

CANADIAN MENNONITE

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Storm clean-up

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EDITORIAL

Practice the peace we proclaim

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

While I appreciate the widespread support for *Canadian Mennonite* when we broke the story in our last edition regarding Canada Revenue Agency reminding us about “political partisanship” cited in two editorials and four articles, I want to clarify and correct some misinformation reported by the public media.

I also want to appeal to our readers to refrain from vitriol and name-calling in their responses, despite their strong feelings and deep suspicions regarding the government’s action.

First, there has been overstatement in the public media about what the CRA did when sending us a registered letter. While our CM story, written by Carl DeGurse, indicated a warning with the implication that certain consequences could follow, it was labelled a “reminder,” or a drawing attention to the letter of the Income Tax law that spells out what is and isn’t permitted regarding political advocacy, particularly what is considered “partisan” speech or activity.

In two follow-up telephone conversations with the audit officer of the CRA, he made it clear that *Canadian Mennonite* is not under review, its charitable status not threatened; this was just a notice of reference to the portion of the law that has been on the books for years. So to see headlines and hear reporting that we are under attack, or threatened, or bullied, is

just not factually correct. The conversation with the CRA audit officer was very professional and reasoned. No one raised his voice or engaged in heated debate.



I did object to the agency seeing this as “partisan,” stating that I was calling our own faith community to consider our deeply and long-held beliefs in non-violence regarding war, injustices regarding the poor, the indigenous and the immigrant and called for closer attention to care of creation, so that my intent was speak to power, regardless of party or candidate. Calling on particular persons within government to pay attention to these issues did not seem to me to be “partisan.”

As a life-time journalist I thought this was within my right, especially as a spokesperson for a particular faith community holding distinctive beliefs. Hence, my comment to him about viewing this as a “chill” on freedom of speech, and by extension of religion. These were my opinions, however, and not meant for pejorative purposes. I felt some obligation to register them, not to use them as one would in a court setting as defence arguments.

It is also misleading to say that *Canadian Mennonite* is the official voice of Mennonite Church Canada. While we have heavy representation on our governing 12-member board from MC Canada, neither they nor we consider

ourselves their mouthpiece. Our board is independent from the denominational structure.

Secondly, I want to make it clear that *Canadian Mennonite* did not seek the public attention to this issue. This story, which went big in the national and local media, was entirely at their initiative, not ours. We felt obligated to share the story with you, our readers, but had no intention of making it a “public square” issue, did not champion its cause or make it our agenda beyond our own readership. I willingly cooperated in interviews with the media for the same reasons stated above—to speak to the facts of the “reminder,” and to give an opinion on the “speech” issue, when asked, but not to market the story or push the cause.

And let us guard our speech when expressing our displeasure with this action. These governing officials are not our enemies. Let us practice the “peace” we proclaim. These persons should be considered our friends, our fellow citizens on a journey in that centuries-old experiment of democracy where all voices need to be heard, but let’s not demonize each other.

These persons to whom we would hold account are often sincere in their beliefs. They have families, likely attend church and worship the same God. In their worldview, they think they are doing the right thing. We can disagree with them without disliking them, keeping the discourse on the idea level.

In this Advent season, we again celebrate the arrival of a small child on the human scene of an equally troubled society in ancient Palestine, where the angels broke into the song of “peace on earth, goodwill to men (all).” Can we rise to the same tune in our own Canadian society this season amidst the political turmoil that marks our age? ☸

ABOUT THE COVER:

Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) volunteers put damaged drywall out for garbage pick up in Staten Island, New York, after Hurricane Sandy. Because of the overloaded infrastructure, there were no overnight volunteers in the early days. See further story on back page.

PHOTO: MDS PHOTO BY PAUL HUNT

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Guiding values:

Hebrews 10:23-25 • Accuracy, fairness, balance • Editorial freedom • Seeking and speaking the truth in love • Open hearts and minds in discerning God's will • Covenantal relationships and mutual accountability

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Online NOW!

at canadianmennonite.org

We've never had so many comments to our online articles. Be sure to check out:

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Advent Reflections

Advent hymns and
texts are disturbing.

ALLAN RUDY-FROESE



“O come, O come Emmanuel,” a stock dirge of Advent, comes from a house of pain that once was, still is, and shall be again. The hymn is haunting. (HWB #172)

Friends grinding grain are ripped apart. One remains and the other is taken. (Matt. 24:36-42)

An expectant teenager sings a song of revolution. The hungry feast in the dining room of a grand house—the owners have fled. (Luke 1:46-55)

When asked a simple question about big stones and a big city, Jesus warns of war, earthquakes, persecution, and suggests running for the hills. (Mark 13:1-27)

John the Baptist screams about an axe, trees and a fire: spiritual deforestation on a grand scale. (Matt. 3:1-12)

With these and other Advent lectionary standards, we are ushered into something quite the opposite of innocent anticipation of what is under the Christmas tree. In Advent I am held in dirges. I picture myself losing a friend in an instant. As one of the rich, I am fleeing my festive dining room while others are enjoying my (former) largesse. I am running for the hills, which are burning.

Even Lent, of which Advent is meant to be a shorter, less penitent version, seems like a piece of cake compared to all of this apocalyptic drama.

In Advent we are forced to stay in that disturbing place of longing, praying, and singing dirges.

Richard Lischer, in an article entitled, “The Limits of Story,” suggests that being disturbed by Advent is a good thing. Lischer is skeptical of our North American Christian middle-class infatuation with stories that end well. He wonders if our appetite for the predicable plot line is yet another way to falsely assure ourselves that all is well. The “closure” we feel at the end of a good story, sermon, or worship service may actually lull us into thinking that all stories end well. We also become blind to the many “unresolved plots” around us.

Are we guilty of too much closure in Biblical storytelling, singing, and preaching? In one hour of worship, problems are solved, plots resolved—and we can go living our lives as if all is well. Abraham and Sarah could not have children, but then she bore a son; the Israelites were stuck in the desert and then eventually they landed in a land of milk and honey; stories that begin with a blind man and a bleeding woman end in healing. The cross of Friday is followed quickly by the Sunday of resurrection.

We love these stories, and so we should. God is active in bringing new life, new land, healing, and loving community. But plot lines are not all the same, good resolutions often bring collateral damage, and God’s good news is not automatic, predictable, or necessarily “nice.” God mercy is bigger than the resolution of the plots we suppose that we are in.

Advent texts force the worshipping congregation to stay in that part of story where the trouble at hand is not yet—and perhaps never will be—resolved. The world over, in our homes, and indeed in many biblical accounts, stories do not end well: The hungry are not fed, young people die, the war goes on, women remain barren, the family dysfunction goes on in perpetuity, and the refugees remain

in the camps. Many plot lines remain unresolved. In Advent we are forced to stay in that disturbing place of longing, praying, and singing dirges.

I welcome Advent with its disturbing hymns and texts. I marvel at those who dare to sing “rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,” in a house of pain. Advent hymns and texts disturb me into believing and hoping in God in the myriads of places

where much remains unresolved.

Allan Rudy-Froese is Assistant Professor of Christian Proclamation at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. His doctorate is in homiletics—the art and theology of preaching. Allan has been planning, preaching, telling stories, and singing in Advent for more than 25 years.

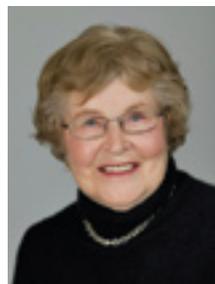
What Advent means to me

ANNE KONRAD

Advent means memories, traditions, plans, lists, emotions and thoughts. In my youth in western Canada, growing up in a Mennonite Brethren (MB) community, Advent was a season. It was not marked by a number of Sundays, but by particular songs sung or lessons read.

The first MB hymnal (in German) the *Gesangbuch*, lists six appropriate Advent hymns. Sylvester (New Year’s Eve) also has six suggestions. Advent hymns might be “*Ich klopfe an* (I knock at the door)” or “*Macht Weit die Pforten der Welt* (Swing wide the gates of the world)” suggesting spiritual preparation for the reception of someone important, a king, but with emphasis on repentance.

The lessons were more intimate, coming from short devotions in a page of the *Christlicher Abreisskalender*, a German daily devotional calendar with tear-off sheets that my father read from his place at the head of the farm kitchen breakfast table. My sister recalls that our mother read us German poems of Advent. An



admirer of Karl Gerok’s *Palmblätter*, our mother could have read *Am heiligen Advent*. I recall that she sometimes had a small pine wreath with a single candle in the middle of the infrequently used dining room table. Also, when plastic wreaths emerged, a red wreath with an electric

fied candle in the living room window.

The joy of Advent was a surprise. An awkward young girl, invited by my uncle and aunt, I was in the Orpheum Theatre in Vancouver and for the first time heard the *Messiah*. Coming from rural Alberta, radio hymns and cowboy tunes, the music and words were a revelation, a glimpse into a new world.

When did we begin opening windows in our Advent calendars? Our children, born in the 1960s think they “always” opened little windows revealing angels, sheep or other Christmas symbols—long before we lived a year in Vienna (where we picked up the tradition of an Easter Egg tree).

For our family, the church emphasis on Advent began in 1969 when we became part of the Toronto United Mennonite

Church (TUMC) and watched in anticipation as some child or family lit the appropriate red candles in the fragrant pine wreath at the front of the church. (My Catholic friends tell me Advent candles should be purple.) At the suggestion of the pastor, Rosemarie Heinrichs had adapted her German tradition of a hanging Advent wreath to TUMC. On a stand that allowed the wreath to be revolved, and suspended by wide red ribbons to shape a tree, this symbol of Advent expressed its message of hope, peace, joy and love.

Advent of course also means work. Joyous occasions require preparations. There are gifts to choose, cookies or cakes to bake in advance (don't forget *Zwiebach*), geese or turkeys to order or groceries to buy, a house to clean, cards to write, invitations to send out or consider. Plans. Visits to relatives and friends or nature. Decisions. In lieu

of another digital toy should you suggest the grandkids buy goats for Africa? What about tickets for "A Christmas Carol"? Amid the busy schedule there are concerts to attend. Grandkids' programs. It seems a miracle that Christmas carols sound fresh each year. Advent brings music, exceptional Christmas music. Is it a wonder I order tickets for the family to hear the *Messiah* at Koerner Hall?

Anne Konrad, a teacher of English and History, lives in Toronto. Her writing includes: The Blue Jar, a collection of short stories, Family Games, a family saga, And in Their Silent Beauty Speak. Her most recent book, Red Quarter Moon: A Search for Family in the Shadow of Stalin, is published by the University of Toronto Press in 2012 and offers a unique look at the lives of ordinary families and individuals from the USSR.

a wooden sled with curved runners like ram's horns, abandoned in the snow outside a lamplit church. I would gaze endlessly on that image, imagining the child who left the sled behind, wondering when he or she would return. That sled and I, it seemed, were both waiting.

Waiting is, of course, an integral part of Advent, but for a child it is also typically the most difficult part. I was never particularly patient and neither, it turns out, are my boys. They wonder why, if the whole world is waiting for one day, we can't just hasten the calendar along. Why light just one candle on the Advent wreath and leave the others untouched? Why do cookies and cakes have to wait for the arrival of guests? Why do gifts have to be wrapped at all and then, to make matters worse, stashed away in closets? Why do we pray for so long before eating our Christmas dinner? And why (this why most of all) must we sleep away the precious hours between Christmas Eve and Morning??...

I suppose it is the certainty of Christmas, its dependable warmth and fulfillment, that make waiting for it so difficult for a child. Yet for a parent this certainty—the assurance that we will be together as a family on Christmas Eve, that we will look back over the past year and see how God has managed all that concerns us, that we are indeed unspeakably loved—this is precisely what makes the waiting precious.

I know that I do not wait in darkness for the coming of the Saviour's light. That light is even now all around me as it is all around you. Christ has already come to set us free and claim us as His own. And so, as we wait in this season of Advent to celebrate the gift of His light and life, that very gift sustains us not with wistful dreams merely, but with the assurance that "He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

Markus Poetzsch lives in Waterloo, Ontario, with his wife, Jeni, and two boys, Samuel and Gabriel. He teaches English Literature at Wilfrid Laurier University and listens to Christmas music long before Advent. October is usually a good time to begin!

A father's perspective on Advent

BY MARKUS POETZSCH

Our childhood returns to us through our children—especially in the season of Advent.

As I witness my sons' delight at the first December snowfall, their eagerness to pry open the windows of the Advent calendar (sometimes all 25 in one day!), their busy hands decorating cookies and gingerbread, their unexpected stillness around a candle, then I am transported back to my own childhood in East Germany and to the wonder of expectation.

Wonder is in many ways easier, perhaps more natural, for a child because so much of its world is shrouded in mystery. The planning and preparations, all the behind-the-scenes work that makes Christmas special, are beyond the child's awareness.

My parents typically decorated the



house after my brothers and I had gone to bed, so that when we awoke the next morning, the familiar spaces of home would be magically transformed. Old wooden angels with wings as fragile as rice paper, ornate candelabras, music boxes, wreaths, lacquered *Räuchermänner* sending plumes of incense into the air, and the tree

of course, festooned with straw stars and tinsel—all these wondrous items, vividly remembered from the previous year, would suddenly reappear and with them the realization that Christmas was indeed coming soon!

My favourite Christmas record proclaimed these tidings in the unerringly sweet voices of the Dresden Children's Choir: "Bald nun ist Weihnachtszeit (Soon now is Christmas time)." The record sleeve featured a photograph of

Coming home

Advent marks a physical and spiritual journey back to my roots

BY EMILY LOEWEN
YOUNG VOICES CO-EDITOR
TORONTO, ONT.

In my first year at Canadian Mennonite University, my first year away from home, I kept a running countdown to the Christmas holidays on the whiteboard stuck to my dorm room door. Only 12 days until I fly home, 19 days until Christmas.

Each day I would update the number with red or green markers, and listen to the CD of Christmas music my sister mailed to me. By December I had been battered by papers, stressed by readings and just begun the slog through final exams. If anyone needs the hope and anticipation of Advent, it is students.

Advent then was a season of great anticipation; it started the gradual process of going home.

It's true that I'm no longer in school, but still a young adult trying to figure out my future. December is still a time of year when I'm feeling most overwhelmed, and Advent calls me home both physically and spiritually. It is a ritual I find comforting and one that I've come to depend on.

I have lived away from my hometown in Fort Langley, B.C. for the last seven years, and every year my parents have flown me back to celebrate Christmas as a family. Once Advent begins I start looking forward to the traditional father-daughter Christmas tree chopping excursion, listening to the Roger Whittaker Christmas album and eating a Christmas meal as a family.

While my family traditions aren't part of the Christian calendar, they are meaningful to me. In a 2009 blog post on Patheos.com (<http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Advent-Intentionality.html>), Emily McGaughy suggested that celebrations outside of church activities, like buying the perfect gift for a friend, are still a part of anticipating and celebrating the

coming of Christ. My Advent traditions may not all take place in church, but they do help me prepare to celebrate Christmas.

Yes, there is also a spiritual side to my homecoming (don't worry, I haven't cast aside the church calendar in favour of Christmas cookies and carols). Each year Advent also calls me into a new and more intentional relationship with the church.

It's not that I don't attend the rest of the year, but as a young person without a car living in the fierce cold of Winnipeg or the metropolis of Toronto, the logistics have never been in my favour. And as the months go on I get busy, either with school, or now with work and the search for more of it.

The start of Advent, however, always wakes me up and reminds me to give my spiritual life some attention too. That is the beauty of any change in season, it forces you to notice the world around

PHOTO BY DOUG HOSTETTER



Emily Loewen

you. Like fall leaves or falling snow, Advent marks the beginning of a new season and reminds me that in my faith I have something great.

Advent calls me back to a refreshed relationship with the church. At the time of year when I am often the most weary, Advent reminds me that renewal is coming in the birth of Christ. It reminds me to wake up and come home. ❧

Emily Loewen is Young Voices Co-Editor for Canadian Mennonite and a freelance writer and editor. She is a member of Langley Mennonite Fellowship in British Columbia.

