

Graduates Told They Can Change the World

70 Students Celebrated on May 31st

“Now the real hard work begins.”

That’s what David Northcott, long-time anti-poverty activist and Executive Coordinator of Winnipeg Harvest, told Menno Simons College (MSC) graduates at the College’s 16th annual Spring graduation celebration.

The celebration was held for the first time at Elim Chapel, located across the street from MSC.

The next steps are “the real grunt work,” said Northcott, adding that “with a loving thud, we are now putting all the problems of the world on your laps.”

Northcott went on to remind the graduates of their good fortune, and how life in Canada made it possible for them to get an education. “You have had access to the world’s knowledge anytime you wanted it,” he said. “You are among the few on the planet who have the ability to tell your own story. You have an ability to change the world.”

He went on to affirm MSC’s emphasis on the spiritual. There is a “common



David Northcott: “Now the real hard work begins.”

hunger and thirst to take steps to move us closer to God, truth and love,” he said, noting that the most important question facing people who want to help poor people today is: “Can you love one another? All else is secondary. Human rights are based on loving one another.”

Prior to Northcott’s address, University of Winnipeg President Lloyd Axworthy expressed gratitude to Canadian

Mennonite University (CMU) for “the way our two institutions meld and work together” to offer conflict resolution and international development studies through MSC.

“I cherish our relationship with CMU,” he said. “It shows we can collaborate and work together for the better good of giving students the excitement of learning . . . I very much honour the continuation of that partnership with CMU.”

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Referring to the suffering and conflict that fills the world today, he told the graduates that “we celebrate you who have, through your studies, chosen to speak a word of peace in the world.”

He went on to praise MSC for how it reflects the values of the “Mennonite community” that “make the world a better place.”

The graduates, he said, “bring a supply of commitment and learning that is very much in demand today . . . a demand that exceeds supply. It is God’s work.”

The celebration also featured a reflection by Joel Marion, who graduated with a degree in Conflict Resolution Studies, as well as an Honours degree in Political Studies.

Seven years ago, he said, he was working as a night cleaner at a hotel when he thought: “I can do more than this.” A week later, was registered at the University of Winnipeg to study politics.



Members of the MSC Class of 2008


“I knew I wanted to know more about the world we live in, but I wasn’t really sure what the exploration was going to look like,” he said.

That exploration included enrolling at MSC after he realized that “an important element” was missing from his studies—“the human element.”

Through classes at MSC, his “education really started to mean something,” he said. One pivotal experience was a trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo as an election observer in 2006; the visit taught him that “change doesn’t happen all at once, and it rarely happens the way you expect it to.”

That realization, he added, also summed up his experience at MSC.

“I really didn’t know what to expect, and I didn’t know where it would take me,” he stated, adding that his studies have given him, and the other graduates, the “skills and knowledge” they need to move into a career, along with the “willingness to step out of our comfort zones, to question what we think we know, and to open ourselves to new learning experiences wherever we go.”

A total of 70 students graduated with Bachelor of Arts degrees in Conflict Resolution Studies and International Development Studies. Four students—Chris Ewert, Laura Normand, Martine Friesen and Judith Biber—received medals of achievement from the University of Winnipeg. 



MSC Currents is a publication of Menno Simons College. MSC provides education flowing from Anabaptist Mennonite understandings of faith, peace, and justice while engaging other religious traditions and intellectual perspectives. This includes offering undergraduate programs in International Development Studies and Conflict Resolution Studies.

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Grad Stories: Joel Marion

by Aaron Epp

Most students wait until they've finished school to go traveling. But Joel Marion acquired passport stamps from both Ireland and the Congo as a student at MSC.

The 27-year-old Winnipegger graduated from the College with a degree in Conflict Resolution Studies, as well as an Honours degree in Political Studies from the University of Winnipeg.

Of his school-related trips, the visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo is the one that sticks out most in his memory. Marion was part of a group who went to the country as an observer during the Congo's first-ever democratic elections in summer, 2006. That trip, sponsored by CMU's Institute for Community Peacebuilding, gave him a chance to witness first-hand a situation he had been studying for three years; it also enabled him to weave different aspects of the situation in the Congo—things like culture, gender and violence—into almost all of the courses he had taken up until that point.

"I think what interested me about the situation in the Congo was mostly the complexity of it," he says. "It's not just a matter of economics, or of race, or any one thing. You can't say, 'This is the cause, here's the effect, now let's find the solution.' That complexity intrigued me."

Marion's knowledge of the situation allowed him to brief the group on the Congo's constitution and electoral laws; his knowledge of French also allowed him to act as the group's translator.

