

FROM SIN TO STEWARDSHIP

What a change! Historically, many people in the Mennonite community were taught to view insurance with considerable suspicion. To purchase insurance demonstrated a lack of faith in God and in one's faith community. In many contexts it was labelled as sin and grounds for excommunication. It meant becoming "unequally yoked with unbelievers". (2 Corinthians 6: 14) It was in this environment that mutual aid societies or associations were encouraged and found fertile ground, whether to meet health needs or property protection. It was these organizations that for more than a century kept the spirit and practice of mutual aid alive in the churches.

Today we think of being properly insured as an act of stewardship. We become annoyed, impatient or even judgemental if people experience a loss and have inadequate life, medical, auto or property insurance. As Christian stewards of what we own, we are encouraged to ensure that we protect our assets as well as possible with adequate insurance to maintain or regain wholeness at a time of loss.

Historically the Mennonite church held a fatalistic theology which taught that believers should be thankful for suffering since it tested resolve and brought them closer to the mind and experience of Christ. Today we more commonly believe that God's will for our lives is not to suffer setbacks and losses that will prevent us from carrying on the ministries to which we have been called. We are encouraged to avail ourselves of various forms of insurance, allowing us to sustain our asset base and restore wholeness when setbacks or losses occur. However this does not address the question of being unequally yoked with systems and values with which we cannot agree.

Increasingly, para Church organizations such as MAX Canada Insurance Company and Mennonite Savings and Credit Union are replacing the traditional informal aid ministries.. Fully meeting all the regulatory government demands designed to protect society, these organizations nevertheless allow members of our Anabaptist constituency to receive professional services equal to or better than large societal institutions provide. Furthermore, operated within the historical and theological understandings of mutuality and service, these organizations remain dedicated to the historical tasks of mutual aid and mutual support within the constituency they serve with new forms of "Barn raising".

Consequently, whether premium dollars, savings or investment dollars, they remain within the orbit of the faith community and are used to serve others within that faith community through services offered and mutual aid activities. We buy insurance to preserve the wholeness of our assets, knowing that when need arises, programs are in place to restore wholeness within the faith community. With our participation in such organizations we fulfill the vision the Apostle Paul shared with the Corinthian believers: "I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance." (2 Corinthians 8: 13-14)

Within MAX Canada, Mutual Aid Ministries operates four programs supported by the insurance enterprise to under gird mutual aid; A Burden Bearing Ministry, a Network Ministry, a Financial Aid Ministry and an Educational Ministry. For more details visit www.maxcanada.org.

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