❧ For discussion

1. What are some of your warm "waiting for Christmas" memories? What is it about Advent and Christmas family traditions that make them so special? Do you have negative memories mixed with the nostalgia? What role does gift-giving play in Christmas nostalgia?
2. Why do we go to so much effort to get families together at Christmastime? What does your family do when families overlap and there are conflicts over dates? Do you sometimes end up rushing from one event to another? How do you deal with that?
3. Allan Rudy-Froese says that he finds some Advent hymns and texts disturbing. Should we find the words of Mary's song comforting or fearful (Luke 1:46-55)? What Advent activities help us to move beyond the warm fuzzy image of the Christmas story?
4. For some people, the emphasis on family at Christmas is depressing. What happens to people in your community without family nearby or who have dysfunctional families? How can we do a better job of reaching out to include others at our family tables?

VIEWPOINTS

/// Readers write

We welcome your comments and publish most letters sent by subscribers intended for publication. This section is largely an open forum for the sharing of views. Letters are the opinion of the writer only—publication does not mean endorsement by the magazine or the church. Keep letters to 400 words or less and address issues rather than individuals. We do not countenance rancour or animosity. Personal attacks are inappropriate and will not see the light of print. Please send letters to be considered for publication to letters@canadianmennonite.org or by postal mail or fax, marked "Attn: Readers Write" (our address is on page 3). Letters should include the author's contact information and mailing address. Letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Preference will be given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

✉ New Mennonite building can provide synergy

RE: MCC'S BIG building rationale not compelling.

After returning from a fundraiser for MCC's relief work in Syria, I read Will Braun's critical article on the new Mennonite building underway in Kitchener (Nov. 12, 2012, page 11). The well-attended event was organized by the local Syrian community and Conrad Grebel students, with support from MCC Ontario. We had a live Skype conversation with a community activist in Homs, Syria, talking of the horrors his family and community are experiencing. I think this was a great example of MCC's ongoing commitment to support the creative engagement that Braun feels will somehow be shortchanged.

I support the idea of having all of our related agencies together in one place, because there is a synergy that can't be achieved working in isolation. MCC came out of that same desire for Mennonites of different stripes to work together, helping our sisters and brothers in Russia. Likewise, as Mennonites we are best when we come together as a community and not label people as creative, affluent or poor. Creativity and deep faith can be found in poor and rich alike. We are all equal before God, and Jesus mingled with people from all walks of life. In fact, his ministry was supported by the generosity of a few wealthy women.

I'm often amazed at the generosity and humility of our people, who through hard work and good fortune may have more financial resources than others. I'm also amazed how MCC Ontario can manage to bring together Mennonites from seven different conferences under one roof. Our theology may divide us, but they

bring us together in a desire to help a hurting world.

I felt privileged when I travelled to Israel/Palestine on an MCC Ontario Learning tour to share that experience with three brothers from the Old Colony Church. I'll always remember one night in Nazareth where our Old Colony brothers sang in German, along with Rick Cober Bauman, as the local Muslim call to prayer drifted through an open window. I think that scene made God smile at our shared humanity. So how can we find ways to come together like that, rather than retreating into our own silos and labels?

Will the new building accomplish things that couldn't have happened in isolation? I think I'll leave that for history to decide, but until then, I trust our leaders in their decision-making process.

LEON KEHL, FLORADALE ONTARIO

✉ Let's not hide sin under new names

I HAVE FOUND recent letters such as "Dismayed with church's LGBT statement" (Sept. 3, page 10) disturbing.

In the days of Jonah, God had compassion on Nineveh, because they didn't know wrong from right. His dealing with Israel was different, because, though they had been taught to know wrong from right, they chose to live as though they didn't, calling "evil good and good evil." (Isaiah 5:20)

When and by whom was temptation changed to orientation? When did living together unmarried become co-habitation (as though they just happen to live in the same apartment, or just happen to use the same bed)? When did the sin of Sodom become a lack of hospitality, or the relationship of Jonathan and David homosexuality? When did yielding to temptation become cause for celebrating?

Isaiah said about the people of Jerusalem, "they parade their sins like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them!" (Isaiah 3:9) Can we expect the Lord to show us the compassion he did to Nineveh?

Paul informed the Ephesians that there ought to be not even a hint of sexual immorality among them. Could that be a message for today as well?

JAKE HEINRICHS, WINNIPEG

✉ Modern warfare connected to powers of evil

CAROL PENNER'S ARTICLE "Peace to our Neighbour Once Removed" (Oct. 29, 2012, page 4) brings home the truth that modern warfare, though it operates with rubber gloves on, is still doing what warfare does—killing people deliberately and with no accountability for the destruction and grief caused. No matter how sanitized the delivery of death, the people surviving

the blow know that the powers of evil delivered it.

How can we, who cohabit with these powers of evil, possibly distance ourselves and effect change? Followers of Jesus must be committed to love ALL God's children. We must scrutinize our lives to see where our complicity with the powers that be contributes to the violation of others' lives and homes. Then, using our God-given creative imagination, we must find ways of withdrawing our support.

MARY GROH, SCARBOROUGH, ONT.

Mary Groh is a board member of Conscience Canada.

✉ **Menno-Scots are a hardy lot**

THANKS TO MENNONITE Church Alberta's "McThiessens" and "McFriesens" for a wonderful photo of their skit, joking their way through what it might mean to be a "Menno-Scot."

As a Swiss Mennonite married to a Scotsman, I feel

that our three children may truly be "Menno-Scots" with patchwork quilts and sandwich tartan blankets on their beds. Shortbread and *Pfeffernisse* overflow our cookie jar. My two daughters Highland dance to church hymns they play on the fiddle. Once my son wore his grandfather's army tartan—the Cameron Highlanders'—to a Sunday School class about peacemaking.

Some compare the hardiness of the Highlanders, to that of the Swiss from the Jura mountains. Others say the faith of the Scots runs deeper than Glasgow's river Clyde, akin to that of the Swiss and their Bernese river Aare. The small differences we do have go unnoticed however, as we are privileged to live in Canada's most multicultural community and worship at a Mennonite Church led by Congalese, Tamil and Chinese pastors (Hagerman Mennonite).

**SUZANNE CONRAD MCWHINNIE,
RICHMOND HILL, ONT.**

FROM OUR LEADERS

'Sir, we would like to see Jesus'

TIM FROESE

The above request came to Philip from "Greeks" who had come to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem.

Whether the question came out of their curiosity about the triumphal entry or the resurrection of Lazarus (John 12:17) is unsure, but this was their request. In many ways, this request is still with us today, whether in the words of those who critique the church, in the unspoken desires of those who live in our communities, or within our own hearts: "We would like to see Jesus."

Jesus' response in John 12:23ff appears at first glance both unrelated and disconnected. What follows is a brief message on glorification, death and multiplication, priorities and servanthood, Jesus' presence with us and a declaration of how God honours persons. The greatest challenge perhaps is to understand that



seeing Jesus requires a profound commitment (including servanthood, self-denial and even death).

In a consumer culture, where our hands instinctively know what to do with remote controls, cell phones, and computer tablets, we expect to be served and we expect to be shown things. For the most part we do not want to put in much effort (i.e. little investment), to relinquish control (i.e. no servanthood), or to suffer (i.e. no death).

Despite our personal preferences and comfort with the convenience of the marketplace, there are some who suggest that we are not in as much control as we think. Jonathan Bonk, Mennonite mission scholar, writing in *Forming Christian Habits in Post-Christendom* (Herald Press, 2011) says that "Christian citizens yield obeisance [i.e. Investment] to the presumably infallible hidden hand of the marketplace—a merciless idol

[i.e. servanthood] that is satisfied with nothing less than the sacrifice of human beings [i.e. death] and even the planet." These stark words echo those of Jesus, except that there is no honour in this arrangement and Jesus is neither served nor is He present.

I am thankful for each of our international ministry workers and our numerous ministry partners who all, in their desire to see Jesus, are willing to be where Jesus is. The desire to see Jesus is not theirs alone, but it is for each of us, and for those around us. To see Jesus we are called to serve and follow Him, to invest our very lives. Not only will we see Jesus, but those around us will as well.

May God bless you as you respond to Jesus' life giving words: "Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me." – John 12:24-26

Tim Froese is Executive Minister of Witness, Mennonite Church Canada.

✉ Support for expressing religious values

I AM SHOCKED, saddened and horrified at the government's attack on your magazine. I'm not a Mennonite, but I believe most Canadians share the values in the editorial written by Dick Benner—"peacemaking, compassion for the poor, and care for creation." It is instructive that the Conservatives find this a partisan statement, and it seems an admission that these are not Conservative values, although they are conserving concepts.

The government's attempt to silence your expression of your core values seems to me to be a Charter issue. My concern is how they found these articles. Are we, the taxpayers, funding what appears to be a paranoid witch-hunt into the farthest corners of journalism? Canada Revenue Agency refers to editorials and articles in four editions of your magazine. It is inconceivable to me that CRA would accidentally stumble upon articles in four editions.

I fully support your right to the expression of your religious values.

PENNY MILLS, NEWMARKET, ONT.

✉ Layton article not 'political advocacy'

RE: "CANADIAN MENNONITE warned of political activities" (Nov. 12, 2012, page 16).

Rachel Bergen wrote a thoughtful and inspiring article, "Jack Layton inspires young people to vote for change" (Sept. 19, 2011, page 34). I was appalled to read that it prompted Paul Fournier of Revenue Canada to remind Canadian Mennonite of income tax regulations that speak to rules around "political advocacy."

I have a Mennonite father and a Jewish mother, both of whom consider Canada the land of their prayers for its freedom of speech. Rachel's article is being treated like a call for violence instead of an appreciation for a politician who stood up for all that is right about our country. Bravo to *Canadian Mennonite* for printing it and shame on Canada Revenue.

MELANIE FRIESEN, VANCOUVER, B.C.

✉ Mennonites do not understand the holiness of God

RE: CANADIAN MENNONITE warning from Canada Revenue Agency (Nov. 12, 2012, page 16).

GOD, MONEY, ME

Who's talking to your kids?

DARREN PRIES-KLASSEN

We are bombarded with thousands of advertising messages every day. As we approach the holidays it seems everywhere we turn we're being targeted. Radio, TV, billboards, newspapers, magazines, pop-up ads all deliver a relentless plea to spend more and more on what are often frivolous items marketed as necessities.



As adults, we hope we have the judgment and the insight to decode these messages and to realize that spending more will not make us happier. Hopefully, we've learned that buying the latest gadget or gizmo doesn't make us any more fulfilled. But we aren't always able to separate the hype from the reality.

The Bible reminds us that we should be content, satisfied with what we have. But

that message is often lost when the slick pitchman tells me how much better my life will be if I purchase his latest doo-hickey. Plus, if I order now, I can get two for the price of one. Surely, that will lead to contentment.

True contentment comes to those who develop a healthy relationship with money and who trust in God's instruction and promise, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" (Hebrews 13:5).

If adults struggle with contentment, how much more difficult is it for our youth? In a culture where you're not really cool unless you have the latest thing, it's hard to say, "No, I'm content with what I have."

Teenagers develop a sense of

contentment early by modeling what they see and by talking about how their faith and values can influence their spending and saving. Now is an excellent opportunity for youth leaders and Sunday school teachers to talk openly about faith and finances, contentment and acquisition.

One resource to help you lead that discussion is *Money Matters for Youth: Integrating faith and finance*, which was originally created by Everence and adapted for Canadian audiences by MFC. It is available free for download at www.mennofoundation.ca/mmfy.

I invite you to download a copy and look it over and start a conversation about contentment today. If we don't talk about money, faith, and values with our children, who will?

Darren Pries-Klassen is the Executive Director of Mennonite Foundation of Canada. For more information on generosity, stewardship education and estate and charitable gift planning, contact your nearest MFC office or visit Mennofoundation.ca.

I was just given notice of the warning you received from Canada Revenue regarding some materials you published in your magazine.

I do not know your background, but my grandparents escaped Russia, fleeing with what they could carry out with them. They left a communist, socialist regime that severely limited their ability to believe what they felt was true.

It concerns me greatly that so many Mennonites today are supporting the same type of government in Canada that our forefathers fled from. Your writings

suggest you are against the Conservatives and would vote for any of the three other parties (Liberal, NDP, Green). The Conservatives are not without their problems, but they are not nearly as socialistically minded as the others. Notice what the McGuinty Liberals have rammed through the legislature in Ontario, what they want to do, and what the NDP stand for. I believe it is shameful to side with such an ungodly government.

It has concerned me for some time to see Mennonites attacking Israel and supporting the

FAMILY TIES

More room for awe and wonder

MELISSA MILLER

“Are you excited about the new IKEA store?” asked the woman I was visiting. Sheepishly I confessed that I was and then added, “Even though there is nothing I need in my house from that store.” Her husband offered that he was looking forward to enjoying some meatballs, and we discussed the food possibilities in some detail.

It's true that IKEA is opening a new store in Winnipeg. My commute from city home to country church takes me right past the new store and I've witnessed each stage of the big blue box arising from the ground. A few weeks ago, workers erected a huge sign that towers over the landscape. I yelped with laughter when I first saw it. The enormous blue and yellow logo appears to be large enough to be seen from outer space, way beyond what's necessary for the generous sightlines of the flat prairie.

IKEA is an attention-grabbing business. At least some of us take notice and get excited, whether it's for the mouthwatering meatballs or the stylish European home furnishings or some other reason. I visited their website (as research for this column) and began drooling even before

I got to the food! Examining my own response, I see I've been (once again) seduced by the lure of materialism. With its glossy artful photos and cleverly marketed products, IKEA tugs at my soul's yearnings for—what? I'm not even sure. Beauty? Home? Comfort? Satiation?

It seems silly to me even as I write these words. For I know I am blessed with a warmly attractive home, more than adequate food and finances, and a wonderful



I see I've been (once again) seduced by the lure of materialism.

web of people-connection. The materialistic gods of our culture seem to possess the power to disrupt our contentment and leave us aching to scratch an itch we didn't know that we had. Or that's the power we give over to them.

This is a season to examine our appetites and assess how we are tending them. It's the season of Advent with Christmas waiting in the shadows of anticipation and mystery. Or that's how it unfolds in the Christian calendar, with a time of preparation and repentance to enable us better to receive and celebrate God's

incarnation as Jesus. In North America, this Christian season can easily be lost in the frenzy to purchase and consume. The gods of commerce and materialism seem to overshadow the One who came in a simple, humble way as a wee baby.

We have to resist the false gods, whether it's a trendy furniture store or the latest technological gadget or an extra plate of meatballs. Our stuff doesn't save us, and it doesn't bring us real life. I think what's real can be found in relationships. Getting our relationships straight—with God, with ourselves, with others (especially those closest to us), with the earth. “Less is more” might be a slogan to guide us. Less pursuit of false gods. Less shopping. Less consuming, frenetic activity. Less expectation of perfect children's programs and perfect choir concerts.

More moments of stillness. More room for awe and wonder. More times on our

knees gazing at a baby in an animal feed trough. More genuine joy. More respect for the earth, and careful, grateful tending of its resources. More giving to those who are truly hungry, cold and homeless. More awareness of the people we love—holding hands, laughing and crying, talking about the important things, maybe even making meatballs together—from scratch.

Melissa Miller (familyties@mts.net) lives in Winnipeg where she works as a pastor and counsellor. Her family ties include that of daughter, sister, wife, mother and friend.

Palestinians who are out to wipe out Israel. I would advise you to read Genesis 12:1-3.

The Mennonites are in grave danger as most have no understanding of the holiness and righteousness of God, let alone His love. I would hope you would read God's Word and see just how far off base you have come.

WALTER BARTEL, GRANDE PRAIRIE, ALTA.
Walter Bartel is pastor of Harvest Baptist Church.

✉ **Emphasis on God's Spirit difficult to maintain in Canada**

ONE OF THE discussion questions following the article, "Ethiopian Church grows in maturity" (Oct. 15, 2012, page 4) asks about the difference between the MKC experience of the Spiritual world and that of our church.

In Canada the emphasis is on individualism, self-sufficiency and independence. Whatever we need we buy, not asking anyone else to be involved. If we have a medical problem we see a doctor, not thinking about

God's role in healing. If Ethiopian church members were asked about this they would say it was the work of the Spirit. When we have wealth, it is harder to depend on God than when everyone lives in poverty.

