mennonites from Menno Colony in Paraguay. They organized in 1989 with 44 members, growing to 100 in 1992. Grain of Wheat Community Church on Home Street is a related communal church not formally associated with Mennonites but with many Mennonites in its leadership.

Table 2 summarizes our discussion of Winnipeg Mennonite church growth, by plotting both the number of churches planted and church membership in 1948, 1972, and 1992. The number of churches grew from six in 1948, to 23 in 1972 and 39 in 1992. There were six to seven times as many churches in 1992, a span of some 45 years. The MB Church numbers rose roughly the same, so that each of the two conferences represented more than one-third (36 per cent) of the total. The more conservative churches began later, with no churches in 1948 but five in 1972, which more than doubled to eleven in 1992. Total church membership increased fourfold between 1948 and 1972, from 1,620 to 6,330. From 1972 to 1992, it increased another 50 percent, from 6,330 to 9,050.

Table 2 Growth in Winnipeg, 1948, 1972 and 1992

	Number of Mennonite Churches				Church Membership			
	1948	1972	1992	Percent of Total	1948	1972	1992	Percent of Total
Mennonite Conferences								
Mennonite Brethren	3	8	14	36	750	2450	3100	35
Mennonite Church	3	10	14	36	870	3500	4600	51
Other Mennonites	0	5	11	28	0	380	1350	14
Totals	6	23	39	100	1620	6330	9050	100

In 1948 there were 1,620 members in the two MB and MC conferences. The 750 MB members more than tripled to 2,450 in 1972, 25 years later, and increased to 3,100, representing one-third (35 percent) of the total Mennonite church membership; an increase of 4.5 times in 45 years. Mennonite Church members increased 5.5 times during that time, from 870 in 1948 to 4,600 in 1992, representing 51 percent of all Mennonite church members. The more conservative EMC, EMMC, and Sommerfeld/Chortitzer members grew by almost four times from 380 in 1972 to 1,350 in 1992, representing 14 percent of all Mennonites in Winnipeg. Both churches and membership increased substantially in half a century.

Findings on Mennonite Church Extension

Christian Schwarz's eight natural church development factors seem to hold much promise for contemporary internal assessment of how churches are growing. Since Schwarz's guide cannot be used for past church growth, we developed seven external factors that we found greatly influenced the growth of Mennonite churches in Winnipeg.

Missions was the earliest way Mennonites began their churches in Winnipeg, as was common in many other cities in Canada. When most Mennonites were still living on rural farms and reluctant to live in the city, the few who did move there met informally and focused on Bible studies, or rural missionaries came there to start churches. In 1907 several MB families in the North End began to meet. Slowly this developed into a small church group, meeting first in schools and rented quarters and finally in their own building. After a number of moves they are now Elmwood MB Church.

Immigration was a major factor in the 1920s and after World War II. First Mennonite Church is the best example of how early Mennonite immigrants from Ukraine shaped the Winnipeg scene. Their young women came to work as domestic workers in the city as early as the 1920s. They needed spiritual services, which the church provided. First Mennonite Church was among the first to welcome immigrants and has become the city's largest church. The same process was true for North End MB. Sargent Mennonite began as an immigrant church after World War II, and Springfield Heights

served the same function in the sixties and seventies for South American immigrants. These new immigrants greatly enhanced church growth, illustrating the importance of immigration.

Rural-urban migration began in the 1930s, so that Bethel Mennonite Church emerged after World War II; large numbers of 1870s rural Mennonites came to Winnipeg from the Manitoba reserves, further enhancing church growth. Conservative rural Mennonites were reluctant to come to the city, but after World War II many who had seen alternative service came in droves to find work and higher education. These people created separate churches, because they felt less comfortable in immigrant churches tending to be more German linguistically and culturally.

Institutions played a major role, when immigrants in the 1930s began a newspaper and a hospital to serve their own people in German. The two national colleges begun in the forties became a major factor in attracting Mennonite youth from across Canada. Education joined with urbanism to foster love of the city, helping many to live there effectively.

Church planting followed, as churches grew in numbers and membership mushroomed, requiring larger facilities. While First Mennonite built larger buildings to hold their thousands, other churches like Bethel Mennonite encouraged the spawning of new churches in other parts of the city. A number of congregations spawned daughter churches in the process of new church planting. This strategy relieved pressures to build larger facilities, gave opportunities for leadership to experiment in new beginnings, and encouraged outreach, evangelism, and new life.

Class, culture, and suburbanization Fort Garry MB was the first church to move out from a mission in central Winnipeg to the suburbs of Fort Garry in the mid-fifties. Since then there has been a huge flow into the suburbs, as Mennonites have attained more education and entered the professions. Charleswood and River East MB are good examples of churches where teachers, social workers, and medical professionals are in the leadership. The colleges encouraged more education, which led to upward mobility and cultural changes in life styles, income, and occupations, all of which encouraged a wider range of non-traditional expressions of faith and life.

