

# VISION 2012

## SOMETHING FOR CHILDREN

How do children catch a vision? Or, how does Vision 2012 affect children? If you look closely at the Vision 2012 projects, you might notice that many of them encourage faith formation for all ages--but children especially! Camp Menno-scah? Surely children meet Jesus in our prairie camp. New church plants? Surely children are at the center of congregational life. The Resource Library? Of course! Children's literature and resourcing are at the heart of this ministry.

Watch and listen for ways children can be incorporated into your congregational goals for Vision 2012. Explore how every child (kindergarten through fifth grade) will use a "Children's Activity Booklet" (to be published in May) for fun and learning about Western District Conference.

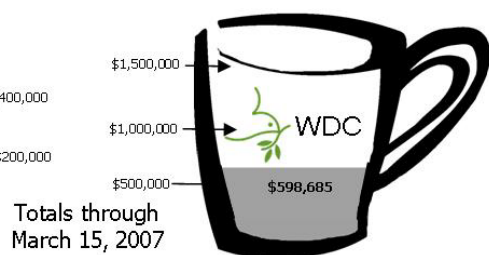
Do your part and share your faith with a child.

*-Dorothy Nickel Friesen*

**2007 Annual Budget**  
Congregational Goal: **\$472,300**



**Vision 2012**  
3 year Goal: **\$1,500,000**



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# WDC News

April 2007

## Let the little children come to me..."(Jesus)

In a massive study of Mennonite Church USA conducted in 2005 of over 120 congregations (of a possible 965) and over 300 (from 500 active and active-without-charge) pastors and 22 racial/ethnic congregations in Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles, there is new evidence that our denomination is changing. The Feb. 6, 2007 issue of THE MENNONITE gives the first of many reports by Conrad L. Kanagy, associate professor of sociology at Elizabethtown (PA) College, an ordained minister in Lancaster Mennonite Conference and principal researcher for the Mennonite Member Profile 2006.

A section of the profile was dedicated to findings concerning pastors in MC USA. "Differences between pastors and lay members show up early in life. Pastors attended church more regularly as children than members--96% attended weekly, compared with 87% of members. Pastors (59%) are more likely to identify a 'specific moment' when they accepted Christ as Lord and Savior compared with members (49%). And pastors were baptized earlier in their lives--at 12.5 years of age on average, compared with 13.9 for members." (p. 12)



Brandon and Danny Friesen, and John Mark Duncan visit the WDC Resource Library to pick out books to read at home. (Photo by Vada Snider)

## Church attendance for children

In Western District Conference, we value our children and provide encouragement for frequent church experiences--from well-stocked nurseries to well-trained volunteers at all ages of early life. One congregation hosted a "baby shower" for the church nursery to replenish the shelves with new books and toys when new babies started to repopulate the congregation. Some congregations have a "children's church"--a special time of worship especially designed for younger children. Another congregation hosted a Wednesday night series of parenting classes to inform parents about their important role in forming faith practices. The new "Gather 'Round" curriculum has special resources that deal with connecting home and church to Biblical lessons and Scripture memorization. Patterns established in childhood are very important for life-long Christian nurture.

## Deciding to follow Jesus

There are critical points in life when children (and adults) realize their spiritual thirstiness for God and the realization that Jesus is more than a Bible character. Children learn to love Jesus through caring adults who model Christian virtues--way before they can read or write. Young teens express their love for Jesus through songs, original poetry, and participating in service projects--like serving as ushers with a trusted adult, or bringing food offerings to be blessed. Children's stories told in worship that connect the sermon, the music, and the Bible are effective tools to help children

decide to follow Jesus in their lives. Where does your congregation invite children to follow Jesus? And, of course, camping experiences are special environments to help children and youth discover another place to decide to follow Jesus.



Lawrence Hart, pastor of Koinonia Mennonite Church, Clinton, OK, holds granddaughter. (Photo by John Sharp)

## Baptism

There are some congregations which are moving catechism (church membership classes) to the junior high age believing that many middle-school age youth are ready to make a commitment to the church. Other congregations are lengthening the catechism experience over a two-year model that combines retreats, service opportunities, worship participation, and Bible study in a thoughtful blend that leads to baptism and church membership. While some congregations have a Sunday School time for all high school students dedicated to catechism, still others are moving to a Sunday afternoon or evening time that is dedicated to those who truly want to explore baptism. The Mennonite Member Profile 2006 hints that pastors were making a public statement of faith at an earlier age than typical members. Does your pastor fit that profile? How is catechism being taught or shaped in your congregation? Is it time for some changes?

Children were welcomed by Jesus and we form our own church rituals of child dedication based on his invitation. Scour the Bible for more examples of how children speak their faith and how Jesus, especially, healed children. What new ways might Western District Conference churches strengthen their ministry to children?

*--Dorothy Nickel Friesen, Conference Minister*

### Western District and South Central Joint Annual Conference

- ◆ **Date/Location:** July 27-29, 2007 - Tulsa, OK
- ◆ **Theme/Scripture focus:** Speak Lord! ¡Habla Señor! (I Samuel 3)
- ◆ **Speakers:** Barry Bartel, Bethel College president; Esther Martinez, church planter and storyteller; Raylene Penner, biographer/English professor; Lawrence Hart, Cheyenne pastor and peace chief
- ◆ **Feature:** "The Upside Down King: A Rock & Roots Musical on the Life of Jesus" (written by Doug & Jude Krehbiel, Duane Johnson)

*Watch for brochures/registration forms in late May!*



Asha Regier enjoys hearing a story read by her Grandpa Fremont Regier, Faith Mennonite Church, Newton, KS, in the WDC Resource Library. (Photo by Vada Snider)