A brochure for volunteers states, "When the person you are helping has nothing to offer you, you have nothing to offer them." If our help for those in poverty or homeless is only what we can give, our help often disappears.

In Canada there is a class system that measures the amount of wealth we have. This system has a tendency of creeping into our church. When we lived in Pennsylvania in the 1960s, our church was located in a district with lots of poverty. We tried to set up a program to mentor school children, but almost no one came. When we asked why not, the answer was, "Look at all the new cars around the church!"

Our church believes very much in the Spirit's leading, but like the MKC church, we will have to teach and train leaders to keep the faith and find ways to keep the church dependent on God and the Spirit.

RUDY WIENS, CALGARY

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Clemmer—Olivia Jane (b. Nov. 2, 2012), to Jeff and Sarah Clemmer, Tavistock Mennonite, Ont.

Wynette—Nash Walter (b. Nov. 12, 2012), to Julie and Kyle Wynette, Tavistock Mennonite, Ont.

Baptisms

Sara Dick, Noah Goertz—Bethany Mennonite, Virgil, Ont., Oct. 28, 2012.

Marriages

Hiebert/Thiessen—Toni Hiebert and Kayla Thiessen (Steinbach Mennonite, Man.) in Steinbach, Man., July 6, 2012.

Geerlinks/Martin—Megan Geerlinks and Devin Martin (St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont.) at St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont., Nov. 3, 2012.

Deaths

Dyck—Eva (nee Sawatzky) (Wiebe), 96 (d. Sept. 22, 2012), longtime associate with Olivet Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.

Epp—Abram H., 93 (b. Jan. 21, 1919; d. Oct. 2, 2012), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Gerber—Edna (nee Albrecht), 95 (b. Oct. 27, 1917; d. Nov. 3, 2012), Crosshill Mennonite, Ont.

Klassen—Margaret, 87 (b. June 27, 1925; d. Oct. 19, 2012),

First Mennonite, Saskatoon, Sask.

Konrad—Mary (nee Schultz), 93 (b. Jan. 6, 1919; d. Oct. 6, 2012), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Martin—Lovina (nee Shantz), 81 (b. Feb. 10, 1931; d. Oct. 27, 2012), Listowel Mennonite, Ont.

Rostek—Adina (nee Neufeld), 97 (b. Dec. 28, 1914; d. Oct. 25, 2012), First Mennonite, Saskatoon, Sask.

Sawatzky—Katherine (nee Kampen), 85 (b. April 16, 1927; d. Nov. 12, 2012), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Tiessen—Elvira (Vera) (nee Fast), 88 (b. Jan. 29, 1924; d. Nov. 1, 2012), Bethany Mennonite, Virgil, Ont.

Toews—Margaret (nee Mathies), 91 (b. May 1, 1921; d. Sept. 30, 2012), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Wiebe—Sigrid (nee Wagner), 85 (b. April 26, 1927; d. Oct. 17, 2012), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Willems—Howard, 59 (b. Dec. 23, 1952; d. Nov. 8, 2012), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon, Sask.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones

announcements within four months of the event.

Please send Milestones announcements by e-mail to milestones@canadianmennonite.org, including the congregation name and location. When sending death notices, please include birth date and last name at birth if available.

VIEWPOINTS

Beyond politics

BY WILL BRAUN
SENIOR WRITER

I'm a sucker for politics. I read the papers, stay up late on election nights and get far too emotionally involved. But at the same time, I maintain a fundamental suspicion of partisan politics. While I know and respect people in the political sphere, I will never buy a party membership, go door-to-door with pamphlets, or bang a sign into my front lawn. I care about the path society takes but I choose to care in other ways.

So while I could criticize Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) vehemently and from various angles for "reminding" the publishers of this magazine not to be partisan, I have to admit that there is a part of me that cringes whenever I read references to specific parties in *Canadian Mennonite*, even if I agree with the viewpoint offered.

Though I have mentioned three cabinet ministers myself in articles written in the last two years—all Conservative and all in articles they would have rather not seen published—I feel more comfortable avoiding partisan politics altogether. (Incidentally, none of my articles were among the six fingered by CRA as overly partisan.)

While I often write about matters that

many would consider "political," I try to focus on issues more than parties. Ideally, I try to do more than just advance one side of an argument. I try to delve deeper, to present nuances. Admittedly that involves a good deal of grey area as well as some lapses (and/or advised exceptions).

Enough other commentators in society focus on politics. The discussion they carry out is important, but it is also predictable and seldom creative in a deeper sense. I think church writers should strive for a truly distinctive voice on public policy issues, rather than adding to the political banter (though at times they will have to report on government actions that have implications for the church).

The challenge is to rise above partisan politics, to operate in a different sphere, to engage "political" issues in an altogether different way. This could involve looking seriously at the elements of truth on various sides, modelling a non-polarized posture. It could involve considering the spiritual dimensions underlying political issues, such as the fear that seems to drive so much immigration and justice policy, and the self-interest behind so much economic and environmental policy.

It should not, in my view, involve

anything that partakes in what John Howard Coder called the "grasping for levers of control." As Christians, our role is not to get sucked into power games and simple dichotomies. An article shouldn't feel like a pitch for a particular side.

Following the election of George W. Bush in 2000, I heard an interview with Noam Chomsky, the prominent leftist scholar and writer in the U.S. At a moment when Chomsky's side was beaten and enraged, he was eminently calm. This shocked me. Knowing well the consequences of the election outcome, his message seemed to be that life will continue. Just keep on living.

Since then, at times when I felt my partisan impulses fire—such as when I heard about the CRA reminder—I have recalled his equanimity. It is important to think incisively about what the CRA action means, but it is equally important to take a step back. Not to be drawn in. To remember that when the authorities confronted Jesus, his ultimate response was not to fight back, but to humbly trust in something of an entirely different and unthinkable paradoxical realm.

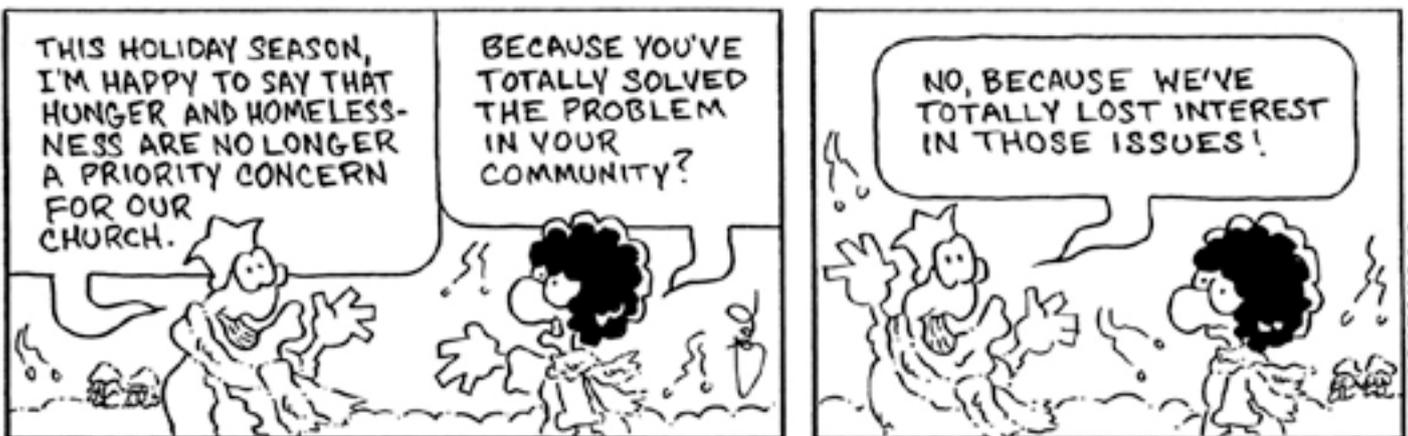
(For the benefit of both Mennonite and CRA readers, perhaps I should clarify that I am not equating the "reminder" letter to crucifixion nor CRA to crucifiers, I'm just drawing a general parallel about how to respond to opposition.)

None of us should be in any way intimidated (or flattered) by the CRA action.

As the great mystic Julian of Norwich said, "All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well, and we shall see it." ❧



Pontius' Puddle



LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Do you see what I see?

TROY WATSON

It was a week before Christmas and a half-hour past bedtime when my five-year-old son Elias asked me, “Is Santa real Daddy?” We had already been through this the previous year, but apparently he had new “intel.”

“My teacher told me Santa is real,” he continued. “Not pretend real, but really real! So is he? Seriously, I want to know.”

I saw shimmering in my son’s bright blue eyes both the desire to believe yet also to know the truth no matter the cost. I tried an evasive tactic telling him it was fun to believe in Santa Claus but he would have none of it. “Knowing the truth changes things,” I warned him. “Do you want to change Christmas?” He insisted.

I guess the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. Like my son, I have always needed to know the truth or in more appropriate postmodern language, to know with expanding perspective and greater understanding. I recall my own questions that changed Christmas for me years ago. These were not questions about Santa but about the birth of Jesus.

I can’t say I ever remember believing Jesus was actually born on Dec. 25, but it wasn’t till my mid 20s that I began wondering why we celebrate Jesus’ birthday on this date. We do not know when Jesus was born. Some Biblical scholars speculate it was likely mid- to late September, but this is only an educated guess.

Historical records indicate most Christians may not have celebrated the birth of Jesus at all before the third or fourth century and it was around 324 CE when the church began celebrating the birth of Jesus on Dec. 25.

Why did they choose this date in



particular? It seems during the 300 years between Jesus’ resurrection and Christianity becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Christian church began adopting or was influenced by certain pagan practices, rituals, beliefs and observances.

In the Roman Empire, Dec. 25 was the day worshippers of Sol and

Mithras celebrated the sun god’s birthday. Dec. 25 was known as *Natalis Solis Invicti* or the “birth of the unconquered sun.” Dec. 25 was also the winter solstice according to the Julian calendar, the

day the sun starts pushing back against the threatening darkness. (It is Dec. 21 according to the Gregorian calendar we use.) Dec. 25 was also the last day of the Roman winter festival *Saturnalia* a time of general merry-making and gift-giving.

When we look into history we find many of our Christmas traditions have pagan origins; from Christmas trees and gift-giving to Yule logs, holly berries and mistletoe. This goes for Easter as well.

There are a number of other similarities between Mithras and Jesus in addition to the many curious parallels between Christianity and Mithraism. One noteworthy commonality is our day of worship. Mithraists worshipped on Sun-Day as Mithras was a solar deity. At some point the early church stopped observing the Sabbath and began worshipping on Sun-Day, sharing the same “day of our

Lord” as the Mithraists.

Saint Jerome commented on this controversy in the fifth century: “If it is called the day of the sun by the pagans, we willingly accept this name, for on this day the Light of the world arose, on this day the Sun of Justice shone forth.”

When I first discovered these pagan origins and influences it shook my faith a little. Now I see this assimilation as evidence of the incarnational approach of the early church. Incarnation means “embodied in flesh.” When the early church saw God’s story of love embodied in other cultures, religions, rituals and practices, they saw Christ already present and celebrated it. This is what the apostle Paul did in Acts 17 when he saw an altar to the unknown God in Athens and celebrated it as an altar to Christ.

I have started practicing an incarnational approach to the world around me. Whenever I see or hear something that reflects God’s story, I see Christ and God’s love embodied in the “flesh” of that

When we look into history we find many of our Christmas traditions have pagan origins; from Christmas trees and gift-giving to Yule logs, holly berries and mistletoe.

culture, religion, practice or person.

I am surprised at how often I see Christ these days in “unchristian” people and places. I am starting to see what Paul meant when he said “Christ is all and in all.” Jesus said even the stones, the physical universe, will “cry out” and reveal the truth of Immanuel (God with us).

Truly the story of God’s love is woven into the very fabric of the universe if we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Troy is pastor of Quest Christian Community in St. Catharines. His series on “The role of Scripture in the postmodern life” will continue in the new year.

KETTLE WISDOM

'Jesus, can you spare a dime?'

BY ROSS W. MUIR
MANAGING EDITOR

For the better part of the last decade or so my service ministry has involved manning a Salvation Army kettle in three Ontario communities.

My father introduced me to this Christmas tradition. Dad always seemed to have spare change for every kettle we came across and would lift me up so I could put the money in the kettle. When I was older and sold Christmas trees from our front yard, Dad strongly suggested that I should tithe a portion into a kettle.

We didn't attend the local Salvation Army citadel, so in retrospect it seems strange that he never pressed me to put money in our Baptist church offering plate. Then again, he went through the Great Depression alone as a young man, so it wouldn't be surprising if he came across an Army soup kitchen in his time of need. It was when my wife, young son and I moved back to central Ontario in 1999, that the idea of actually manning a kettle myself took root. Seeing a kettle in front of the same store I had put money into more than 30 years before got me to thinking that I should give this a try.

When I offered, I expected to be told that the spots were filled, but they'd take my name for next year. Actually, I was hoping that would be the case because, with seminary assignments and exams coming up, I had my hands full. But before the day was over I was collecting money for the Salvation Army outside an urban mall in Barrie, Ont.

Besides collecting the coins and bills I watch the shoppers around me. Here's what I've found:

- When people approach you with a hand in their pocket, don't expect a wallet to emerge. These days, it's just as likely to be a cell phone.
- As I've grown older, not even my calf-

length "McMenno tartan" wool coat can keep me warm while standing outside for three hours. Thank goodness the Salvation Army now lets "older" volunteers choose our spots to serve.

- At the Wal-Mart on the northern outskirts of Waterloo, Ont., where I now live, I see conservative Mennonites, their forms of dress giving them away. While the girls seem happy to fill their bags with trinkets and sweets, the boys, like boys throughout history, don't seem all that enamoured to be stuck inside a store on a Friday evening.
- As a whole, shoppers at the liquor store seem to be the happiest going about their business. They are also the most likely to strike up a conversation and tend to be some of the biggest givers.
- Kids who show an interest in the kettle are a big help to the cause. Parents will often give their children some money and send—or carry—them over to make a donation. This gives me hope that the art of generosity lives on.

A couple of incidents in and around the downtown Waterloo liquor store got me thinking about philanthropy. One night, two years ago, I was walking to my first shift. It was dark and I was late, so I hurried past a man squatting up against a building with his cap held out.

I thought no more about him, but it wasn't long before people entering the store, some of whom put money into my kettle, told me I had competition outside. I guess they told the liquor store staff, too, because they went outside to tell him to leave numerous times before he actually did.

Part of me felt guilty that my presence was probably cutting in on his action. Why would a store bar him, but allow a charity to solicit donations, some of



'Jesus, can you spare a dime?'
digital artwork by
Ross W. Muir, 2008.

which might very well go to him?

The second incident happened just before my shift was ending. It is why I will keep manning a Christmas kettle for as long as I am able. A second homeless man entered the store's foyer, where my kettle was set up, because he told me. This one made the first man seem positively well dressed. His left hand was in one of those fingerless gloves; the other hand was formed into a fist. For a second, I checked my escape options, all of which involved going through plate glass.

Then he opened his hand and his palm was full of coins. As he started picking them up one at a time and depositing them carefully into the kettle, he said, beaming, "This is for you. I collected them tonight."

"You see," he continued as he looked directly into my face, "you helped me out. See these boots?" He raised one of them as high as he could, and they looked like a sturdy pair of work boots. "I got them from you. I live in a shelter in the winter, and I had two pairs stolen while I slept. But you gave me these and they're the best boots I've ever had."

Now the tables were turned and I felt like a beggar grasping for the right words to say. I hope my thanks on behalf of the Salvation Army didn't sound as hollow to his ears as it did to mine.

But his example stuck. As my wife Diane and I did our marketing the next morning, we made our annual kettle contribution. But I also dug out some spare change for the first guy who asked. ❧

GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

BEING A FAITHFUL CHURCH PROCESS

The paths and ditches of Biblical interpretation

At the July 2012 Mennonite Church Canada Assembly, delegates approved Being a Faithful Church 4 for study. These articles are to stimulate further thought and discussion. For more information, visit www.mennonitechurch.ca and follow the “Being a Faithful Church” links.