John Derksen, Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution Studies at MSC, also went on that trip to the Congo. He says that Marion brought a sense of adventure to the group and, because he reads widely, he also offered a wide worldview.

"As his strong interest is in peace-building and human rights, he did the most thorough research on how fair the preparation for the election was, as well as how fair the election itself was," Derksen says. "He has a strong attention to detail, and a strong attention to thoroughness. Also, he's cool, calm and collected—not very easily rattled."

After the election, Marion stayed in the country to talk to people and gauge their reactions. He says the trip "affirmed my idea that democracy is not an over-night kind of thing."

"Any amount of time spent in another country opens your eyes to different things," he adds. "Basic everyday life looks different, feels different, tastes different—there's always this uncertainty factor wherever you go. It kind of breaks you, but I think that's a good thing. Everyone should do it—we're too acculturated here."


Marion began an internship at the U of W's Global College while at MSC, which he will continue until Summer 2008. He is currently working on a project called Canada's World, an independent foreign policy consultation that's talking to Canadians about their understanding of Canada's role in the world, as well as their ideas of what that role should be.



Joel Marion

Marion says that studying at MSC taught him "to be more open-minded and interact with people more," adding that he found the learning process was not passive, where students listen to the professors' lecture, but a process where interaction is encouraged.

As for the future, he's confident that studying at MSC has given him "a good foundation to move around to different kinds of positions, and be flexible." His time in the Congo also taught him to appreciate the things he has, and the value of hard work.

"I feel like I can make a difference in the world, and that if I try really hard, I'm capable of doing it," he says. "But, just wanting it isn't enough—you have to want to put effort into it. You don't always get what you want, but if you keep trying and keep pushing, eventually more opportunities will present themselves." 

Students Learn About Jobs That Make A Difference At Social Justice Fair

by Aaron Epp

Where on earth do you get a job in line with your beliefs and values?

It's a question all university students ask themselves at one point or another. It's also the question David Northcott posed at the beginning of his keynote address at the February 6 social justice fair at MSC.

Northcott, executive director of Winnipeg Harvest, a non-profit food bank, addressed the question in a presentation titled "Please, Sir, I Want Some More."

During the presentation, Northcott listed three ways it's possible for students to find jobs and make a difference: government; business and organized labor; and the not-for-profit sector. The best, he said, was the non-profit world.

"The benefits are bad and the wages are low," he warned, "but I love the idea that we can change the world."

Following his address, Northcott was part of a panel with careers in social justice with Helene Kadi, an analyst with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Afghanistan task force, and MSC alumni Abdikheir Ahmed and Noelle Depape, both of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM).

"Don't wait for your fourth year to start what you want to do," Ahmed advised students, encouraging them to volunteer now and get to know people in the fields they're interested in.

Depape suggested students take advantage of as many internship opportunities as they can, adding that while a Master's degree is helpful, sometimes a good idea and the willingness to pursue it are just as good.

"We need social innovators, and we need people with new ideas," she said, noting that this could include documentary filmmakers, travel writers or people who want to start non-profit organizations. "There are a lot of people who are willing to support good ideas," she added.

One student who had worked with a non-profit organization in Botswana questioned whether people from the West have the right to work in developing countries— wouldn't it be best for her to stay in Canada and work on social justice issues here?



Jenna Sparling (l) speaks with Social Justice Fair organizers Bre Woligroski and Zoe Gross.

"If you're an IDS student and you're not asking that, you probably have some more thinking to do," Depape reassured the student.

"It's fine to be confused, and it's fine to be skeptical," Kadi agreed. "Just stay engaged."

In addition to the panel discussion, Caitlin Peeling of La Siembra, an Ottawa-based worker's cooperative that produces certified organic chocolate, cocoa and sugar products, led a workshop on fair trade issues. Peeling discussed what a co-operative model of development looks like, why it's important, and how people can take action.

In between workshops and addresses, students browsed displays by over 20 social justice organizations, including Mediation Services, UNICEF, Mennonite Central Committee and Siloam Mission. Students were able to meet with representatives from each organization and pick up promotional materials.

"It's inspiring to find out what all of these organizations do," said Jenna Sparling, 23, a fourth-year MSC Conflict Resolution Studies student. "It gives you something to aspire to."

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Professor Publishes New Book On Restorative Justice

Changing Paradigms: Punishment and Restorative Discipline is the title of a new book by Paul Redekop, Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution Studies.