The Conference factor With few exceptions, churches were planted by Mennonite conference groups. The MBs started mission work in the North

End, and the North End MB (Elmwood) began in 1907. The CMCs started a church in the West End when immigrants in the 1920s arrived, to form Schoenwieser Winnipeg (First Mennonite). The Evangelical Mennonites, Evangelical Mennonite Mission, Chortitzer, and Sommerfelder conferences all began their own churches. Mennonite conference affiliation is one of the best indicators of when and why churches were planted. The MBs and CMCs began meeting together in North Kildonan but soon separated into conference churches. That was also true of the Chortitzer and Sommerfelder, who began together but later separated. The colleges began separately and church headquarters have developed separately. It will be interesting to see what will happen to the Jubilee Church, where CMCs and MBs now worship together. In 2000 three Mennonite colleges (CMBC, Concord, and Menno Simons) joined to form Canadian Mennonite University in Tuxedo at 500-600 Shaftesbury, illustrating a recent trend toward denominational cooperation.

All seven external growth factors, we found, have definitely operated in the past, but immigration and rural-urban migration appear to be fading in importance. Perhaps this is why some Mennonite churches are exploring Christian Schwarz's internal factors, which emphasize attracting members from surrounding areas to include more from non-traditional Mennonite backgrounds.

Our figures clearly show that the number of Mennonite churches has grown from six in 1948 to 39 in 1992, a sevenfold increase in 45 years. This increase has also occurred in the major MB and MC conferences and the smaller conservative groups. We have demonstrated that church membership has grown from 1,620 to 9,050 members in these 45 years, which is about 3.5 times, although this varies somewhat by conferences. The two factors, immigration and rural-urban migration, which fueled much of this growth earlier, seem to have declined in importance, so that recent growth trends appear to have levelled off and a few churches have even declined in membership.

If continued growth is desired and essential for dynamic church life, it now seems appropriate to look at other external growth factors such as missions and church planting to see if their effectiveness can be enhanced. The other option is to look internally and see what help Schwarz's natural church development factors can offer, so that the growth of existing churches can be enhanced. Churches that can enhance both external and internal factors

will likely grow fastest. But how much growth is best? If members are uninspired, so that numbers decline, we seem to have a serious problem. However, if members are so inspired that growth is too high, we seem to have a “good” problem, which can be remedied by planting new churches, as Bethel and others have shown.

Notes

¹ J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991); Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1990).

² Lyle Schaller, *Growing Plans: Strategies to Increase Your Church's Membership* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983); Schaller, *Looking in the Mirror: Self-Appraisal in the Local Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984); Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

³ Raymond Breton, “Institutional Completeness of Ethnic Communities and the Personal Relations of Immigrants.” *American Journal of Sociology* 70:103-25.

⁴ Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

⁵ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Emmelsbull, Germany: C & P Verlage-GmbH, 1996).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷ Ronald W. Waters (ed.), *An Anabaptist Look at Natural Church Development* (Mt. Joy, PA: New Life Ministries, 1999).

⁸ Interview with Robert Suderman, August 1, 2000.

⁹ Interview with Debra Dyck, August 1, 2000.

¹⁰ Terry Zimmerly, “Leaders Test Out Natural Church Development Strategy.” *Canadian Mennonite* 2:17, 2001.

¹¹ In 1992 Bruno Dyck and associates at the University of Manitoba interviewed leading ministers or representatives of almost fifty Mennonite churches in Winnipeg. Respondents were asked many questions related to the history and development of their church. Membership figures were gathered for the entire life span of each church so that figures could be plotted. We decided not to redo these interviews but to update them, and we contacted some churches with related questions. Interview schedules were used to develop seven external growth factors which grew out of the data. We thank Bruno Dyck for use of his data and for his encouragement.

¹² Anna Thiessen, *The City Mission in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1991). Esther Horsch, *C.N. Hiebert Was My Father* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1979).

¹³ Three MB churches were established before 1950. North End MB Church, the first Mennonite church in Winnipeg (1907), moved further north to College Avenue, and then across the Red River to East Kildonan, on Henderson near the Mennonite Printing Press and MBBC. It was renamed Elmwood MB Church in 1954. Businessman C.A. DeFehr was influential in getting it to move to the east side of the river, where more Mennonites had settled