Path # 7 Holy Spirit and interpretive community

BY ROBERT J. SUDERMAN

Being a Faithful Church Task Force member

“It is the Holy Spirit who guides the interpretive community in faithfulness, and in faithfully understanding Scripture for our lives. This means that we must continually open our hearts and minds to the work of the Spirit within and among us. Without this, the text is just black marks on the paper.”

I’m glad the congregational responses to our invitation for feedback on the BFC process identified the work of the Spirit in the hermeneutic community as an important key to using the Bible well.

As General Secretary of Mennonite Church Canada in 2006, I led the God’s People Now tour during which I personally visited virtually every one of the 225 congregations across Mennonite Church Canada. One congregation pushed the question of where “hermeneutical authority” lies in MC Canada. This congregation had recently revamped its leadership structure so that the pastor was the authority for biblical interpretation in the community, and the role of the community was to obey the discernment of the pastor. I responded by saying that our understanding is that there are three essential ingredients to interpretive authority:

- Scripture is open before us;
- A reading and interpreting community gathered around open Scripture with the



gifts that the Spirit has given it;

- The Holy Spirit guiding our discernment.

This response generated much dis-ease in that congregation. They responded by saying that if interpretive authority cannot be focused in one person, effectively it means that “there is no authority at all.”

Path #7 reiterates an understanding of the authority of the Spirit-guided community in scriptural discernment. The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* underlines this perspective. It states: “The Bible is the essential book of the church. Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit nurtures the obedience of faith to Jesus Christ and guides the church in shaping its teaching, witnessing, and worship. . . . We participate in the church’s task of interpreting the Bible and of discerning what God is saying in our time by examining all things in the light of Scripture. Insights and understandings which we bring to the interpretation of the Scripture are to be tested in the faith community.”

While some Christian groups may prefer to give more authority either to a Pope, a Presbytery, the Clergy, a Learned Seminary, or the Elders, this path suggests

that we need to look to the discerning wisdom of the gathered community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Path # 11: Interpretive community is cross-cultural

BY LAURA LOEWEN

Being a Faithful Church Task Force member

“We need to see our interpretive community as larger than the people we can see around us. The hiking trail we are on has already been forged by many who have gone before us. They have left markers on the trail to help those who come after . . . [T]he interpretive community extends geographically beyond those in our hiking group; it is not restricted to our hiking group; it is not restricted to our choice of time and schedule; and it is not constrained by our particular agenda. We must affirm the critical importance of those on the trail with us at this time, those who have gone before, and those who are hiking at the same time, but on trails that may be geographically and culturally distant from us.”

This path teaches us that there are others on our hike who interpret Scripture very differently from how we might.

One of the most passionate cross-cultural debates in our Scriptures is found in Acts 15. For a people who had been commanded that male circumcision was a non-negotiable sign of one’s commitment and obedience to God (Gen. 17:10, Exodus 12: 43f; Joshua 5;), and who had obeyed that commandment for centuries, it was unthinkable that the law of Moses could be broken. Salvation came through obedience to the law (Acts 15:1). After considerable debate among the apostles and elders, Peter acknowledged to those gathered that God’s Spirit was at work in the lives of the new folks on the hiking trail, the gentiles, and that circumcision was not central to salvation. God’s act of salvation was an act of grace, and it extended beyond the Jewish race.

The example of slavery is an illustration of a discussion that took centuries to bring us to where we are today in our interpretation. We have abolished slavery, and in those instances where child slavery or the enslavement of women for the benefit of the sex trade takes

place, we believe that a terrible wrong has occurred. In our scriptures, slaves are told to obey their masters with enthusiasm as though obeying Christ (Eph. 6:5-9, Col. 3:22-25, Titus 2:9-10, 1 Peter 2:18 – 19).

There are other Biblical texts that support the practice of slavery. And yet, there are also texts which suggest that as followers of Jesus, slaves were to be treated more as brothers and sisters than as property one owned (Philemon 1:8f). In the letter to the Galatians, Paul writes that all believers are children of God. There is no differentiation

between Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free (Gal. 3:25-29). While Paul's context can be seen as maintaining the status quo regarding slavery, we also note that a shift in the relationship between owner and slave is beginning to emerge. As Anabaptists, the life and teachings of Jesus are central in our discernment and therefore the commandment "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you . . ." (Matt. 7:12) already suggests a world view where there is no master/slave relationship. ☸

Jubilee is the standard for both business and pastors

BY DICK BENNER,

Editor/publisher

NIAGARA FALLS, ONT.

Proclaiming Jubilee is the mission and vision of both the congregation and Mennonite-owned business, David Miller told a workshop of business leaders and pastors when Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) met here for their annual meeting focused on "Business as a Calling."

While both parties can ascribe to the vision outlined for the children of Israel by Moses in a very agrarian society—the command to return ownership of land and the forgiving of debts—applying it to a developed economy in a technological age can be complex and daunting, requiring new imagination, Miller, associate professor of Missional Leadership Development at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, acknowledged.

The relationship between pastors and business leaders can be tense, at times, because the pastor, in the business of doing spiritual formation, can reflect on the seductive nature of wealth and call into question the priorities and ethics of business practices while congregants in business often feel misunderstood, judged and not listened to as valid members of the community of faith.

The two groups sat around tables together, hearing the struggles both have in working

at this tension, pastors often confessing they have said things they later regretted and business persons calling for a new level of understanding when they, too, face serious issues coming from a downturned economy—the ethics of what to do about smoking in the workplace, whether or not to be open on Sundays, even facing bankruptcy.

In a session of caucusing with their own kind, pastors and business persons shared common affirmations, specific struggles and what they would long for in this sometimes tenuous relationship. "I would want pastors to understand my business, first and foremost," said Jim Erb, co-owner of Erb's Funeral Home in Kitchener, but in his 47 years in the business, spawning several pastors, he always "felt cared for."

"To what extent can I share the details of my business," another asked of his peers in the business caucus. And "how much do I share with the congregation about my business," asked another, wondering how it can be shared?

In the "what do I long for" segment, one person called for more support of "my calling into business, more acceptance of my purpose." Another called for better listening on the part of pastors, more empathy, and making conversation with businesses a part of the church's agenda.

In his opening remarks, Miller asked the question of both groups: "pastors, how many businesses in your congregations have you visited" and conversely: "business leaders: how many of you have invited your pastor to visit your business?"

Part of the dilemma, said Myrna Miller Dyck, pastor at Steinman Mennonite Church, is the difficulty we have talking about money. This is especially hard, she said with the Mennonite emphasis on simplicity—how much money is enough, what to do with our wealth in regards to sharing it with those less fortunate. "Let's face it," she said, "we are all in the one percent when it comes to having enough money and resources, so how do we talk about this issue as one body in Christ?"

Miller called for a new look at both Jubilee and what Moses called the essence of the law in Deut. 10:17-19 in that the people of God are called to look after the widow, the orphan and the stranger. He said this calls for a greater imagination and a calculating of our resources as not only capital in terms of money and assets, but also "people capital"—the combined resources of education, skills and the network of relationships.

He also called for the church to "break the cycles" of poverty by combining the counseling skills of pastors and the organizational skills of business persons to address an increasingly prevailing problem in our neighborhoods. "We need to stop these easy divides that have come to characterize the conversations between people of wealth and those of lesser means and start imagining what we can do together to address the problems of the widow, the orphan and the stranger."

He reminded the groups that as Christians we are a people of "remembering"—remembering that Jubilee is our vision and standard of conduct, outlined by the prophets, then picked up by Jesus and carried on by the Holy Spirit—a biblical standard and solution to the many economic and political problems of our time.

One of the outcomes of the workshop was the suggestion to take a new look at church budgets and see not only financial resources, but people resources that can be turned loose on services and aid that target specifically the needs of low-income, underprivileged persons in our communities. ☸

Snow, warning letter and study enthusiasm

Interest high at MC Canada Fall Leadership Assembly

By DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alta. Correspondent
EDMONTON, ALTA.

A blast of winter welcomed Mennonite Church Canada leaders to Edmonton's First Mennonite Church for the annual fall leadership assembly Nov. 7-10. Most travellers managed to be on time, and laughter about inadequate footwear, lack of coats, and snow-covered signs was common fodder at coffee break.

Fall leadership assembly brings together MC Canada staff and general board, area church moderators and ministers, as well as the three councils—engagement, formation, and witness—to discuss issues and do the work of the national church between assemblies. Since moving to a biennial schedule, 2014 will be the first summer in with no assembly. Communicating with the delegate body is a priority for the General Board, and annual area church assemblies and the updated MC Canada website were noted as important places for this to occur.

Friday morning sessions included enthusiastic endorsements of the July 2012 assembly held in Vancouver. The assembly, which limited business sessions and focused on Bible study, was well received. Chief Administrative Officer, Vic Thiessen, said he was; “excited about the young adult engagement at the 2012 assembly.” Approximately 40 young adults took part in the study assembly and Thiessen felt their responses were highly positive. The success of the study conference spurred the Faith and Life committee to propose significant times of study for Winnipeg in 2014. The General Board affirmed keeping business sessions brief and scheduling study for a weekend to encourage attendance. A theme of healing, arising from a prayer project using Matthew 8-10 was also affirmed by the board.

Canadian Mennonite's warning from the

Canadian Revenue Agency, reported by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation that morning, raised issues of free speech as well as the magazine's relationship to MC Canada. Rudy Dirks, chair of Witness, said: “*Canadian Mennonite* is not the same as MC Canada; at a meeting last year we expressed concern about CM not speaking for us. Whereas this is an interesting article, it's not reflecting on MC Canada. Question of CM whether it crossed the line isn't [the general board's].” The board agreed to send a letter to the CM board of directors, asking for clarification of the issue.

The “Being a Faithful Church” process, intended to build capacity for discernment on all issues facing the church, is ready for another round of hearing from congregations. This is the next feedback tool plan

for the next phase, moving into the part of the exercise to address sexuality issues. Feedback from congregations is crucial in determining what will be discussed. The board acknowledges that, although much good work has occurred, there are still misconceptions around what the BFC process is. Rudy Baergen, chair of the Faith and Life committee commented; “[I am] concerned if congregations jump into the process when we talk about issues without doing the study first.” Currently, *Canadian Mennonite* is publishing a series of articles to help churches understand the process.

MC Canada expects a balanced budget this year, however, the news is mixed because balance is achieved through the under-expensing of programs, notably Witness. Randy Wiebe, Chief Financial Officer, reported that while congregational giving is on track, donations from corporations and individuals is down, resulting in a shortfall of approximately \$98,000 at the end of October. “We've been talking about this trend since summer assembly; it's the trend that's worrying us at this point in time.” Wiebe said.

Executive Director, Willard Metzger, takes the trend seriously and says that we, “can't sustain our status quo in the next years.” The board gave consensus to a task



Cheryl Pauls (right), president of Canadian Mennonite University and Terry Schellenberg, vice-president external, were among those who attended the Mennonite Church Canada leadership assembly in Edmonton where winter came early. They also met with pastors, parents and students in Edmonton and Calgary during their trip.

force proposal to look at the MC Canada system to consider adjusting it to fit current realities and fulfill its mission. Naming what the national church does that congregations cannot do is a key part of the task. Vince Friesen, chair of Engagement, cautioned against negativity saying, “[we] are not just dealing with a downward spiral, but the excitement and hope to make a healthier system.” General Board vice-chair, Aldred Neufeldt added, “it’s a good time to do this thinking when there isn’t an immediate need to respond to financial crisis.”

A proposal to suspend the July 2012 decision to adjust the fiscal year end was affirmed by the general board. The adjustment, meant to enable better planning by situating the four months of greatest giving at the beginning of the year, has proven immensely difficult to implement because of a deficit that would result in a short fiscal year. MC Canada staff will continue to work with the situation. If needed the decision may be brought back before the delegate assembly in 2014 for reconsideration. ❧

Ukraine oak ‘grandchild’ planted at M.E.I.

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

The Chortitza oak, a large tree that has stood in Ukraine for over 700 years, continues living on in a new generation on the campus of Mennonite Educational Institute (M.E.I.) in Abbotsford, thanks to a gift from Art and Marlyce Friesen.

In a ceremony on Nov. 6, a sapling grown from the famous oak was dedicated on the grounds of the M.E.I. Secondary School. The Friesens had purchased a shoot from the oak several years ago at a Mennonite Central Committee auction. They decided it would be appropriate to plant it at M.E.I., with many students there having ancestors who would have gathered under the original oak in Ukraine.

The immense tree has been a landmark in Chortitza for hundreds of years and was thought to be sacred to Zaporozhian Cossacks. Mennonites who settled in the area beginning in the 1790s were among those who met there, watched children play under its branches and celebrated weddings in its shade.

In recent years the tree has nearly completely died; only one branch continues to produce leaves. Acorns from the tree were brought back to Canada by visitors to the area and several other descendants of the oak are growing in B.C.’s Fraser Valley.

M.E.I. superintendent Ernie Janzen is

thrilled to have the “grandchild” oak as a living legacy on the school grounds, symbolizing hope for the future through M.E.I.’s students. “I can see a day, 30 years from now, when students will be reclining in the shade of this tree,” he commented. “It has potential to be a landmark here.”

The Friesens have a long association with MCC and Ukraine. They helped found and are on the board of the Mennonite Centre

❧ Briefly noted

World Fellowship Sunday resources available

Each year Mennonite World Conference (MWC) encourages Anabaptist-related churches to worship around a common theme, on a Sunday close to Jan. 21. On that day in 1525, the first Anabaptist baptism took place in Zurich, Switzerland. World Fellowship Sunday provides an opportunity to remember common roots and celebrate worldwide community. The 2013 worship materials including biblical texts, prayers, song suggestions and sermon ideas were put together by members of Colombia’s three MWC member churches. The material is available on the MWC website, in English, French and Spanish: www.mwc-cmm.org.

—Mennonite World Conference

of Ukraine, a former Mennonite girls’ school in Moloschansk that today provides spiritual, medical and physical aid to disadvantaged people living in the area.

Dr. Art Friesen hopes that the tree will help connect the past in Ukraine and the future in Canada. “We trust and pray it will help us remember a bit of our history,” he said. ❧



With the oak sapling in the background, Art Friesen addresses the group gathered to recognize the gift of the tree grown from the famous Chortitza oak to M.E.I.

MC Manitoba fall delegate meeting

To close or not to close Camp Moose Lake?

STORY AND PHOTOS BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

Manitoba Correspondent

WINNIPEG

Delegates attending the fall Mennonite Church Manitoba delegate meeting on Nov. 1 faced a difficult decision. Although the final vote on a proposal for camping ministry showed delegates were divided down the middle, there was a spirit of good will. As one delegate said, “The goal we all have is that at the end of the day we will still have a MC Manitoba.”

The Board brought to the delegates a proposal for a sustainable camping ministry that included shutting down operations at Camp Moose Lake after the summer of 2013 and moving Camps with Meaning offices from 600 Shaftesbury to Camp Assiniboia. The proposal also included a vision for year-round programming, leadership development, and hiring a full-time camp director by the end of 2012.

The proposal was presented to the churches well in advance of the meeting. “Around 2008 the board engaged in a planning process with camping ministry and came up with an ambitious plan to address issues, but the board at that time could

not achieve consensus that the resources would be there to do that plan,” explained Hans Werner, MC Manitoba board chair, as he outlined the history of this proposal. “In that process we gathered considerable information about how other camps functioned. The next phase explored a model of an autonomous kind of structure. In 2009 we brought this question to area meetings and dialogued with congregations. The board’s reading was that that was not the wish of the community. Congregations wanted to retain ownership of the camping ministry . . . We then engaged the Camp Planning Committee with the task of how to create a sustainable camping ministry. They explored a number of alternatives and out of that came the proposal we have been discussing for some months.”

In March 2012, all the churches received a copy of the proposal with supporting documents. The board followed that up with five regional meetings throughout the province to listen and to share information. Most recently the board sent letters encouraging

churches to discuss this as congregations and send feedback to MC Manitoba.

“It has not been an easy process for your board. We operate on a consensus model. We keep talking until we reach consensus,” said Werner. “The staff has put in a huge volume of hours. We recognize that some of the things have not been helpful. Some of the material sent out and the language used has not been helpful. We want to apologize. We were reluctant to go to a vote but we will vote today. We are going to yield to your wishes and we do so willingly. Our only motive is to put camping ministry on a sustainable basis.”