Redekop says he wrote the book to make people aware that there are alternatives to traditional measures of punishment, and to raise awareness of restorative justice programs. “There is no moral justification for punishment,” he says.

Redekop views his book as a follow-up to Howard Zehr’s seminal 1990 book *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*, which showed how restorative justice can be used in criminal justice settings. *Changing Paradigms* is his attempt to take Zehr’s ideas “to the next level, so it’s not just a criminal justice thing, but a way of life.”

In the book, Redekop calls for the abolition of punishment altogether, and counters the two traditional reasons for punishment: retribution and deterrence.

The problem with the retribution, he says, is that the benefits of communicating moral disapproval depend on a situation where the person being punished agrees completely with the values of the punisher, and fully understand the rightness of the punishment. This level of agreement rarely happens and, when it does, punishment is rarely necessary.

The problem with the deterrence, he adds, is that punishment doesn’t act as a deterrent—it makes things worse. Studies consistently show that the longer someone is in prison, the more likely that person to re-offend once released, he says.

But the main problem with punishment, he notes, is that it

doesn’t allow for communication between the victim and the offender.

“We have every right to express our disapproval of wrong acts, but when we punish, we undermine the message,” he explains, pointing out that the way the criminal justice system is set up now doesn’t allow for contact between the victim and offender. “It’s an exercise in futility, because punishment breeds only anger and resentment on the part of the person being punished.”

A restorative justice response, he says, holds the wrongdoer accountable, and has him or her restore the harm that has been done. That can mean anything from compensating the person they’ve wronged in some way, or sincerely apologizing to the person and reassuring them that it won’t happen again.

This can happen through mediation, where the victim and the offender meet with a third party, and also through community conferencing, where victim and offender meet with a circle of people to support them. In this scenario, everyone has a chance to share how the wrong affected them, learn from what happened and find ways for the offender to compensate the victim.

“People are upset about crime, so they want more punishment,” Redekop says. “But that is only because they don’t know that there are alternatives. Punishment is the only option that’s been available. They don’t know there’s a whole other way of dealing with these conflicts that actually can work.” **C**

From a report by Aaron Epp

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Bre Woligroski, the director of student services at MSC, noted that while the event started out as a career fair, the focus for the past two years has been on social justice issues.

“The fair is a great opportunity for students to connect with professionals in the social justice fields,” said Woligroski. “While the connections students make at the fair can lead to practicum, scholarship, internship, bursary and maybe even job opportunities, the focus is on showing them how they can get involved in the community.”

Students appreciated that focus.

“All the issues here, and all the booths here, get us thinking about Canadian culture and how we’re living,” said Zoe Gross, a first-year Conflict Resolution Studies student who helped organize the fair.

“It’s not just about what I can do in a few years,” said Gross. “It’s about what I can do now.” **C**

Date Set For First Youth Peacebuilding Gathering

Fifty youth, twenty mentors and a dozen facilitators will gather August 24-31 at a camp in Manitoba's Whiteshell region for the first Youth Peacebuilding Project Summer Peace Gathering.

The goal of the Youth Peacebuilding Project gathering, sponsored by a partnership of organizations headed by the Institute for Community Peacebuilding (ICP), is to give youth from diverse populations, primarily from Winnipeg's inner city, a chance to explore dynamics between different identity groups, and to develop positive relationships with each other.

During the gathering, which will be held at the Manitoba Pioneer Camp, the youth will participate in activities constructed in such a way as to promote an exploration of, and healthy response to, stereotypes and biases towards each other. These activities are designed around starting points that would be seen at any camp — such as art, outdoor challenge, recreation, cultural teachings and teambuilding activities — and build on these activities in such a way that mutual learning, and transformation of attitudes, occurs.

"We're looking for youth who have experienced tension between themselves and members of another identity group," says ICP Director David Pankratz. "This isn't about sharing rainbows and pretty flowers between people who've already figured everything out — this is about the hard work of overcoming societal and personal stereotypes and biases. Building peace means you have to talk to the 'enemy'."

The gathering has been made possible by a grant from the United Way and is conducted in partnership with Welcome Place, Ka Ni Kanichihk, IRCOM, MMRC, and YMCA/YWCA.

THE BULLETIN BOARD

Ruth Taronno, Practicum Director for Menno Simons College, visited Kenya and Uganda from April 24 to May 9 to research non-governmental organizations that would be willing to host practicum students. She met with numerous organizations which had hosted MSC students in the past, or which had been recommended by faculty or students as good possibilities. As a result of these meetings, MSC is setting up semi-formal Memoranda of Understanding with Nairobi Peace Initiative, Change Agents for Peace International (both in Nairobi), and with Hope for Children, Kabarole Research and Resource Centre and Central Buganda University (all in Uganda). During the course of these meetings, Ruth was able to observe, and be part of, a fascinating consultative meeting of a network of peace and development organizations (Peacenet Kenya) that discussed the over-arching issue of resettlement of internally displaced people in Kenya resulting from the post-election violence this past winter.

