



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 2008

Sabbatical is time for transition, study, reflection for Henry Kliewer

Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) - It can be difficult to end a job, especially if it is something you are passionate about and hold as your calling. That's why Henry Kliewer needed a change of pace after completing seven years as conference minister for Mennonite Church British Columbia. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary is helping with that transition by hosting Henry on sabbatical as part of the Engaging Pastors program.

As conference minister Henry worked with 34 different congregations, all of which he could have felt welcomed and comfortable to worship in. "I came to see all the pastors of the churches in the conference, whether they were a single pastor, youth pastor, associate pastor and even staff, as the particular members of my congregation."

Sabbatical has provided the time and space for Henry to grow and evolve in his ministry transition after completing the conference minister post. "I wanted space to reflect on my past seven years, space to grieve appropriately, a time for rest," said Henry, who will be staying on the AMBS campus for nine weeks.

When facing those life transitions it is valuable to have the means to process, which in Henry's case is where Engaging Pastors came in. "With uncertainty, anxieties bubble up," Henry said. "You have to live in the present with gratitude and take the steps you have. There are times of wilderness, but that's important, like Jesus' temptations."

Interaction with the AMBS community has been a blessing to Henry. Though he misses his wife, Nellie, he recognizes that is part of his journey and he values being on campus with people from other walks of life who are passionate for Jesus. He said, "Jesus and the servant

attitude is the center of this place. It is symbolized all over, and I want to feel Jesus more deeply. I want to feel his hands on my feet and spirit.”

Henry is engaged with a great deal of biblical study at AMBS as well. His particular focus this nine weeks is on covenant and how God has chosen to reveal himself in the form of covenant. “I am fascinated with the whole area of covenant making,” he said. “Covenant keeping, breaking and renewing.” To Henry the word *covenant* is more than a noun, it becomes a verb: Christians are *covenanting*. “We live out the covenant daily; it is a process within and without us.”

Studying and reflecting on covenant has led Henry in his continually growing faith. “I’m coming to see that the God of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New Testament. The covenant of the Old Testament is not separated from the New Covenant. God’s character is gracious, compassionate and loving,” he said. “Everyone has a desire to be part of something. That’s why we join bowling leagues or certain clubs. The question and interesting piece is that we have the choice to what we belong—and the church is the most wholesome place to belong; we are wired internally for covenant.”

The topic of covenant is so important to Henry partly because of the role he believes it will play in the future of the church. He said, “We are in need of covenant. It is a crucial piece of church of today if you look at North American Mennonites. It is the renewal of personal and corporate relationships.”

Sabbatical has also been a chance to slow things down a bit; Henry has enjoyed the opportunity to have some time to rest. “I’m doing my share of reading and having conversations. There has been a lot of new input for me with students and faculty. But part of it is letting the soul catch up with the rest ... the body and the mind. I’m learning that Sabbath can happen in the midst of business, and we have to foster space where we can practice that.” Henry plans and hopes to leave the seminary with a clearer mind in transition while he continues to covenant in the story of God.

The Pastor Sabbatical Program is one element of Engaging Pastors, funded by a five-year grant from Lilly Endowment. Engaging Pastors includes ten different kinds of projects that bring together AMBS professors and pastors so each can learn from the other.

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Nathan Ramer