Nearly 150 delegates representing 33 churches attended and more young people than usual were in attendance. They expressed their deep-felt commitment to and concern for camping ministry. The board was affirmed for its hard work. One delegate said, “I want to applaud you for the process. I know that in our by-laws you could have taken a shorter route.”

Many of the respondents expressed a concern that 2013 was too fast, too soon to make the irreversible decision to close a camp. An amendment to remove the closing of Moose Lake from the proposal and to continue operating the camp until at least 2015 was narrowly defeated. Some delegates voiced concern that over the last few years the lack of a full-time camp ministries director and regional committees has led to this situation.

Werner explained, “When the camping



Hans Werner (right) outgoing chair of the MC Manitoba board presents Peter Rempel with a Bible and welcomes him as the new chair.



The MC Manitoba board stands behind a quilted table runner created by Val Pankratz and commissioned by MC Manitoba. Board members (left to right) standing: Erin Morash, Dave Regehr, Ken Warkentin, Dave Wiebe, Dan Horne, Hans Werner, Karen Schellenberg (seated) Virginia Gerbrandt, Donna Peters-Small.

ministry was started we were in the midst of a baby boom. That's not the case any more. Our numbers are way down. When all those campers turned 20 many of them became marvelous camp workers. They also are not there any more. Even the post-baby boom echo children are gone. We have a lot less human resources to work with. The congregations we have polled do not give us a lot of hope that this is going to change."

"Give us more time," was the call from many delegates. "Perhaps we can get people to see the vision of supporting our own camps," said a delegate. "Then the next time round we will have a better picture of implications."

Ken Warkentin, executive director of MC Manitoba, said, "It has been suggested that we try harder to get more camp staff. We have tried hard and we will continue to try hard and it has been very difficult.

We cannot continue to run a camp with as few staff as we did this summer. It is just not safe. We will run a safe and fiscally responsible camp."

In a final ballot vote the proposal was defeated by 6 votes.

In other business, delegates approved a 2013 budget of \$635,000, a decrease of \$35,000 from last year. "We are aware that a couple of our congregations are reducing their conference contributions to the tune of at least \$30,000 due to financial crunches in their own congregations," reported Tom Seals, treasurer of Mennonite Church Manitoba. To date, 70.9 percent of the 2012 budget has been received. "We still need about \$195,000 before the end of the year," said Seals.

Hans Werner has been chair of the MC Manitoba board for more than 6 years. Although his term ended last February, he agreed to continue until a replacement

could be found. "He has served incredibly well," said Warkentin. At this meeting, delegates endorsed the nomination of Peter Rempel as chair. Rempel is a member of Charleswood Mennonite Church and recently retired as executive director of Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba. He has been elected to a three-year term.

Comments made by the new Winnipeg Police Chief Devon Clunis in an interview with *Christian Week* have dominated the media in recent weeks. Clunis encouraged Winnipeggers to pray for crime reduction in the city and was publicly criticized. Delegates passed a motion that offers support for Clunis's words. The motion also states "that MC Manitoba staff and board write a letter to our churches with a copy to the police chief spelling out our views as a peace church and our common commitment to justice and reconciliation even in the face of hostility." ❧

Women of MCEC celebrate women

STORY AND PHOTO BY VIC ENNS

The fall gathering of Women of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (WMCEC) held at Vineland United Mennonite Church on Oct. 13 celebrated the achievements of five women.

Irma Kaethler from St. Catharines United Mennonite Church, soon to be 90, has influenced many people in her life. She participated in various ladies groups for 65 years, sang in church choirs for 60 years and supported the Canadian Bible Society for more than 38 years. She also volunteered at the Christian Benefit Shop for 14 years, served as a deacon with her husband Cornie and taught Sunday School. These days Irma can be seen at church helping to make quilts every Tuesday morning.

Lorna Rogalski of the Vineland United Mennonite Church has been active in Sunday School, small groups, deacons, youth sponsor etc. If the lights were on in the church kitchen, it was likely to be Lorna working there. Twice she served as church coordinator when VUMC was without a

pastor. She served on the MCEC Missions Committee as well as Women of MCEC and Canadian Women in Mission (including a term a president). Lorna spent 17 years working for the International Child Care Canadian office and had many opportunities to visit Haiti with that organization.

After a 26-year career with a local Credit Union, Sandy Rempel of Vineland United Mennonite Church returned to volunteering, first at the Christian Benefit Shop, then at Vineland United Mennonite Home. In 2008, Sandy embarked on volunteering for Habitat for Humanity and was soon chairing committees to select and support families. In 2010 Sandy became a permanent member of the Habitat team.

Ellery Penner, from the Niagara United Mennonite Church, at age 22 has spent half her life in service to God's work. At age 11 she began volunteering at Red Roof Retreat, a summer camp for children with special needs, and continued through her high school years. In 2011, Ellery served



The WMCEC fall meeting, planned by (standing from left) Linda Wiens and Dorothy Hamm, recognized the contributions of (seated from left) Irma Kaethler, Lorna Rogalski, Sandy Rempel and Ellery Penner

for a year in MCC's Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program in Indonesia where she hosted a Christian radio program and taught kindergarten.

The afternoon also included guest speaker Laura Mullet Koop from Quest Christian Community in St. Catharines who explored the image of treasure in clay jars, reminding the women that the presence of God is the treasure they carry within them. ❧

Equipping day with MC Sask

Finding a faithful future

BY KARIN FEHDERAU

Saskatchewan Correspondent

SASKATOON, SASK

Equipping Day, an annual MC Sask event for pastors and church leaders, was held at Wildwood Mennonite Church in Saskatoon on Oct. 27.

Three main areas of interest emerged in the workshops. As Saskatchewan Mennonites continue to grapple with all the things they heard at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission this past June, they need guidance to process the stories they've heard. Both MCC Saskatchewan and MC Sask encouraged attendance at the sessions and many people from various churches turned out to listen and learn.

To facilitate more learning, two workshops brought people together to think and share about what they heard. Harley Eagle helped participants to envision a new future and what Mennonites might be doing on this new journey.

One workshop used a talking circle. As people reflected on their TRC experience, there was some bewilderment and tears. Many admitted that, although growing up in treaty territory, they had no idea of how the Indians had been treated.

"When young, we didn't know the hurt they were experiencing," said Mary Patkau.

A sense of shock was shared around the room and, clearly, the thoughts and feelings that came out of the TRC weekend were still being processed.

"The awareness opened our eyes to our responsibilities," said Rita MacDonald, from Rosthern.

Henry Block, a former history teacher, admitted his ignorance. "I taught Canadian history, I knew none of this," he said. "It felt like it was planned."

As congregations are aging, the focus on senior's concerns seemed especially well-timed. Audrey Bechtel's detailed presentation on dementia pulled in an attentive group.

"When they find out [they have

dementia], some people keep it a secret. Others, spread the news about the diagnosis," she said. She shared many helpful and sometimes startling facts about the various forms of dementia; Alzheimers being only one form.

"In 1992, it was estimated there were 300,000 people in Canada with dementia," she said, adding that the number is now believed to be closer to 500,000. "We need to talk about it," she stressed.

Suggestions on how to handle those struggling with Alzheimers were helpful. "Questions can be hard for the person with Alzheimers," she said. When the person with the disease makes a mistake, it is best not to correct them and not to argue with them, said Bechtel, a chaplain with the Saskatoon Health Region.

The majority of workshops, though, dealt with the life of the church. One report by Irma Fast Dueck took a hard look at what has happened to the church in the UK and what the future for Canadian Mennonite churches might look like. Another explored the ideas behind *Being a Faithful Church 4*, with Ken Bechtel.

A report about the Vibrant Rural Churches project with Eric Olfert, was a sobering look at the rural congregations that have closed in the past eight years since the project began. The goal at that time was to revive and encourage smaller churches to help them survive. The idea to meld different smaller congregations together into one larger family, didn't always work, said one pastor.

"People don't always move easily," said Margaret Ewen Peters, who has extensive ministry experience in the rural context. "In rural churches, people find it really hard to leave their comfort zone," she said noting that moving the Sunday service between two buildings to include both congregations was difficult.

Of the original ten churches that were



Irma Fast Dueck chats with a participant over coffee at the MC Saskatchewan Equipping Day on Oct. 27.

profiled in the study, three had closed down and three were doing well, said Olfert. Others were somewhere in between. "In some cases, it was too little too late," he said.

In other news about church life, Jerry Buhler, conference minister, told encouraging stories of those congregations that were overcoming the generation gap. One example is the intergenerational aspect of the worship time at Eyebrow Mennonite church. At Zoar Mennonite in Langham, there is a concerted effort to reach out to the children in and out of the church, noted Buhler.

"At the age of 12, children are invited to have a mentor in the church," he explained.

Buhler was deliberate in his comments on how we speak to youth and children in the church. "Don't tell them 'you are the future church'" he said. It gives the person the idea that they are doing nothing now.

The day's broad range of topics leading to helpful discussions meant a faithful future is closer to reality. ☘

'Say what you know to be true'

Christians engaging with people of other faiths

DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

It was a 2010 article in the Waterloo Region Record quoting Brice Balmer, a local Mennonite chaplain and teacher, speaking against the traditional distribution of Gideon Bibles to grade five students in public schools that piqued the interest of Pastor Mike Wiebe and other leaders at the Milverton Mennonite Fellowship.

In the article Balmer said that, "teachers do need to find a way to educate children about the holy books of different faiths. Interfaith Grand River, which brings together leaders from numerous faiths and emphasizes dialogue between religious groups, is willing to help do that." Wiebe and his fellow leaders queried Mennonite Church of Eastern Canada leaders about what the Church believes is the nature of salvation because it will influence how interfaith dialogue is carried out.

Part of the response to these queries was a series of lunch-hour presentations and conversations with Jim Pankratz, Academic Dean at Conrad Grebel University College. Pankratz remembers his father who served as a missionary to Jews in Canada and Europe, learning much about Jewish history and what Jews believe now, while working towards conversions and teaching Jewish converts to Christianity. Pankratz himself took a course in religions in university and as an undergrad became fascinated with Rammohun Roy, a nineteenth century Hindu leader who taught much about Jesus, helping focus Hinduism on the singular nature of God, but who never became a Christian. Roy became the focus of Pankratz' doctoral studies.

Self-identifying as "an evangelical Christian," Pankratz spent the first of the two, two-hour lunches focusing on scriptural texts, theology and the history of Christianity and other faiths. For Pankratz,



(From left): Jim Pankratz, Academic Dean at Conrad Grebel University College, leads a discussion about Christians engaging with people of other faiths on Oct. 17. Participating are Marianne Mellinger, Ray Brubacher, Larry Martin, and Nancy Mann.

"The Bible is the record of God's revelation to humanity. What we know about God we know through creation and human history, not through stories about the gods." The idea of Jesus being good news led to conversation about how Christians have interacted with other faiths in the past, often feeling the need to try to convince others that all about their faith and culture was bad, rather than looking for points of convergence and connection upon which to build.

In the second lunch, Pankratz focused on the kinds of words we use when thinking about other faiths in relation to Christianity—words such as pagan, heretic, replacement, exclusion, dialogue, proselytize, conversion. In the conversation it was noted that Christians can have a wide variety of attitudes toward people of other faiths. Terms like "rigid orthodoxy" on one hand, or "wishy-washy" on the other, disparage fellow Christians who think differently and leads to polarization.

In the end Wiebe did not feel entirely satisfied with the conversation. Pankratz

noted that the Bible itself contains a variety of positions on how to view "the other." While belief in God through Jesus is at the core of Christian belief the point at which "salvation" has taken place is open to discussion. Does it take place when a person is inclined toward Christ but has not yet made a decision? Or must one have accepted the whole of Christian belief to be "saved?" What does that do for those who are in the church but inclined away from Christ? And do all Christians believe one thing about any part of Christian theology?

Pankratz noted the Jewish category of "god-fearers," like Cornelius in Acts 10, who worshipped with Jews but who had not made the step of conversion. Biblical wisdom literature in particular has borrowed extensively from non-Biblical sources, and the church has used Greek philosophical categories throughout its history to discuss Jewish ideas. In the end questions remained, though participants appreciated the chance to engage around the topic. ☸

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Yoga retreat explores 'breath of God'

Camp Squeah
HOPE, B.C.

Angelika Dawson has been practicing yoga at her neighbourhood rec centre for just over a year and loves it for its holistic nature.

One of the challenges in her classes is the meditation time when instructors lead the class through a time of visualization and meditative breathing. Dawson uses this time to focus on the Holy Spirit, imagining the breath of God flowing through her body. Yet sometimes, her meditation practice clashes with the music the instructor has chosen or the instructions being given. She wondered what a yoga class from a Christian point of view would be like and began to imagine a yoga retreat in her favourite place—Camp Squeah.

Rob Tiessen, executive director at

Squeah, was receptive to exploring the idea, so Dawson recruited the help of Laura Loewen, seniors' pastor at Emmanuel Mennonite Church. Dawson knew that Loewen had practiced yoga with Father Tom Ryan when she lived in Montreal. Loewen put her in touch with Father Ryan who connected her with Ingrid Hauss in Vancouver. Hauss invited Dawson and Loewen to attend one of her classes, which they did. They knew immediately that they had found their instructor.

Hauss is a certified teacher in Yoga and Pilates, an artist and spiritual director. Her academic studies and experience in art and music, Christian spirituality and her appreciation of story, scripture and poetry infuse her teaching style.



Ingrid Hauss will lead a retreat at Camp Squeah titled "Breath of God: Yoga from a Christian Perspective."

Hauss says that yoga found her as much as she found it. She first encountered it through a drama class, then again in a dance workshop. Each time, she found it made her feel alive in a way she had never experienced before. But something was missing. As the daughter and granddaughter of Lutheran pastors, she was steeped in both that theology as well as her mother's background in science, art and biology.

"I became a seeker of a way in which yoga could integrate into my life and Christian spirituality," she says.

She then discovered a book called *Prayer of the Heart and Body* on yoga and meditation as a Christian discipline, written by the same Father Tom Ryan with whom Loewen had taken yoga classes. Hauss ended up studying with Father Ryan.

Hauss, Loewen and Dawson discussed ideas for the retreat and settled on the theme of "breath of God," since yoga is so much about breath. The retreat, to be held in January, will include yoga sessions, opportunities for prayer and scripture-based meditation, time for visiting and exploring nature, and will end with a worship service on Sunday morning, co-led by Loewen and Hauss. People of all levels of yoga experience are welcome to attend but the retreat will be restricted to only 40 people.

To read an interview with Hauss or download a registration form, visit www.squeah.com/Yoga-Retreat.html. Questions should be directed to Angelika Dawson at ajdawson@telus.net. ☿

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Germinating conversations

Food, faith, eating and the city

STORY AND PHOTO BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

Manitoba correspondent
WINNIPEG

Rural producers came to hear urban eaters in the second installment of “Germinating Conversations” on Oct. 15 at Canadian Mennonite University. Winkler was the place of the first conversation last spring when farmers addressed the urban folk about their views and issues concerning food and faith.

CMU, Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba, A Rocha Prairie Canada and Food Matters Manitoba worked together to offer a diversity of urban speakers to share their experiences and concerns around food. Ted Dyck, chef at CMU for the past 16 years, Vern Klassen-Wiebe, a diligent grocery shopper for his family, Deanna Zantingh, a CMU student, Delayne Toews, an urban vegetable farmer and Melanie Unger, Spiritual Life Facilitator at CMU, all shared their experiences with food in the city.

Whether feeding 200 students or a family of four, they all struggle to balance affordability and available time with a desire to eat healthy food, grown and produced locally and justly. That difficult balancing act is played out in different ways. “For most of the year when we are at our busiest at CMU, Manitoba does not offer the local produce we can afford. Greenhouse tomatoes are twice the price.” Dyck uses an economical buying program from a large corporation, “but the downside is that it makes some local suppliers less competitive with their pricing.”

Toews believes that being called to “do justice and walk humbly” applies to his relationship with food. “Do I know how it was grown, how the farmers were treated, how the land was treated? What kind of system am I supporting?” But he doesn’t want to become Pharisaic. “Am I coming up with a new set of strict laws? I don’t want to be part of a gospel that you can only buy with your money.”