as early as the 1920s. With the strong leadership of I.W. Redekop (lead minister 1953-67), the move to East Kildonan, and the support of MB institutions such as the press, the college, denominational offices and the North Kildonan community, Elmwood MB became the college church and increased to 630 members by 1965. Membership slowly declined, to 305 in 1992, for many reasons which we need to examine further by comparing other MB churches (Figure 1). North Kildonan MB Church, begun in 1928 on the east side of the Red River, had grown to 337 members by 1950 (Figure 2). By 1961 it had grown to 636 members, so that in the sixties there were two large MB churches in the northern Kildonan area. The dip to 565 members occurred because five new MB churches were planted between 1957 and 1963, when some folk came from rural areas, and immigrants from Europe arrived in the city and stayed. The start of the new River East MB Church affected the drop especially. North Kildonan MB membership declined from 737 in 1975 to 497 in 1976, a substantial drop of 240. Membership then remained fairly steady (between 500 and 560), because many other MB church plantings occurred. North Kildonan MB had become the mother church of two major new churches, River East MB (1961) and McIvor MB (1976). Church planting was the major factor slowing North Kildonan MB's growth. South End MB Church began in 1936 and moved several times in the near West End before becoming Winnipeg Central MB Church in 1960. It was part of North End MB Church until becoming independent in 1936. In 1960 the larger group of the church built what became Portage Avenue MB Church. However, 121 members who wanted to keep more German services decided to stay in their old church on William and Juno, and continued as a much smaller congregation which grew modestly to 221 members in 1979 and remained at around 200, dropping to 190 in 1992. With their strong emphasis on German it was harder to keep their young people, but they served immigrants who needed the German support. The three pre-1950 MB churches are still alive and well, but since the 1990s their powers to grow seem to be fading. Growth profiles of the three are rather different because of differences in leadership and the extent to which planting of new churches siphoned off strong members from the original core.

¹⁴ J.H. Enns, *Dem Herrn die Ehre: Schoenwieser Mennoniten Gemeinde von Manitoba 1924-1968* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1969).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-5.

¹⁶ Interviews of church leaders.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ A dozen members left Portage Avenue MB in 1964 to begin Brooklands MB Church. After 1970 they again began to grow to a high of 667 in 1985, with 42 transferring to Westwood MB in 1979, and 25 transferring into Portage Avenue MB from a country church. After 1985 fourteen transferred to Jubilee in Valley Gardens in 1986, and another 14 transferred to The Meeting Place in 1991, which resulted in a decline in membership to 556 in 1992, down to 428 in 1999. Four transfers out to other churches seemed to drain some of their young leadership. In the mid-1940s, North Kildonan MB Church was entirely German speaking. A small group saw the need for an English Sunday school in the area and began a program. By 1963 a new English group of sixty members formed Springfield Heights MB Church (later River East MB Church). It was a young, well-educated, professional church, with many members involved in the MB conference and interested in outreach. They had women in pastoral leadership in the

1990s, not in line with conference policy. Recently this has been changing. In 1990 a major split saw about half the members leaving to form Eastview Community Church, shown as a steep drop from 357 in 1989 to 162 by 1992.

¹⁹ In 1947 First Mennonite Church had 400 members. That year they built a large new church on Notre Dame and Alverstone, meeting first in the basement and moving into the upper level in 1950. By 1956 membership was 1,250, rising to 1,450 in 1978, dipping to 1,368 in 1992. The dip between 1964 and 1977 was due to the beginning of several other CMC churches in the mid-1960s.

²⁰ The Mennonite Brethren first met in North Kildonan in 1928, and during the first years MC Canada members met with them. In 1935 the first CMC church was founded, because MB facilities were getting crowded. Many were members of the large Schoenwieser Gemeinde, to which First Mennonite Church also belonged. Members built a new church on Roch and Cheriton in 1951. After World War II many immigrants also joined North Kildonan; by 1956 there were 335 members, growing to 509 in 1962. In 1964 some 156 members left to form Springfield Heights Mennonite Church, which moved further into the suburbs, the reason for the sharp drop in membership (Figure 3). Membership climbed to 561 in 1988 and 525 in 1992.

²¹ Bethel Mission Church originated to serve “Canadian-born” Mennonites whose parents had come in the 1870s and who were moving into the city to look for work or to go to school. These young Mennonites did not feel comfortable at the established Mennonite churches emphasizing German culture and language. A large influx of Russian immigrants also occurred. They began meeting at Bethel in 1937, but growth was slow because of the outbreak of World War II. In 1945 Bethel relocated to Furby and Westminister, and the new CMBC met in the Bethel building and became the home church for students. In 1955 they moved to Stafford and Carter, and later built a larger church. Bethel planted Elmwood Bethel in 1961 (now Burrows), Charleswood in 1963, and Hope in 1987, and had assisted with Sterling in the 1940s. Steep growth since the 1940s until 1960 arose when more youth came to Winnipeg, and the dip between 1960 and 1980 occurred when Bethel planted Elmwood and Charleswood, and other new churches were started.

²² Seven CMC churches were begun in the 1950-69 period. Benjamin Ewert was active in beginning a third church planted together with Jacob Toews of Winnipeg. Mennonite Mission Church, renamed Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church in 1955, began meeting in the CMBC chapel in 1950 and erected a new building in 1959, at Sargent and Garfield in the West End. They started with 45 members and grew rapidly to 323 in 1957, when Toews took 85 members out to start a new United Mennonite Church. It lasted less than three years, disbanding over leadership, and most who left returned to Sargent. In 1963 a small group left to join the new Springfield Heights Church, since it was closer. Membership climbed slowly from 400 to 500 over 25 years, because other new churches began during this time.