



# Profiles

of Mennonite Faith

## David B. Wiens – *Pastor and Radio Minister*

**D**avid B. Wiens was well-known in Canada and the former Soviet Union as a pastor and radio minister. Because of his facility with the Russian language, for over 25 years he was the voice of an engaging radio program broadcast into the Soviet Union behind what was referred to as the “Iron Curtain”. The program was a ministry of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Conference via their agency the Gospel Light Hour. Today it is known as Family Life Network.

David was born November 7, 1908, in Friedensdorf, Molotschna Colony, in what today is Ukraine. His parents were Bernhard B. and Elizabeth (Enns) Wiens. They had eight children of whom David was the third. David’s brother Peter B. Wiens was the well-known editor of *Der Bote*, a magazine for German-speaking immigrants.

Together with his parents David left Russia and immigrated to Canada in 1924. They lived in various locations in Saskatchewan, before moving to Alberta and settling in East Coulee.

David grew up in up in a good Christian

family and initially made a commitment to follow Jesus at the age of 10. Later, in 1933, at the age of 25, he experienced a significant spiritual renewal that changed his life. A year later he was baptized in the Drumheller Baptist Church and joined the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church in Namaka, Alberta.

Answering a call to the ministry he went to school to further his education and enrolled in the Hepburn Bible School, now Bethany Bible College, in Hepburn, Saskatchewan. There he met Gertrude Janz, daughter of the well-known Mennonite Brethren minister and leader Rev. B. B. Janz. On October 28, 1939, they were married. Until her death in 1978 she faithfully was supportive of David’s life work and ministry. They had four children: Paul, Viola, Victor and Edith.

In 1979 David married Mary Toews,



Rev. David B. and Mary Wiens

the organist at the Culloden Mennonite Brethren Church in British Columbia, where he had been the pastor.

David taught at Hepburn for three years and then felt called to minister among Russian-speaking

people in Arelee, Saskatchewan. This proved to be good preparation for his later radio ministry. During the Second World War he also served as a chaplain to conscientious objectors in Alberta and Saskatchewan. He ministered in a number of places including Laird, Saskatchewan as well as with the Western Children's Mission.

Three years later he accepted a call to pastor the Neuwied Mennonite Brethren Church in Germany. However his longest pastorate was at the Vancouver Mennonite Brethren Church where he commenced ministry on 21 July 1957. Later the congregation was renamed the Culloden Mennonite Brethren Church. He resigned from pastoral ministry in 1975.

David is widely remembered for his faithful service with the Russian language radio ministry, which began in 1957 and in which he continued until his death in 1981.

A Russian-language radio ministry had been considered by the directors of the Gospel Light Hour agency. They were convicted that they should begin a ministry for the 200 million people living across the vast Soviet empire. The most likely candidate to conduct such a ministry was David B. Wiens. They contacted him and he quickly responded with a "yes" and a tape with a sermon in Russian.

Initially he taped the messages himself. But eventually he would travel to Winnipeg every few months to record the Russian messages. Each message was 12 minutes in length accompanied with music produced by a choir of recent World War

II Mennonite immigrants from the Soviet Union. The messages were put together with the choir in Winnipeg and then sent to two major radio stations, the well-known HCJB in Quito, Ecuador and the other in Nome, Alaska. The program was called *Swetlyj Lutsch Evangelija* (Light of the Gospel). Later, other radio stations picked up the program and it was broadcast from HLKX, Inchon, Korea, as well as stations in the Philippines and Monte Carlo. In the early 1970's a survey in the Soviet Union rated the program among the top three most popular religious programs.

David was a gifted speaker, fluent in Russian, German and English. Since he was blessed with an exceptional memory, he seldom preached from notes, although he typed out all his sermons. He was a man of integrity, discipline and deep conviction. He never neglected to request forgiveness when he felt that he had wronged someone.

David served the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference in other ways, notably on the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns. His strong insistence on the authority of Scripture gave him the courage to dissent on issues when his convictions did not permit agreement with majority thinking.

In his biography of David B. Wiens, *Ein Leben fuer den Herrn*, Erich Ratzlaff notes, "D. B. Wiens was a man who had experienced the grace of God in his life which enabled him to scale the wall of even the Iron Curtain." Many people in Canada and the former Soviet Union found Christ through his ministry.



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of Mennonite Faith: No. 42, Winter 2009.

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