Farmers listened to their dilemmas in

making food choices and to their concerns about a food system that often seems broken.

“When I buy rice, what kind should I buy? Basmati from Bangladesh, Jasmine from Thailand or Uncle Ben’s grown in the United States? That would be closer but often it is grown where water use is very intensive and involves several more processing steps,” asked Dyck. The issues are complex and myriad.

Zangtingh, who grew up on a chicken farm, is “reluctant to jump with both feet into the urban food mantra to eat locally, organically and responsibly.”

“While there are things that must change so that eaters do not feel their health or the land’s health is being compromised I believe the answer lies in both groups actively participating in understanding one another’s goals . . . we cannot talk about all large scale farming practices as if they are inherently bad and then hope that the end result is that we all learn to work together.” Zangtingh pointed out that urban eaters ask who, how and where food is coming from while farmers are asking how much can they farm, how much can they make to survive, and how can they feed seven billion people. “Asking these questions together is a good place to start. The best answers to these questions will not be done quickly but together.”

Laura Rance, award-winning journalist who writes about farm and rural issues, served as a listener. She heard “a certain wisdom coming from the questions of the presenters and some difficult challenges for the rural community to deal with.”

“Responsibility for feeding the people in the world does not rest with farmers alone but with all of us. Taking into account how food is distributed and how people can access it is a broader and more inclusive discussion that belongs to all of us,” said Rance.



Ted Dyck (right) chef at CMU and one of the presenters at the second Germinating Conversations event talks with Kenton Lobe, one of the organizers.

Kenton Lobe, CMU instructor and one of the organizers, said, “The next step will be to meet with the committee and presenters to discern a way forward. The issues are more complex than we imagined in the beginning.”

Judging by the buzz in the room that followed the presentations, conversation has been primed. One farmer, Marg Rempel, said, “This has certainly been worthwhile. There is always something to come away with.” ☘



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A cry for justice is heard

MC Sask continues its listening journey

STORY AND PHOTO BY KARIN FEHDERAU

Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON

Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, MC Sask churches were wondering what they could do with the stories they heard. After speaking with Steve Heinrichs, director of Indigenous Relations at MC Canada, the Commission decided that a good step would be to invite a Métis singer to share her life journey as well.

Diem Marie LaFortune looked for a spiritual family for a long time before she met the Mennonites.

Born to a mixed-race couple, she was taken from her mother after only one week and placed into a home where she never able to bond with the adoptive mother. "I'm toughened up because I'm an orphan," she said.

Now connected to the Toronto United Mennonite Church, LaFortune was travelling around the Prairies to share songs from her CD. She sang in Nutana Park Mennonite church taking songs from *Beauty and Hard Times*, a work that she first put out in 1998 and then recently re-recorded because she wasn't entirely happy with the first album.

As she has struggled to come to terms with her lost Métis identity, LaFortune has travelled a path of anger and emotional upheaval. She became a lawyer but then realized the stress of that role was making her ill.

"So I started busking," she said. A woman of many talents, it is clear that the pain of a lost childhood and a loss of culture has found a voice within her music. Beautifully poetic but deeply convicting, the songs she has written confronted the small but attentive audience and forced them to see the injustices faced by a colonized people.

"I was more struck with the pain, it



Diem LaFortune gestures during a conversation before the concert.

caught my attention. The arts is how she is being led on the path of healing," said Patrick Preheim, co-pastor of Nutana Park Mennonite. He referred to the process that Mennonites can be considering in all of this; to respect the pain that emerged during the commission hearings.

"Part of that process is not glossing over the injustices that happened in the past or

continue in the present," he said.

A cry for justice comes through in many of her songs. The unfair treatment of Aboriginal people, the injustice of children suffering with alcoholic parents; of people being hurt by the greed of the corporate world and First Nations and Métis suffering the effects of colonization.

Olfert, too, saw and heard the focus on injustice. "There were themes of injustice, reconciliation, healing and finding our way through to a better place," he observed.

"God's strength and God's love gave me the strength to do the work I needed to do on this emotional journey," said LaFortune.

To learn more about her music, go to www.mamadhorizontdancer.ca. There is also a video on Youtube that shows LaFortune singing a music video in front of the Occupy Toronto camp. ❧

MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA PHOTO



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Bible Teaching Nathan and Taryn Dirks Suggested Gift: \$100

Nathan and Taryn Dirks (Niagara United Mennonite Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.) will teach Bible courses at Kijikongo College and in local African-Initiated Church (AIC) congregations. They will also work with AIC leaders and the Kijikongo College Faculty Team to develop an AIC Centre for learning in the city of Gaborone, Botswana.

Church Planting Gregory Rabus and Jennifer Otto Suggested Gift: \$150

Gregory Distrital Mennonite Fellowship, Montreal, QC and Jennifer Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont.) are working on a church planting assignment in Southern Germany together with the Verband Deutscher Mennonitengemeinden.

Mennonite Church Canada is printing and shipping less paper as it invites support for wider church ministry this Christmas. "In the past we have mailed our gift guide directly to individuals," says Daniel Horne, Director of Partnership Development. "This year we are inviting people to browse an e-gift, hoping that congregational leaders will pass it on to their members by email." The online system allows people to designate gifts to more than one project and allows the national church to share up-to-date information with supporters in a more timely fashion. To view the 2012 Gift Guide, see <https://donate.mennonitechurch.ca/> and click on the link for your region.

GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Mothers and daughters learn about HIV in Tanzania

By GLADYS TERICHOW

Mennonite Central Committee Canada
ARUSHA, TANZANIA

Tears flow freely at *Binti Mama* (daughter/mother) gatherings as mothers and their teenage daughters talk openly about issues such as HIV and AIDS. Led by an intergenerational team of students, teachers and women, the gatherings provide a safe setting for listening and learning across generations.

“They dance, sing, eat and share stories of what happened to them,” says Salome Lally, a program coordinator at Mwangaza Education for Partnerships. “People cry a lot when others tell their stories.”

Female students in secondary schools represent one of the highest risk groups for new infections of HIV in Tanzania, says Lally.

In partnership with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Mwangaza trains and supports teams of women to lead seminars and be advocates for healthy lifestyles in their schools, churches and communities. Mwangaza is an educational partnership of Evangelical Lutheran Church congregations in Tanzania and the U.S. Each team consists of 12 women from the same community—six students and two teachers from a Lutheran secondary school and four women from a Lutheran congregation near the school.

The training deals with HIV and AIDS, violence against women, life skills, conflict resolution and how health information, cultural practices and behaviours relate to healthy lifestyles. Participants learn how to use art, music, drama and presentations to share this knowledge with others.

Secondary school students, Angel Mathew and Dinah John, both 17, represent the Nkoaranga Secondary School on an intergenerational team. Mathew said the training helped her understand how positive and negative peer pressure contributes to the rising incidence of

HIV among secondary school students.

For some girls sexual behaviour is a way to obtain fashionable clothes and shoes, says Mathew. “We teach them how HIV is spread and how to avoid the infection. The best way to avoid the infection is to avoid the peer influence and the temptation of having valuable things.”

John says when the team makes presentations it is not unusual for older women to be surprised that teenage girls have so much information on issues affecting girls and women. ☺

MCC PHOTO BY NINA LINTON



Dinah John (left) and Angel Mathew are part of an intergenerational team of women learning and sharing information about HIV and AIDS in Arusha, Tanzania.

“Gracious God, protect our members during storms and other calamities.”

Excerpt from a “Prayer for the MAX Enterprise” © 2012

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/// Briefly noted

Anabaptist seed grows in Venezuela

Peter Stucky, a Mennonite pastor and church leader from Bogota, Colombia, taught a course in “Radical Anabaptist Theology and Latin American Theology” in September to 38 students at a seminary on Margarita Island, Venezuela. The seminary carries the name of John Driver, a former pastor and mission worker in Latin America. According to Stucky, Erwin Mirable, a Venezuelan leader, persevered with the Anabaptist vision which he began to learn in 1987 at a teaching session with John Driver. Under Mirable’s leadership in 2009, a group of congregations, known as Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas del Oriente (Eastern Evangelical Mennonite Churches), obtained legal status. Stucky heard about struggles within Venezuelan Mennonite churches when he attended a 2004 meeting of Andean Anabaptists and he attributed signs of new life to the power of the resurrection of Christ. Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas del Oriente is exploring associate membership with Mennonite World Conference.

—Mennonite World Conference

Lutheran Seminary unveils peace garden

Waterloo, Ont.—Waterloo Lutheran Seminary dedicated a new peace garden on Nov. 2, featuring a labyrinth, a peace pole, and a tree celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The peace pole is inscribed with the saying, “May peace prevail on Earth” in eight languages. Also in the garden is a Greenspire Linden tree, the twin to a tree planted by the Seminary in a *Luthergarten* (Luther garden) in Wittenburg, Germany, the city where the Reformation began in 1517.

—Wilfrid Laurier University

GOD AT WORK IN US

“My great-grandfather was a Mennonite:”

Odette Mukole L Mukanzo

BY DAN DYCK

Mennonite Church Canada

Although Odette Mukole has surely told her story hundreds of times, she speaks softly. She is patient, humble and gracious.

Mukole reaches for a now familiar book on her shelf. *Thirty-five years in the Congo* is a history of Mennonite mission in what was then known as the Belgian Congo. She finds page 170. Her finger traces the lines of text, stopping at the reference to her great-grandfather, Kizongo a Makina.

Odette Mukole was born in Nyanga mission station in what is now the west central region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Established in 1921, Nyanga was where Kizongo a Makina, a sub-chief of the village in his area, was first introduced to Christianity.

“He was the second person in that area to give his life to Jesus,” says Mukole. “People were making fun of him, saying ‘This is ridiculous, this is stuff for kids.’ But he said it was a matter of the heart,” says Mukole. A year later he passed away.

Her grandparents Pierre Kambembo and Marie Mukole Kizongo, and her parents Louis Mukanzo Kambembo and Marie Louise Bongesa Mayimbi Mukanzo became well known Mennonites in the area.

Mukole’s B.A. in Education proved unviable in a country where teachers can work for two years without being paid. She took additional training and found work as a public relations agent for a 5,000-employee sugar cane company.

On the side, Mukole led a 250-member women’s group, Action des Maman Chrétiennes Entrepreneuses, which helped women stand up for their rights in a cultural environment where abuse was considered



Mukanzo

normal. Her employment at the sugar cane plant was stable for 13 years, until her activist work compromised her personal security and that of her daughters.

Mukole arrived in Montreal with her three daughters in January 2000, a penniless single mother.

After six months it became clear that she would need to improve her English language skills, so she moved to Calgary, found a community at Trinity Mennonite Church, enrolled in English classes, and

found a job as a homecare support worker.

“My father always told me that if you need help, find the Mennonites,” she says.

It soon became clear that if she wanted to improve her employment prospects, she’d need to go back to school. With help from her church community and Mennonite Women Canada members in Alberta, Mukole received some financial aid and encouragement to study Conflict Resolution at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. She graduated in 2007 with a major in Social Science and minor in Theology and now works full time as a Newcomer Case Coordinator at the Family Centre of Winnipeg.

Mukole carries her Mennonite identity with pride and she wants to share the message that people of other ethnic backgrounds can and do trace their Mennonite faith back through several generations. When asked, she readily agreed to be featured in one of Mennonite Church Canada’s *Mennonites Everywhere* video series. It is available for viewing at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/3. ☞

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ARTBEAT

REVIEW

A compelling narrative of Russian Mennonites' darkest hour

Red Quarter Moon: A search for family in the shadow of Stalin. Anne Konrad.
University of Toronto Press, 2012

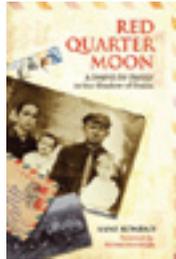
REVIEW BY DICK BENNER,
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

This personal narrative of one of the darkest hours for Russian Mennonites, suffering unspeakably under the repression of a ruthless regime, is one of the most compelling I have read. Reading like a novel with story after story of the suffering, yet remarkable endurance of her extended family, Anne Konrad keeps you glued to the pages as she becomes the spokesperson for the silent, for the sufferers, indeed for the faithful, who against all odds, often stayed true to their Anabaptist beliefs.

What makes it most powerful is that the stories, always riveting in their emotion and energy, are told in historical context so that you always know the backdrop of what was driving the governing officials, the guards and the many henchmen who carried out their ruthless rules.

Even though this English professor, from one of the fortunate surviving families who escaped to Canada, spent the last 20 years persistently tracking down the stories of most of her relatives affected by these tragic times, she tells these stories with compassion and grace without added drama. It's as if she wept with them when coaxing out the emotions that accompanied their tragedies.

When reading the letters her Uncle Gerhard Konrad wrote to her parents, for instance, whom she describes as a "survivor with the bravado and quiet intelligence and ability to judge situations," she says she "has an overwhelming feeling of loss. How



affectionately he asked about his siblings, how he tried to keep alive the family connections, to honour the past without naming it, to be a humane person in a non-religious state, to be pleasant even when he knew evil intent lurked beneath the surface. He had survived a systematic tyranny, but it took its toll." (p. 239-40)

It is a grim tale, indeed, but Anne Konrad makes it a labour of love. As her friend, Hiroaki Kuromiya writes in the foreword: "The Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent Civil War fundamentally changed the lives of Mennonite colonists. The new Marxist government was suspicious of the Mennonite communities, which were tightly organized and resistant to outside control. Their reputation for hard work and apparent wealth—at least greater than their Slavic neighbours—now pointed to them as class enemies.

"They were suspect, to one degree or another in the eyes of all major political groups—the atheist Reds, the chauvinistic Whites, the anarchists and the Ukrainian nationalists. The result was outbreaks of violence against them. Thousands disappeared in the Soviet prison system or were killed. Many fled abroad—to Germany, Canada, Brazil, Paraguay and other countries. Some Mennonites, exiled to the Far East, escaped to Manchuria, from where they immigrated to the Americas. The Konrads and the Brauns

were scattered around the globe."

While that description is horrific enough, Konrad spends most of her time letting her subjects tell their stories in first person. For instance, the letters and voice of Maria Braun are presented in the story of life in the *Trudarmia* (also called the Labour Army), thusly: "In one of the prisons I had been in, in Omsk, there had been an outbreak and so all my hair had been shaved off. It was in March and was still very cold, and all I was wearing when I left home was a thin dress and so I was very lightly clothed for cold prisons. In prison they gave us soup made from thistles and thistle balls, instead of meatballs."

Further down in the letter, Maria described her treatment when getting sick: "...they called a policeman and forced me to go with him to an icy cold room, where no human being ever belonged and he shoved me into this space and locked the door. There stood iron bedsteads and so I sat down on one of the beds and began to sing. It was bitterly cold in there. The policeman knocked on the door and said, 'Stop singing!' So I asked myself who could stop me? So I continued to sing."

Ah, singing! Konrad refers to this redemptive act over and over again. That, and the love of family, most often kept these suffering souls intact, even in the most unspeakable horror, tapping into two of the most enduring cultural gifts of our spiritual heritage.

The symbolism of the title, *Red Quarter Moon*? Anne Konrad, the teacher, would like the reader to grasp its significance as "in the eyes of beholder." But, when pressed, she refers to the quote in her book by Agatha Wieler, who still lived in the small Siberian village from which her parents escaped in 1929. "She wrote cautiously about the many people of the village who had disappeared, about present religious persecution and a hard life. Then in the fantastical phenomenon she described the words jumped out. Of course, red quarter moon. That was the title. That would be the book. She had described probably a perfect lunar eclipse, but wasn't that symbolic of the Soviet system, an eclipse of innumerable lives and liberties? An eclipse moves slowly, gradually gobbling up the brightness of a moon, leaving a darkness, ending red." ❧



*Job (Mark McKechnie) refuses to be convinced by Sonny (Dan Bieman), the fundamentalist Christian, while the “High and Mighty” house band play in the background in Ross Muir’s *Job’s Blues*.*

‘Job’ sings the blues

Ross Muir’s blues opera produced in Ontario

DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
HARRISTON, ONT.