Paul Redekop, Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution Studies, has released a new book entitled *Changing Paradigms: Punishment and Restorative Discipline*. Additionally, he has given numerous public presentations throughout Winnipeg, and appeared on CJOB's Crime and Punishment radio program in April.

David Pankratz, who directs the CMU Institute for Community Peacebuilding, has been appointed to the Canadian government's National Council of Welfare. The ap-

pointment was announced February 20 by the Honourable Monte Solberg, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development. Pankratz's appointment is the result of a study he authored in January for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy. In the study Pankratz showed that eliminating taxes on the incomes of people earning minimum wage in full-time work in Manitoba would result in an effective raise of \$1.50 an hour, significantly improving their well-being. As a member of the Council, Pankratz will join others from across the country in providing the Minister with feedback and advice on policy regarding poverty alleviation in Canada. The Council meets three times a year in Ottawa.

John Derksen, Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution Studies, spoke in April at Winnipeg's First Mennonite Church on "Understanding Islam".

Rick McCutcheon, Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution Studies, and **John Derksen** appeared in *The Winnipeg Free Press* in April in an article on their new responsibilities as editors of *Peace Research: The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*.

In June **Neil Funk-Unrau**, Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution Studies, was interviewed on the national CBC Radio news on the subject of the Canadian government's apology to Aboriginal people.

Perspectives

By George Richert

When one reflects on the journey of life, it becomes obvious that there are many 'windows of opportunity.' Some are only slightly ajar, some are foggy or fuzzy, and some are clear. Most open, and then close, in a very short span of time. They usually do not remain open indefinitely. As a result, it is incumbent on each person to look carefully at the options, sticking out one's neck while being careful to keep one's head.

These open windows, small or large, enhance one's interest and understanding about the surrounding world. Each person who takes advantage of these small windows of opportunity—who cares about what is on the 'other side' and who dedicates their energies in those directions—will find a great deal of satisfaction in their work and life. Never underestimate the impact that even a small crack will have on your life.

For me, leaving the University of Regina to come to MSC was such a 'window' of opportunity. The merging of MSC with CMU, while retaining affiliation with U of W, was another "window." Since my retirement from MSC/CMU in 2001, a number of other windows have appeared. My wife and I have been involved in four

short-term service appointments with Mennonite Central Committee, not to mention a number of volunteer assignments in our home communities.

Retirement may mean that one's life takes the sharp turn in the road, and that direction may put one into another sphere of interest. Awareness of the world situation, and saying 'yes' to involvement and service is why, we have heard, retirement can be very productive and meaningful as a career.

I have always been happy when I responded to openings, things like enjoying wherever we have lived, having short vacations with family, golfing with friends, weekend fishing trips. At the same time, I regret that there were windows I did not see, did not explore, or to which I did not respond.

These past six months have been another window of opportunity for me. It has been quite special to return to MSC. It has been great. And now, we are told, there is another window to explore. We just have to determine how to respond!

All of us have windows of opportunity; we just need to take off the blinders and look for them, especially since some may be on the periphery.

In other words, explore! Respond! And look for your window, no matter how large or small it may be. **C**

MSC Student Receives Scholarship

MSC student Robin Bryan is this year's recipient of a \$1,000 Sustainable Development Scholarship from the Province of Manitoba.

In a press release, Manitoba Conservation Minister Stan Struthers noted that Bryan is a "terrific" example of the "talent and promise we find in so many Manitoba youth."

Bryan, who is majoring in environmental studies and international development at MSC, says he is interested in studying "the inter-connectedness between human cultures and their environments," adding he plans to continue public education work regarding sustainable practices and lifestyles.

Bryan works as field manager for the Wilderness Committee, a citizens group that educates the public and fundraises for research and the protection of boreal forests and wildlife in Manitoba. He also is a co-ordinator of EcoMAFIA (Ecological Males and Females in Action), a student environmental action group at the University of Winnipeg, and involved with SUNSET (Sustainable University Now, Sustainable Earth Together).

"We are working on many different issues from educating students about composting for a sustainable campus to raising awareness about sustainable transportation, the 100-mile diet and waste reduction," he says. **C**