

The Steuer and Church Finance

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Meeting church budgets by way of membership levies (Steuer) was common practice among Mennonite churches. At the time of [West Abbotsford's](#) inception In 1936, the levy was set at \$3 per annum; in many cases, newly-arrived settlers were earning \$1 per day. By 1958, that levy had risen to \$50. Holding members accountable was often the unpleasant task of church members elected for the task (In 1951, my father was one of two elected to that task.). Their task, by way of a personal visit, was to determine if good reasons existed for delinquent accounts. Those who failed to fulfill their membership obligation had their names read aloud at the annual meeting.

Transferring to another Mennonite church was not a solution. It was felt at the time that this issue was one factor in driving Mennonites to the Alliance Church. Rev. Froese did his own informal poll and reported that of all the teachers at the local Alliance Church's DVBS program, 60% had Mennonite surnames. Furthermore, he was able to determine that half of them had come from West Abbotsford.

Members who lived away from home (students, voluntary workers) were reminded, by letter, of their financial responsibilities. Rev. Froese wrote, "To me this was always an unpleasant situation when I had to write to these people, a very unpleasant situation." The question of discontinuing the "Steuer" was discussed annually at congregational meetings. Budgets were not



W.A. Church Council, 1955

Peter Krueger, Rev. Heinrich Neudorf, Jacob Wiebe, [Rev. P.J. Froese](#), [Abram A. Olfert](#), Franz Reinke
Rev. [Abram A. Harder](#), Rev. [Heinrich M. Epp](#)

always being met, and in 1958, only 87% was raised. Sunday offerings were designated for the budget and any funds needed for special projects had to be raised through other means.

In 1959, slightly more than 50% of the budget was met through “Steuer”. A motion at the annual meeting to abandon the “Steuer” was defeated by a margin of 90 to 37.

Eventually, some members were exempted from paying “Steuer”, while others had reduced rates. The decision on who qualified fell to the “Gemeinderat” (Church Council). Four categories were identified in 1960:

- Those in, or preparing for, the mission field,
- Those in voluntary service,
- Widows and other destitute individuals, and
- Members living away from home and unable to attend another church because of location.

A further differentiation was made in 1963, based on age; those under the age of 60 were expected to pay \$65, while those over the age of 60, were expected to pay \$30.

The formation of [Eben-Ezer Church](#) in 1963 and the exit of a large contingent of members that joined that church, brought the “Steuer” under scrutiny again. Members leaving were denied certificates for membership transfer until they had fulfilled their financial obligations, resulting in frayed relations between the leadership of each group. In the end, those unpaid dues were recovered by deducting that amount from the funds West Abbotsford had committed to the construction of the new church.

In 1964, after lengthy debates and two votes, the congregation voted to support the discontinuation of the “Steuer” in favour of voluntary giving. This action set a precedent which was followed shortly by many other Mennonite churches.

Voluntary giving worked well that first year and even better the next. The Church began issuing tax-deductible receipts, which encouraged even more giving. Meeting the budget in the immediate years ahead no longer posed a problem.

Source: Living Stones: A History of West Abbotsford Mennonite Church, 1936-1986