Ross Muir, managing editor of *Canadian Mennonite*, penned the lyrics to his blues’ opera, *Job’s Blues*, during one of the happiest times of his life, in 1988. The idea had been in his mind for a dozen years, ever since he had heard a twelve part sermon series on the Biblical book of Job while at the University of Victoria, B.C.

Three years after writing the lyrics he found himself re-reading the words and listening to blues recordings as he tried to make sense of the diagnosis of Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, sometimes called Lou Gehrig’s disease) his wife Diane had received. With statistics pointing to 80 percent of victims dying within five years and over half of marriages breaking down, he felt like Job, having his security and sense

of a future with hope torn away. Just as Job challenged God and came back, so did Muir, though he wasn’t always sure at the time he would, or could.

Fast forward to 2012 and *Job’s Blues* was finally performed. Directed by Peggy Raftis, The Grey Wellington Theatre Guild, in conjunction with The Grand River Blues Society, gave the opera a six performance over a two-weekend run at the Harriston Town Hall Theatre. The opera unfolds over two acts with Job’s lament ending the first:

Sighing comes with every meal
And I wash them down with salty tears
Torments come, I cannot sleep
I’m all alone, I’m in too deep
Torments come, I cannot sleep

I’m all alone while demons creep

Muir’s words were set to music by Chris Michie and Andy Kulberg and played by a band fronted by John Stewart. Music drives the opera forward with the scene where Job is tormented by his “friends” done in pantomime over “Seven Days of Silence.”

The entire story unfolds in the High and Mighty Club with God and Satan sitting in the background sipping wine (God—white; Satan—red). In the second act, the friends—Eric the “new age” Christian; Gregg the prosperity gospel Christian; and Sonny the fundamentalist Christian—each trying to convince Job of his sin.

Job refuses to bow until God meets Job and Job becomes convinced, as Muir puts it, of his finiteness, of his need for God’s presence in his life, for life to be complete. The opera ends on an “evangelical” note with the entire cast singing “Amazing Grace,” bringing reminders of John Newton the former slaver who penned the words to the familiar hymn. In Muir’s opera Job is a blues singer, married to a former stripper, who finds he is not independent but dependant upon God.

Though the cast were amateurs there was strong acting from Warren Wray (God), Mark McKechnie (Job), Christine Wick (Job’s wife) and Daryl Mejer (the bartender). The band, fronted by John Stewart, guitar, was “hot” with the audiences enthusiastically responding with applause and shouts as they performed the blues tunes.

Announced in local congregations (Muir and his family attend First Mennonite in Kitchener) there were a number of attendees from Steinman Mennonite in Baden. A series of sermons there had led into a formation hour discussion group on the issues raised in Job—the connection between sin and suffering; God’s goodness. Though Harriston is over an hour north of Waterloo many from local congregations attended, and Muir noted that the 275 seat theatre was never less than half full.

This was the third time interest had been shown in Muir’s work but the first to move through to performance. The current production has raised much interest, including by a professional theatre group in Toronto Muir cannot yet name. ❧

Courage for Lydia

Carol Ann Weaver presents concert in support of accident victim

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.



(l-r) Meaghan McCracken, Rebecca Campbell, Carol Ann Weaver, Ben Bolt-Martin and Willem Moolenbeek perform *Winter Prayers and Blessings* from Weaver's *Three Seasons for Lydia Herrle*, on Oct. 31 at Conrad Grebel University College.

Elementary school student Lydia Herrle was thrown 25 metres after being hit by a truck as she stepped off her school bus in front of her family's Country Farm Market on Erb's Road near Waterloo in May. It took months before she came home from hospital and she has years of rehabilitation ahead of her. She and her family attend Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church.

On Oct. 31, Carol Ann Weaver (professor of music at Conrad Grebel University

College), together with Joanne Bender (composer and teacher) organized and performed at a "Courage for Lydia" concert, part of CGUC's Wednesday noon hour concerts.

Bender performed a series of piano solos of pieces she has created for her younger students, as well as a trio piece together with Ben Bolt-Martin (cello) and Marianne Wiens (violin), connecting each

piece to Herrle and her healing. Weaver performed *Anything World*, with a text by Kiera Schneider aged 9 who died shortly after writing the words. Rebecca Campbell, Weaver's long-time co-performer sang the words:

This is the world where anything can happen

And when you are walking by

You see the sun dancing in the sky

It hardly ever rains

But when it does, only for a little while

And when it stops

The rainbow stretches out for half a mile
In the world where anything can happen.

A quintet of Weaver, Bolt-Martin, Willem Moolenbeek (alto sax), Meaghan McCracken (flute) and Campbell then performed *Three Seasons for Lydia Herrle*—*Summer Silence* with piano and the cello providing Herrle's heartbeat; *Autumn Dawn* blending the sense of the dawn slowly rising out of the mist, combined with the healing energies of Joyce Mazibuko a South African Healer; and *Winter Prayers and Blessing* a gentle moving prayer and blessing which, according to Weaver, had to be written before the larger piece was done. "God has ways of bringing out creativity," she noted.

The chapel was full to overflowing, including some of Herrle's family.

Seemingly in answer to the concert's prayers and hopes, Herrle was released from hospital and walked home from the family store the day after the concert. The lane was lined by friends and family, many with bright green ribbons which adorned many vehicles, mailboxes and people in the months since the accident. ❧

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The perfectly correct Christmas Pageant

A SHORT PLAY WITH FIVE CHARACTERS

By Kevin McCabe

(The setting is a meeting of the worship committee.)

Chair: It's that time of year again. Time to think about our Christmas program.

Pastor: Yes. I'd like something which is both traditional, but innovative.

Elaine: Well, let's not have another Christmas pageant with the angels and Mary and Joseph.

Andrea: No. It's pushing the nuclear family as the norm—you know—mother, father, and baby.

Heather: Perhaps we could try two women and a baby, or two men and a baby.

Chair: I'm not sure that our congregation would go for that. But having a non-traditional family sounds promising.

Elaine: How about having the angels deliver Baby Jesus directly to the shepherds? That would eliminate the holy family and the stable.

Andrea: Not bad. But then the shepherds were probably all male.

Heather: We could add a few female shepherds.

Chair: I don't think we want to suggest that men and women were sleeping out in the fields together. We have to be aware of how the congregation might take these ideas.

Pastor: Yes...but we can build on these suggestions. Nevertheless, we still need a basic approach to Christmas that will work for the membership.

Elaine: Let's table the drama presentation and talk about other ways to make this Christmas season relevant.

Andrea: Well, I know that many businesses and schools are dropping "Merry Christmas" as a holiday greeting. "Season's Greetings" seems to be more popular.

Heather: I prefer "Happy Holidays" myself; but they are both inclusive.

Chair: Yes. And they could both refer to other times of the year. So, if we print up materials, we can still use them for Easter

or Canada Day.

Pastor: Generally speaking, I like this approach. But "Season's Greetings" seems a bit Eurocentric. After all, they don't have four distinct seasons in warmer climates.

Elaine: Well, I wonder if we should even have our ushers greeting people. I've read somewhere that Koreans regard it as disrespectful to come up to someone you don't know, and shake their hand.

Andrea: Yes. I worry about that. A lot of people nowadays just want to be anonymous.

Heather: Well, do we even need a Christmas program? How many people really want one?

Chair: But we'll get complaints if we don't have one. It's tradition.

Pastor: Perhaps we could find a Mennonite answer to the Christmas program. What did Mennonites actually do for Christmas back in the 16th century?

Elaine: Frankly, it's a real nuisance to have to plan something every year. Whoever invented Christmas opened up a big can of worms.

Andrea: Worms... hey! Maybe we could look at the less pleasant side of Christmas. How it affects the homeless, and people without families.

Heather: Yes. That might provide some good sermon material. Suicide rates are always highest around Christmas time.

Chair: Now we're getting somewhere. A relevant contemporary Christmas message!

Pastor: I appreciate all these suggestions, but I'm not sure the congregation wants a sermon that's such a downer at Christmas

time. They are trying to get into a celebratory mood.

Elaine: Perhaps we'll have to do a minimalist Christmas message. Just mention Christmas when it's necessary, but not raise it as an issue.

Andrea: I'll go for that. There's nothing new to say about Christmas anyway. Just read a few scriptures, sing a few carols, and then move on.

Heather: We always seem to be trying to discover something new about Christmas, and adding more bells and whistles to our services. It's like we're trying to reinvent the wheel. Why don't we just go with the very basic story about God coming to earth in the form of a baby?

Chair: You know, that's just crazy enough it might work.

Pastor: Well, it is a trifle unorthodox. But it might get the attention of the congregation.

Elaine: I'm just concerned that it would mean extra work for you, Pastor.

Andrea: Yes. You would have to examine the Christmas story from a new perspective.

Pastor: Actually, I would enjoy it. We need to try something different once in a while.

Chair: I think we can do this. But we all have to work together in presenting this approach to the congregation.

Pastor: That gives me a lot to work with. And I want to thank you all. I already have an idea for a sermon on the angel song, explaining the meaning of, "Peace on earth, good will to men".

Elaine: You mean "good will to men and women," don't you, Pastor?

Pastor: Didn't I say that? Of course, that was what I meant. Anyway, many thanks for your help, and I'd like to get into the spirit of the season by wishing all of you a very Merry Christmas.

Committee: And a very Merry Christmas to you too, Pastor. ☸

Go to www.canadianmennonite.org to see the many responses to articles, "Canadian Mennonite warned of political activities" and "Political reminder' disturbing."



Nancy Mann (left), Wendy Priebe, Peggy Roth, Susan Pries, Carolyn Burkhardt, and Jennifer Jacobi released their third CD on Oct. 28 in honour of Joy Dorsch who died in 2006.

Lifted Voices honour departed member

DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
KITCHENER, ONT.

When Kitchener's First Mennonite Church's choir had a piece that needed a women's group to sing, seven women volunteered. Soon another piece needed the same treatment and they did it again. That led to other opportunities and they felt they needed a name. Over 23 years "Lifted Voices" has not changed personnel, though Nancy Mann has moved on to pastor the Waterloo-Kitchener Mennonite Church, and Joy Dorsch was lost to cancer in 2006.

It was to honour their friend that Lifted Voices recorded a third CD, *A Song for Joy*, released at a concert at First Mennonite on Oct. 28. The song, *The Son's Flower*, was written by Susan Pries, the group's pianist, in memory of Joy who enjoyed sunflowers.

When circles are broken, a life friend is gone;

We look to the promise, we look to the Son.

And when we are empty, and words are all gone;

There still is a flower, remembered in song.

The other 19 songs on the CD are a mixture of traditional and newer pieces, both from Mennonite hymnody and beyond. Tight harmonies from the five singers (six on *Precious Lord Take My Hand*) are accompanied by minimal instrumentation. Soloist Jennifer Jacobi's range and strength add to the simple arrangements. All in all a feel good CD of encouragement.

Although the "joy" in the title was an honour to Dorsch, it also comes through clearly in both concert and recording.

CDs are available from Peggy Roth (519-579-8351/proth@conestogac.on.ca). ☼



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Sängerfest a tribute to choral tradition

BY DAVID REMPEL SMUCKER

On Nov. 11 a choral group of 80 singers and a full sanctuary of worshippers gathered at Springfield Heights Mennonite Church in Winnipeg to honor the musical contributions of George and Esther Wiebe. George, a conductor, and Esther, composer and pianist, lived and worked for many years in Winnipeg at Canadian Mennonite Bible College.

With three long practices in the two weeks prior to the concert, this was a wonderful opportunity to become immersed in the excellent choral tradition of the Russian Mennonites. Three veteran and professional directors—Bernie Neufeld, Rudy Schellenberg, Henry Engbrecht—guided us through the pieces, composed by F. Melius Christiansen, Johannes Brahms, Felix Mendelssohn, J. S. Bach, Hugo Distler, Esther Wiebe, Carl Mueller, and August Grell. An octet sang excerpts from a piece by Heinrich Schütz. The congregation and choir also sang five hymns and heard tributes to George and Esther Wiebe.

As a semi-outsider to Manitoba Mennonites, I found it remarkable that so much of what made this concert possible was not articulated but assumed. It depended on a collection of musical scores which had been preserved and stored. It depended on an un-auditioned call for singers which resulted in a large group of excellent singers accustomed to intense direction from experienced conductors. It depended on people familiar with the German language and its pronunciation. It depended on planners knowing which pieces could be instructed by that particular group in that number of practice sessions.

Not surprisingly, the role of the German language was prominent. As well as one letter of tribute read in German, exactly half the texts set to music were sung in

German. Two of those hymn texts, sung in German, had been written in English and translated into German—"My Life Flows On in Endless Song" and "Give to Our God Immortal Praise."

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, gospel song texts and tunes were translated from English to German by German-speaking Christians. Songs such as "My Life Flows on" were appropriated by Mennonites in Russia and "brought back" to their North American origins in different "clothing." In this case Jacob T. Friesen, a Mennonite translated a text by nineteenth-century gospel song writer, Robert Lowry. Peter B. Wiens translated "Give to Our God Immortal Praise," an eighteenth century

British evangelical text by Isaac Watts.

I noticed few listeners (and fewer mass choir singers) under the age of 40. If most singers sang under George and Esther Wiebe from 1954 to 1991, then that would account for the lack of those under 40. But one might ask if there is a waning of this choral tradition among Manitoba Mennonite young adults. My conversations with Winnipeg Mennonites suggests that young adults have the vocal skills and an interest in classical choral literature, but they are not as motivated by participating in the larger choral groups.

This festival shows that the choral tradition of sacred music among Manitoba Mennonites is still thriving. ❧



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FOCUS ON MISSION AND SERVICE

MCC PHOTO BY JOANIE PETERS



Volunteers, (from left) Sasha Homenko, Anna Marie Giesbrecht, Laeun Kin and Birte Wiebe get to know each other as they work in the kitchen at Sam's Place.

Healthy living begins with wholesome food at Sam's Place

By GLADYS TERICHOW

Mennonite Central Committee Canada
WINNIPEG

Packages of beans, tomatoes, carrots, apples and pesto fill the freezers at Sam's Place, a used book store, café and performing arts venue in the Winnipeg neighbourhood of Elmwood.

Freezing fruits and vegetables is a new

experience for 18 year old Sasha Homenko. "I like working in the kitchen. It's fun and I'm good at it. It's like playing house."

Homenko is among 75 volunteers sharing and gaining skills at Sam's Place, a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

Manitoba activity that is striving to become a self-sustaining enterprise with a strong community outreach focus.

Healthy living begins with wholesome food, says manager Jennifer Dijk. That is why she is passionate about creating awareness of the availability of locally grown food and the benefits of whole, unrefined food, such as whole grains and dried legumes. This is especially important in the Elmwood neighbourhood where people living in low income households have limited access to grocery stores that stock fresh, affordable produce. "The neighbourhood has become a food desert—we are trying to find ways to help people deal with that reality," says Dijk.

Sam's Place is run mainly by volunteers. About 75 per cent of them are under the age of 30, says Dijk. Volunteers work in the kitchen, serve customers, sort and price books, work with the sound system and more.

Although Sam's Place is successful in developing its outreach components, the revenue continues to be about 15 per cent below operational costs, says Ron Janzen, newly appointed executive director for MCC Manitoba. "We are still on the path to make it a sustainable operation," he explains. An evaluation of the business operations was completed in October. Janzen anticipates a new business plan with strategies and recommendations will be announced in early 2013.

"I have a lot of confidence that Sam's Place can be a success in terms of both its café/bookstore business model and social enterprise objectives," says Janzen. "It is one of the most innovative things that MCC Manitoba is doing. It is already having a significant impact by engaging the community and constituency, in particular the youth and young adults."

Homenko learned about Sam's Place through searching for jobs on the Internet. She started volunteering in February 2012 when she was in Grade 12 to gain work experience. Now a student at the University of Manitoba, she says she has gained more than food handling skills.

"I was shy when I first came here," she says. "I'm way more confident now and more comfortable around people. This place has helped me a lot." ❧

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MCC PHOTO BY SILAS CREWS



Women in Bangladesh work together to make soap as part of a Mennonite Central Committee job-creation program. The hand-made soap is sold through Ten Thousand Villages stores and sales. Former sex workers are given a basic salary and a yearlong training program to develop job skills so they can support their families. Graduates of the program make soap or other products. Ten Thousand Villages provides a fair income to artisans from more than 30 countries.

