

A letter to readers of *Vision*

Arlo Frech

Dear People of Vision,

My sister Dora Frech told me about your magazine. Dora's our pastor at Christ Church, Stemming. That's in North Dakota, in case you don't know. The Mrs. and I—her name is Emma—we live on a farm out here north of town, right on the Manitoba border. In fact, our barn is *in* Manitoba. That used to didn't matter much, but a couple years ago the Americans put up a booth right between our house and the barn, so of course the Canadians put one up right the other side of it. They've got guys sitting in them booths all day. Now every time I go to milk our cows, I have to clear customs. The Canadian guy asks me where I'm headed in Canada. "To the barn," I always say. And when I walk back to the house, the American guy asks if I'm bringing any alcoholic beverages across the border. "Nope," I say, "them cows gave nothing but milk today."

As I was saying, Dora told me about your *Vision*. She said you were going to be writing up some things about power and leadership, what with your two groups of churches having merged, or whatever you call it. That got my interest up, because our church here was something of a merger. My grandpa Marcellus Frech founded the church, and he named it the Ex-Old Mennonite Church, General Conference, of Stemming. Grandpa Marcellus was Pentecostal Holiness, but when he moved up here from Tennessee, he said that North Dakota was too cold for a hot religion. After studying on the matter some, he decided that the Mennonite religion was best suited to our climate. But he couldn't decide whether to be Old Mennonite or General Conference. Other people in Stemming, those who weren't Catholic and started coming to Grandpa's church, they didn't seem to care one way or the other. So, finally, Grandpa Marcellus just decided that the church would be Old Mennonite. This brought about no end

of turmoil, with people in the congregation saying things about Grandpa Marcellus like, “Who elected him pope?” All of those folk now wanted the church to be General Conference, so Grandpa Marcellus yielded. That’s how our church came to be the Ex–Old Mennonite Church, General Conference, of Stemming.

My sister Dora never liked the name. She went to St. Julian’s seminary down in Grand Forks. That’s Baptist or Episcopalian, I think—not Grand Forks, but St. Julian’s. Anyhow, Dora changed a lot of things when she got to be our pastor here. For one, she took to wearing kind of a dark red robe every Sunday. Folks thought that was pretty odd. But nobody said anything to Dora, not wanting to hurt her feelings and all. She made some other changes, too, that everybody grumbled about but just went along with. Then one Sunday we looked at our bulletins, and they said “Christ Church, Stemming.” Emma and I looked around, thinking we’d stumbled into the wrong building or something. There was quite a ruckus, with some old folks remembering that name-change thing back with Grandpa Marcellus. Chet Vanderbork, our choir director—we don’t have a choir, but Chet got elected director at a church business meeting—Chet said, right out loud, “Now she’s gone too far!” Well, we finally all sat down and hashed things out—“discernment,” Dora called it. It turned out Dora could keep wearing the robe or change the name of the church, but not both. She went with the name, so now we’re Christ Church, Stemming.

When my neighbor Gus Dobrinski heard about it—Gus is Catholic, by the way—he said we were now the Ex–Ex–Old Mennonite Church, General Conference, of Stemming. Speaking of Gus, he has a bunch of Brown Swiss dairy cows. Emma’s and mine are Holstein-Friesian. We go back and forth about which breed is better, but the milk tastes pretty much the same. Emma says we should mix the herds, so they’d be black and white and brown. We’ll see.

Faithfully yours,
Arlo Frech

P.S. The Mrs. says “hello.”