

Tenth Man: A Pastor's Testimony Years Later



In my pastoral work, I have personal experience with the JoinHands Program. My wife, Joan, and I planted Maplewood Mennonite Church in Fort Wayne, IN. This church was started with the help and direction of First Mennonite Church, Berne, IN. The thriving Men's Fellowship group, numbering about 100, from First acted on the congregation's vision of starting a church in Fort Wayne. In the early 1960's, the group set a goal to assist in new church plant. We pastored in Fort Wayne for 14 years.

When we left Fort Wayne, I served as pastor of the Faith Mennonite Church for 12 years. In 1985, the Home Missions Committee of the Western District Mennonite Conference asked if we would plant another church, this time in Denver, CO. We were enjoying our work at Faith, a congregation of about 300. We declined the invitation. The Committee came to us a second time. After much thought and prayer, we discerned that God was calling us to a new assignment, so we agreed to go.

The Mennonite colleges provided a list all of the alumni in the area. For the first 5 months, we called on the alumni. We reached out to persons who were referred to us. Together in our we gathered in our home for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship meals. After 5 months, it was time to find a place for the group of about 35 people to worship and study.

When we found a place to rent, we felt that it was an answer to prayer. The Aurora Senior Center had a large room for worship, rooms for Sunday School classes, and a place for fellowship meals. The group grew to about 55 and we needed a larger facility. A property for sale was located where our people lived. Since it was located on a well-traveled street, it was an ideal. But the price was not so ideal – \$170,000 for 2.2 acres. There was only about \$30,000 in the Building Fund. However, the Western District Mennonite Conference and the Rocky Mountain

Mennonite Conference offered some financial support to begin the project.

One particular day, I was driving in the neighborhood. I drove onto the lot, wishing we could buy it. I started walking across the lot, and somehow felt the need to pray. I knelt down on the ground, and prayed, "Lord, if you want to have a church planted here, you will have to help us."

It was soon after that when Joan and I met with a friend from the church in Fort Wayne. He was a land developer. He suggested we plan a "Fund Raising Dinner" in Fort Wayne, inviting folks from both Maplewood Church, Fort Wayne and First, Berne, IN. "I will help pay for the dinner," he offered.

About 45 people attended the dinner. The guests were invited to jot down any pledges they could make. After the dinner, we gathered at our friend's home, and looked over the pledges, \$1,000, \$5,000 and more. But there was one note read, "My wife and I would like to match the total giving of this group, up to \$50,000." We were shocked! WHAT AN OFFER! When we totaled the pledges, it came to \$53,000. That night checks and pledges totaled \$103,000. This was an answer to many, many prayers. It was God's doing, not ours

In 1995, we began to make plans for a church building. We hired an architect. Our attendance was approximately 80. We surveyed the congregation to see what we could give. We began to raise funds for our new building. Various events and projects were planned.

In 1985, I was serving on CHM, the Commission on Home Ministries of the former General Conference Mennonite Church. Stan Bohn, Executive Secretary and several of us conceived the idea of starting a fund to be used for new churches to either build or buy a church facility. The Tenth Man Project was born. The first grant, \$50,000, was granted to San Francisco Chinese Mennonite Church in 1965. The next year, the Boulder Mennonite Church in Colorado, was also given a grant of \$50,000.

Barney Habegger from Berne, IN, contacted many of the men in his Men's Fellowship group and more than 50 men signed up to donate.

In 1996, the church in Denver applied for a building grant from the Tenth Man Project. We asked for \$50,000 and the request was accepted. It made a deep impression on our congregation, that men from across the United States would commit \$200 a year to make these grants possible. We witnessed that we as a new church were

not alone. We were a part of a much larger network of churches.

What a help that gift of \$50,000 was to our church!

Once the building project had begun, we planned for a weekend to bring people in to help with the building project. About 85 people from Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado came together for a Friday and Saturday in November to help lay the sub floor for the new building. We worked together for 2 days. Even when the temperature went down to 19 degrees, the work continued.



The building project was completed in 1997. The building was dedicated in August during a special celebration. All the choirs from the Denver area Mennonite churches gathered to form a large choir of over 70 voices. Dr. Erland Waltner from the Seminary in Elkhart presented the sermon.

I again want to thank Mennonite Men for the gift of \$50,000. In addition to the money, I am grateful for the prayers and the many hours of labor that were given to construct the new building.

-- Leonard Wiebe, 2018



Later in the building process, groups of men came from many places to help for a day, a week or longer. Irv and Edna Reimer from Goessel KS came for 2 months and parked their camper in our driveway.

Barney Habegger made 3 trips from Berne, IN always bringing 3 or 4 men with him in his van. They drove straight through from Berne to Denver, 20 hours. They worked from Monday morning till Saturday evening. They put up sheet rock, did all the tile work and laid all the carpet.

The volunteer help was absolutely incredible. Our members had the pleasure of hosting these volunteers in their homes. Many new friendships were formed.