



Part V:

Speaking through correspondence

Letters were the primary means of communication between Alternative Service workers and their distant communities.

The Archives holds copies of newsletters circulated by churches to their men in alternative and military service. These often contain news from the home congregation, as well as sermons and other words of encouragement. The Archives also holds personal correspondence to and from the men, their families and friends. The men also wrote to Mennonite leaders asking for help and advice. The following are letters from:

- David Jantzi to his wife Lavina and family
- Harold Schmidt to his friend (later wife) Enid Culp
- The Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches to “our men in the services”
- Erb Street Mennonite church, featuring a sermon by J. B. Martin on “The Church’s responsibility to our young men in camp”

The Archives welcomes donations of letters, photographs, diaries and other memorabilia so that we can continue to preserve and tell the story of Alternative Service.

Campbell River British Columbia
Mar 31/43 Wed evening

Dear Lavina and All. -

Sincerely a greeting to you all in the
Lord's name hoping you are all enjoying the best of health
I am fine

Thanks once more to you Lavina for your letter
mailed on Saturday which I recieved yesterday I recieved
no mail to-day and on Thur we dont get mail so I'll
have to wait until Fri for more news.

We are still planting trees and I think we will
finish up Fri. (but latest rumours) and won't be
able to go to Seymour until Tue as they can't get
(special) buses until then. for the spars are all in
use moving ~~our~~ air-force boys. We are all glad to
go back to our old camp.

I haven't heard anything about a leave yet. Although
four boys from this camp have there granted ^{as soon} ~~as soon~~
as tree planting is finished.

My hands are rougher than sandpaper from

SEYMOUR MOUNTAIN CAMP

Dollarton, B. C. ,
September 3rd, 1942.

Dear Enid:

It appears now as though we have some things in common after a doubtful past. As I see it we both enjoy (perhaps I have used the word wrongly) the isolation residence assigned to us for a period, and if you care to use your imagination still more I can think of another similarity- both have white uniforms. The only difference being you are working toward obtaining a black band while the writer tries to have as few black bands (grease) as possible. If you get what I mean?

W If I understand your letter properly?, I conclude from it that you are still taken up with your career at The General, which is a pleasure to hear indeed. It truly was refreshing to again hear of one so firmly established in her convictions making a success of both her professional and christian life. More power to you Enid.

Life at a B. C. Forest Camp goes on and on and where and when it will end is the question in the mind of most present. These last few weeks our usefulness has been demonstrated largely and have every reason to believe that we have won the appreciation of many B. C. residence, for the which due praise must be given our Lord. Forest fires are the order of the day. There are days when one feels very much alone when so few men are around. Our men have handled fires in this immediate community as well as several along the coast as far north as Powell River one hundred miles north from Vancouver. When this team of men was taken to Powell River they expressed their desire for the long boat ride which was their's free, but after their arrival the reports given the writer seemed to show a change of mind. The comforts of home apparently could not be found, but rather in this old lumber camp where they were staying was possessed of bed-bugs, and the like. Therefore my sincere wish is that they will not spare the water before returning to this base. Fighting these fires has proved very trying for the men during the hot weather at times, but thus far only one member has taken refuge in the army, and he was a non mennonite.

Do you know Miss Merium Cressman ? She is a young lady from New Dundee, Ontario a one time school teacher at home and now in training at the Vancouver General Hospital. Anyway she was out at camp one sunday for a visit and very interesting conversations were conducted. She informs me that the rating as to size and efficiency is the highest of any hospital in our Dominion. Does one accept such a statement as correct, or otherwise, give me the benefit of your greater knowledge ? She will graduate in 1943 and has in mind doing missionary work in Africa should the Lord so desire. Her religion is that of Mennonite Brethren.

Second Letter from

THE ONTARIO CONFERENCE
OF MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCHES
18 Gordon Avenue
Kitchener, Ontario

To Our Men in the Services,
at Home in Canada and Overseas.

Dear Men:

This is a second message from your home churches. Our love goes with it.

You have left your jobs, homes, churches, friends and loved ones to serve God and the King in hard labors and amid great dangers. You suffer much and you may have to lay down your lives. In order to go the whole weary length of this thorny way unfalteringly and faithfully, you certainly need encouragement and assistance.

We at home cannot do everything we would want to do for you, but may we remind you of your ever-present, ever-faithful and all powerful Highest Headquarters. You are welcome to approach it at all times, at all places, under all circumstances, with all your troubles and difficulties.

"Ask and it shall be given you."-- Jesus, Matth. 7:7

Prayer changes things.

Prayer changes you.

Prayer changes even God in His ways and attitudes.

May we draw your attention to some of the blessings that come from prayer?

1. Forgiveness 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all our sin."

2. Divine Nearness Ps. 145:18, "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth."

3. Mercy and Grace for future needs Heb. 4:16, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

4. Wisdom Jas. 1:5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upraideth not; and it shall be given him."

5. Deliverance Ps. 34:17, "The righteous cry and the Lord heareth and delivereth them out of all their trouble."

6. Honor Ps. 91:15, "He shall call upon me and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him."

Dear boys, don't forget to pray. We are praying for you and so is Jesus.

May the Lord keep you and bless you!

(Rev. B. B. Boldt)

The Conference Committee

Kitchener, Ontario,
January 15, 1943.

The Church's Responsibility to Our Young
Men in Camp--J.B.Martin
Sunday, Aug.30/42.

We are trying to reach our young men in B.C. with some of the messages in this conference, as you see right now. The girls are going to take some of the messages and later on they will be written out in full and sent to our young men.

God allows misfortunes and suffering of various kinds to befall mankind. In fact, so many of the disappointments are because of disobedience of His own children. There is so much that should be said on this subject that we hardly know what to leave out and what to put in.

We would like to give a brief background to show that we have a Christian responsibility to our young men who are in camp. Old testament harvesters, when they cut grain, were instructed from God's Word to leave the corners of the field stand for the needy to harvest. The Old Testament reapers were to leave some gatherings behind so their poor needy folks may gather them up. Old Testament worshippers were to bring the tithes for the Levites and the offerings for distribution to the poor.

Christ taught sharing of their means with the hungry, thirsty, naked and the poverty stricken. Christ emphasized alms-giving and told His people they should be cheerful givers to those who are in need. As we look at the church as it is recorded in the Book of Acts, they had a common treasury into which they put their means and had men appointed to distribute to the needy folks in the church. They also carried on relief work in seasons of great need. Paul taught mutual sharing with Christian Workers, widows and poverty stricken. The Bible certainly teaches mutual helpfulness. Christ took of the fruits of the earth and multiplied them and distributed them.

We think of Dorcas, with her noble work. Probably Dorcas made possible our Sisters' Sewing Circle. At the end of her life there was great sorrow. (Like the good Samaritan we are to help the needy) The widow's mite is the spirit of the New Testament, helpfulness and work in the early Christian Church. Phoebe was a helper of many.

To bring our present responsibility before us we should say a word about our historical heritage, as it has been handed to us. The church was composed of Christian believers. They held to the doctrines of baptism. They were separate from others, and had the group spirit, help within the group. Conrad Grebel, Blauroch, Manz, Menno Simons and others certainly carried over the ideal of the anabaptists. These were at first called Brethren but when Menno Simons appeared on the scene they were called Mennonites. They believed in the freedom of conscience, leading of the Holy Spirit and separation of the state and the church. Here, no doubt is where we have the birth place of our biblical mutual helpfulness to one another where there is need in the Christian Church. This is meant to be entirely independent of the state and government help of any kind. Remember all mutual helpfulness in Europe was among Christian people.