

April 8, 2010 – News Release:

The Bethany College Connection:

Bethany College and MCC join to tour Saskatchewan with a message of Restoration!

By Stephen Siemens, MCC Restorative Justice Program Coordinator for Saskatchewan.



The Bethany College Players are an eight-member, dynamic and creative drama team committed to using their gifts and abilities in service. They are pleased to present "Re:connections" a drama by Wilma Derksen.



Hear Wilma Derksen (Bethany College alumna and coordinator of Victim's Voice for MCC Canada) share her journey of losing her daughter Candace to a tragic act of violence.



Participate with MCC Restorative Justice Program Coordinators James Loewen (MCC Canada) and Stephen Siemens (MCC Saskatchewan) as they facilitate dialogue about practically responding to harm in our communities on a national and local level, by living out the ministry of reconciliation.



It began with an internship several years ago. Stephen Siemens was working on completing his B.A. in Pastoral Ministries and Biblical studies at Bethany College (Hepburn, SK) and needing an eight month placement to wrap it up. *"I wanted something outside of the box," Siemens mentions with a grin, "Often students participate in churches or mission agencies for their internships. I love the church, and I'm committed to serving her always, but I wanted to experience something that would take me to obvious places of pain and despair, where hope would be hard to find, relationships would be difficult to begin, pat answers non-existent... I wanted to come to a place where everything I had been learning over the last three years would be called into question."* The answer to Siemens' desire came through the quiet yet active peace and justice, relief and development agency of Mennonite Central Committee. It was in the Restorative Justice Program in Saskatoon where Siemens found the perfect fit he had hoped for. *"Once my feet hit the pavement through the internship, I couldn't believe the revolving door of prison, illiteracy, FAS(D), just how blurry the line between good and evil really is, the obvious lack of trust, the need for healthy relationships, affordable housing, dysfunction breeding dysfunction and violence begetting more violence."*

It was an interesting time for Siemens as he reflected on his experience: on the one hand he felt as though this experience and the people's lives he had collided with was the most fulfilling, struggling, nerve racking, but totally transformational thing he had ever experienced.

On the other hand, there was the stark reality that this kind of work, or working for this kind of justice, a justice bent on restoration is very countercultural within society, even within the church at large. *"How can this be,"* asks Siemens, *"since the church's message revolves around a future focused way out of the muck where past records don't count, but forgiveness counts, new ways forward count, defeating addictions count, being accountable and transparent with each other count?"* As time went on Siemens was hired on as staff at MCC in Saskatoon as the Restorative Justice Program Coordinator. As he engaged with various restorative justice initiatives around him, his biggest desire was to get the word on restorative justice public, for the sake of so many who have been victimized, and those still actively perpetrating. *"Church people need to find their niche amidst the pain, within the complexity, embracing real emotions from anger and vengeance to grief, compassion, and forgiveness to those who have been offended, and those offending, and everyone in between,"* Siemens exclaims passionately! Siemens began to entertain the idea of a tour through the Province of Saskatchewan to purposely get to know more people and invite them into a conversation about justice. Specifically this would be a tour that would consist of storytelling, conversation, dialogue and participation, utilizing a drama to frame the experience. *"I have been on a few drama tours before with Bethany College. There is something energetic and electric about being on the road, staying in people's homes, and being an agent of encouragement and challenge"* Siemens notes. As thoughts for a tour were brewing, Siemens

Nurturing Disciples... Training Leaders To Serve

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began discussing this with Wilma Derksen, the Victim's Voice Coordinator for MCC Canada (located in Winnipeg) who's own life journey has been marked with much pain and tragedy and unending questions about justice and forgiveness as her daughter Candace was abducted and killed in Winnipeg in the mid 1980's. "Wilma was completely on board, and wanted in on the process, and already had a good indication for what drama we could use for this project" Siemens revealed.

"For me the beauty of this drama was the creative process out of which it was born," Derksen gracefully explains, "It was originally workshopped by an offender group and a victim group separately, writing two dramas that have now been merged into one. Even though this drama has changed significantly from the first, I still feel the spirit of the two voices has remained, giving it a ring of authenticity. The issues are real. For me the real thrill of this tour will be to listen to the discussion the drama evokes. It's all about having a conversation that challenges us while it energizes us. Nothing is simple when it comes to a discussion between a victim and offender." Derksen's script was the perfect material that Siemens wanted: a balanced portrayal of the struggle for victims and offenders and their communities to move forward from the aftermath of criminal violence.

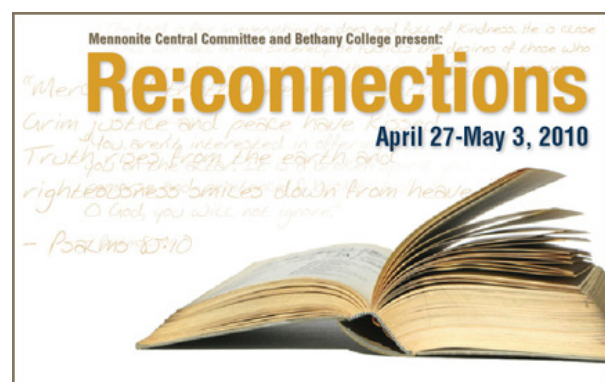
As the script was ready for performance, Siemens thought "who better to perform this than the drama team from Bethany College? My whole journey into restorative justice comes from these two distinct organizations, why not encapsulate this message using both of them!?" Bethany College agreed and recognized their interest in the facilitating the drama for Re:connections. Nick Boschman, interim director of the Bethany Players for the Re:connections tour comments, "Re:connections presents us with the story of people in need of relationship restoration. At Bethany, we seek to explore what it means to be healed by the restorative power of Jesus, within a distinctly Christian community."

With plenty of prayer and church support the details of the Re:connections Tour have been confirmed. MCC and Bethany College will be on the road from April 27th until May 3rd in community centers, high schools and churches in Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Regina, Canora,

and Swift Current. See www.sk.mcc.org/reconnections or www.bethany.sk.ca for more information.

"We are inundated with the carnage and false hopes of retributive justice everywhere from the media to the playground to people who annoy us in traffic to our workplaces, even our families," articulates Siemens, "You did this. You deserve this. The goal of the Re:connections tour is to create space for conversation, planting seeds of redemptive participation and solutions to the problems of violence. Within that conversation, we seek to connect everyday people, especially church people, to a definition of justice that strikes a clear chord to the foundation of the Christianity, a justice that does not define itself as handing out "just desserts," adversarial in nature, stoic, and punishment based. Rather a justice willing to go to the source of the problem, a justice that is tough on crime by being tough on racism, tough on poverty, tough on addictions, tough on white middle class Christian apathy towards the poor, and getting real with people in the cycles of violence and pushing the heart of the Gospel— forgiveness and reconciliation between people and God—back to the center of what it means to be Christian."

Bethany College and MCC invite all who are able to join in this conversation and come out to a tour presentation near you. We also invite you to attend our upcoming Spring Concert, "Tradition!" Saturday, April 24, 2:30 pm, Knox United Church followed by Commencement Service on Sunday, April 25, 2010 also starting at 2:30pm. For more information visit: www.bethany.sk.ca



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