CANADIAN FOODGRAINS BANK PHOTO BY EMILY CAIN



Two men carry a bag of millet at an MCC-supported food distribution in south-west Niger. To date, Mennonite Central Committee has been entrusted with donations of almost \$370,000 to help millions of people across the Sahel region of Western Africa. This includes contributions to MCC's account in the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB). Although farmers in some regions of the Sahel are anticipating a better harvest than last year, the food crisis for millions of people is far from over. (Names are withheld for security reasons.)

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Briefly noted

Just Food art exhibit goes online

In 2010, 18 artists from Canada and around the world were asked to interpret the meaning of the human right to food, especially as it relates to hunger in the world. The result was the Just Food art exhibit, which toured across Canada for two years. The tour comes to an end this year, but the exhibit will live on—online. Justfoodart.com is the new home for the 36 pieces of art created to engage people about the issue of global hunger. Each of the paintings in the online exhibition features a statement about the right to food, a Bible verse about food and hunger, and a reflection on the piece by the artist. The Just Food art exhibit is a joint project of the Mennonite Committee on Human Rights and Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Funding for the exhibit came from Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine, Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and Wanda Koop.

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Fall 2012
Volume 23 Issue 1

AMBS window

Read the Bible—and read it together

Rachel Miller Jacobs, D.Min. candidate, Assistant Professor of Congregational Formation

When I went to seminary, I was amazed by how much I benefited from class experiences of reading New Testament texts together in Greek. Because we'd had to translate every word, we were reading more carefully than when we flipped open our English Bibles. And we were benefiting from what each of us had noticed and especially from the times we'd made different translation choices.

As a pastor, I saw Bible study groups launch into discussion without first reading the text. Leaders told me people knew what was there already, and reading out loud used too much time in a short Sunday school hour. But I couldn't get my experience in class out of my head. How could people in congregations receive some of the same gifts in opening the Bible that seminary students get?

One clue lies in our Anabaptist inheritance: the Bible is best read and interpreted in community. While this was not an innovation, it was and is one of the most important characteristics of an Anabaptist approach to scripture. Reading and interpreting in community

implies two obvious and powerful things: first, we have to actually read the Bible. Second, we have to read it together.

So I started reading the Bible with groups in this Anabaptist way. First we read the text out loud, so that we could notice what was actually there—and so that our comments would flow from the text rather than simply our opinions. Then we asked ourselves: what do our particular experiences, our particular knowledge, help each of us see in this text? Together, we weighed our understandings and our hunches about what God was speaking to us through it.

One memorable experience was with junior highers preparing to lead worship. In our study of I Samuel 24, they noticed how vulnerable Saul was, relieving himself in that cave—especially since David and his men, whom Saul had been chasing, were right there in the shadows.

Based on their experiences of junior high bathrooms and the temptations they offer to bullies, the junior highers noticed, and helped the congregation see, how powerful and unusual David's choice was. When you have the upper hand over

a bully, it's almost impossible to imagine not taking advantage of it. But David did.

The riches we reap in reading the Bible with people like us are magnified when we read with people who are different from us in race, culture, ethnicity, economic class or language, to name just a few possibilities. An Anglo and two Latino congregations in my hometown decided to read the story of the Good Samaritan together, seating people with folks from their own and other congregations, including interpreters.

Together, they noticed something interesting: in the Spanish Bible, *neighbor* was translated *prójimo*: the one "closest to me." Anglo folks, when they thought of caring for their neighbor, thought about loving people far away—such as sending money to victims of disasters; Latinos thought about loving those closest to them—supporting friends and relatives. Together, these readers recognized that Jesus' invitation to love the neighbor includes both those far away and those closest to hand, a realization that might have been missed without the shared reading. ●

Remembering Anabaptists remembering Scripture

Jamie Pitts, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Anabaptist Studies

Anabaptists have long been suspicious of theology that is divorced from the living community of the church. Frequently this suspicion raises a call to get “back to the Bible,” back to the church’s shared, authoritative witness to the move of God in history. Today this call resounds again, but can be found among people espousing very different views of what the Bible actually says or recommends.

Reflecting on how valued ancestors, spiritual as well as biological, navigated tumultuous times can remind us of useful strategies we have forgotten. Their struggles and failings can also serve as warning signs, and they may even hold a mirror up to our struggles and failings.

What might we learn from the first generation of European Anabaptists about getting back to the Bible? How might our memories of Anabaptists shape our current approach to Scripture?

Sixteenth-century Anabaptists were, like their Protestant counterparts, committed to the Bible as their sole guide to faith. They made the Bible central to their lives. They prayed, preached, studied, memorized and debated it, discerning their paths in its light.

It is vital that we read these plural pronouns as referring to Anabaptist communities, and not simply to individuals. In the sixteenth century, Anabaptists distinguished themselves by insisting that local communities of devoted Christians were the basic context for biblical interpretation. They trusted that the Bible’s meaning was

plain enough, and inter-congregational associations united communities in common understanding.

Anabaptists were accused of adopting an overly literal interpretation of Scripture, but they could also be accused of relying too much on the Holy Spirit for understanding. Excesses were committed, but at their best the Anabaptists held together rigorous attention to the texts with patient listening to the Spirit.

Central to maintaining this balance was the conviction that both text and Spirit were about Jesus Christ. Anabaptists viewed the Bible in its entirety as culminating in the Gospel narratives; this perspective could have deleterious effects on Old Testament interpretation, but also encouraged practical imitation of Christ’s life.

In our day, appreciation for context makes sensitivity to interpretive diversity a necessity. This sensitivity, however, sometimes makes it difficult to know how congregations can share any common understandings of Scripture—and this difficulty in turn gives rise to the escape valves of literalism and spiritualism. Those temptations are especially enticing when science and religious pluralism raise questions about the Bible’s adequacy.

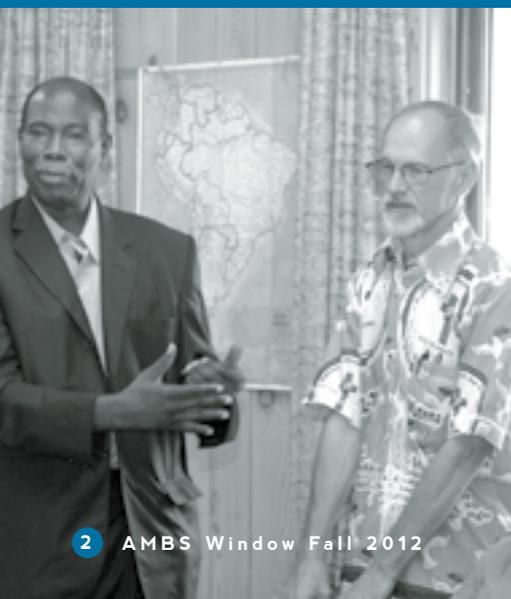
A naïve appropriation of sixteenth-century Anabaptist approaches to the Bible may, therefore, be undesirable, but aspects of their interpretive praxis speak directly to our situation. At times, and in notable and enduring ways, they achieved communal and inter-communal



unity through zealous commitment to Jesus Christ as they learned of him through Scripture and Spirit. That is our challenge. We do well to remember. ●

Top: Jamie Pitts leads a session of *Christian Theology I* this fall.

Cover: Rachel Miller Jacobs listens as participants in *!Explore* share the work they have done on their theological questions. Participants include (clockwise from center front) Adam Troyer, Alissa Murray and Clarra Lay. Caitlyn Desjardins (right) is a seminary student who served as an event pastor.



ALUMNI NEWS

When Pastor Siaka Traoré, Vice President of the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission International Central Council and President of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso, visited AMBS, **Rodney Hollinger-Janzen, Master of Divinity 1990**, served as a translator. Pastor Traoré and Pastor Benjamin Mubenga, President of AIMM’s International Central Council and President of the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Congo, helped to celebrate the

release of *The Jesus Tribe: Grace stories from Congo’s Mennonites, 1912-2012*. Rodney, James Bertsche and Nancy Myers edited the book (see at right).

Willard Swartley, (Bachelor of Divinity 1962, professor emeritus) is author of *Health, Healing and the Church’s Mission: Biblical Perspectives and Moral Priorities* (IVP Academic 2012). One reviewer calls it “sober, mature and constructive treatment of a critical issue.”

Reading the Bible requires reading culture

Andy Brubacher Kaethler, Ph.D. candidate, Assistant Professor of Faith Formation and Culture

You can't read the Bible without first reading culture.

This is the conclusion Musimbi Kanyoro arrives at after returning to Kenya from Europe to spend some time with her mother following her father's funeral.

While in Kenya Kanyoro participates in an ecumenical women's Bible study, a profound experience exploring together the Bible's wisdom for their daily lives.

But something disturbs her. Too frequently the village women interpret the Bible in a manner consistent with their village culture but inconsistent with the saving and liberating trajectory of Scripture. For example, one woman wonders if she should allow her teenage daughter to wed a much older man. Another woman fears she will contract AIDS from an adulterous husband.

Shocking to Kanyoro is the way these women justify cultural practices using the Bible. The daughter's marriage is justified by Ruth marrying Boaz (Ruth 4). The actions of the adulterous husband are unchallenged because Jesus addresses only the Samaritan woman (John 8:3-11). How is it that these women, earnestly seeking the guidance of the Bible, assent to practices which could harm the most vulnerable among them?

There are two real dangers in not properly reading both the Bible and culture. Kanyoro describes one danger: absorption. When the Bible is unwittingly conflated with culture, its wisdom becomes indistinguishable from the main tenets of culture, and we mistakenly find affirmation in the Bible

for the very practices from which Bible seeks to liberate us.

The other danger is ghettoization: treating the Bible and culture as two separate entities, a move usually to guard the holiness of Scripture.

Absorption and ghettoization each limit and distort the Bible as the living, dynamic Word of God.

Historically, Anabaptists are prone to the second danger. We kept to the edge of society and kept the Bible there with us.

Now we are trying to fit in culturally. But we do not always bring the Bible back with us—at least not the prophetic, liberating parts about the idolatry of nationalism, the diversion of consumption, the false logic of violence and retribution, and the false hope of technology.

Disciples of Jesus are called to be counter-cultural. But this does not mean being anti-cultural.

First, it means practicing cultural hermeneutics—careful interpretation of our contexts. Disciples must observe and name the assumptions and meaning-making systems by which we live our daily lives—the things that don't need explanation because they are "just there."

Second, it means being culturally eccentric (off-centered). Having identified cultural focal points, disciples can now identify how Christian focal points are different:

- allegiance to Jesus the Lamb is a different focal point than allegiance to a powerful nation;
- living simply is a different focal



point than amassing wealth;

- reconciliation is different focal point than war and punishment;
- the slow patient work of God in the Incarnation is a different focal point than the speed and "efficiency" of technology.

Living faithfully and fruitfully today requires us to be active readers of both the Bible and culture. ●

Andy Brubacher Kaethler combines teaching seminary students with directing !Explore: A Theological Program for High School Youth (visit www.ambs.edu/explore). Together with Bob Yoder, he edited *Youth ministry at a Crossroads: Tending to the faith formation of Mennonite youth*, published in 2011.



YOUR GIFTS AT WORK

The *Jesus Tribe: Grace stories from Congo's Mennonites, 1912-2012* is the latest release from the Institute of Mennonite Studies at AMBS. In this book, coordinated by Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, Christians in the Congo tell stories of how they encountered Jesus. Pastor Benjamin Mubenga, President of the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Congo, signed copies of the book at AMBS, including a copy for student Deborah-Ruth Ferber.

The Anabaptist prayer book, the semi-annual *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*, recent release *Mediation in Pastoral Care* and many other resources from the Institute of Mennonite Studies aim to help pastors, scholars and people involved in the life of the church. Your gifts to AMBS support this ministry, extending seminary materials to Sunday school teachers, pastoral counselors, youth pastors and others at work in the church. ●

President's Window

Sara Wenger Shenk, President

AMBS Window
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The purpose of AMBS Window is to invite readers to call people to leadership ministries, and to provide ways for readers to become involved with AMBS through financial support, prayer support and student recruiting.

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There is nothing more important for an Anabaptist seminary than to have a stellar Bible faculty—which AMBS has. But AMBS professors in every discipline know that reading the Bible is central to their work, including the three remarkable new professors featured in this *Window*.

At AMBS we are asking with renewed intrigue—what does it mean to be an Anabaptist seminary? As a learning community with a revitalized Anabaptist identity, we've come to a ringing clarity: we will immerse ourselves in the Bible.

We observe the early Anabaptists' wholehearted love and undivided allegiance to God. In order to know God, they immersed themselves in the Scriptures, in worship and in prayer.

But the Anabaptists didn't stop there. With down-to-earth chutzpah, they obeyed Jesus in radically observable ways and in so doing, became a visible community, an activist "body of Christ" committed to reconciling work in the world.

We see abundant evidence that the early Anabaptists were alive to the Spirit. They courageously witnessed in the courts and public squares. They welcomed the Spirit's guidance for interpreting Scripture together. They exemplified a practical spirituality and a joy-filled discipleship that transformed individuals and entire communities.

For my prayer this morning, I opened

Take Our Moments and Our Days: an Anabaptist Prayer Book and read these words: "Give heed, my people, to my teaching; I will open my mouth in a parable. The next generation too should arise and tell their children that they too should set their hope in God." This Call to Praise followed: "O God, your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path . . ."

I am blessed by the Scripture-filled prayers and readings from this Anabaptist prayer book—a priceless gift of AMBS faculty to the church.

Many persons long to recover the transforming power of the Bible. The AMBS learning community invites followers of Jesus Christ to practice with us as we read, interpret, preach, pray, sing and dramatically tell the biblical narratives. We delight in the Scripture's enduring ability to reveal God to us. ●

PANORAMA

Spring online courses: 2 options

Two online options are available next spring: for-credit semester courses and non-credit, graduate-level online short courses.

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- Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture, taught by Loren Johns

Non-credit Anabaptist Short Courses:
www.ambs.edu/churchleadershipcenter/Anabaptist-short-courses.cfm

- Exploring Anabaptist History and Theology in the 16th Century, taught by Lois Barrett (Feb.–March)
- Understanding Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture: What's Different and Why?, taught by Loren Johns (April–May)

Webinars bring resources to you

- **Lent Planning**, Feb. 7 (7:30 p.m.), with Rachel Miller Jacobs
- **Feeding the Spiritual Hungers of Contemporary Christians**, Feb. 20

(2 p.m.) with Marlene Kropf and Dan Shrock

- **Expanding Your Ministry: Getting Started in Group Spiritual Direction**, Feb. 20 (7:30 p.m.), with Marlene Kropf and Dan Schrock
- **Women Leaders: Engaging Race and Gender in the Church**, March 13, with Joanna Shenk, Regina Shands Stoltzfus and Linda Gehman
- **Discerning the Powers: Moral Discernment, Theology and Mission**, May 1, with Jamie Pitts ●



The view from inside Aida camp



Part of the wall surrounding Aida camp

Banana trees and justice

Living in Palestine words and ideas rarely have simple meanings

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KHOLOUD AL AJARMA

Special to Young Voices

When I was asked to write an article for *Canadian Mennonite*, I did not know where to start. I have so many stories to tell, but these stories are complicated, given the history my homeland, Palestine. It has both a difficult present and uncertain future. I wondered, should I write about the geographical spaces, the land, the conflict or the people. Each of these and many other aspects can be very problematic and there is no easy way to explain them.

Homeland is the name I like to call my country. Home is a very dense concept on its own, without adding the additional layers of being a Palestinian refugee. Many writers, researchers and even philosophers have tried to define the meaning of home. Where I come from is a very beautiful land, but that land is battered with conflict. I was born in a refugee camp, meanwhile the

rolling hills of my family home lie only 60 km away in Ajjur, a village I am not allowed to visit, never mind return to. Torn from that family land, I now call Aida refugee camp home. Aida is a word that means “return.”

It turns out, in my country you might find tricky meanings to every word—definitions that you might not find in dictionaries but rather on the ground. Words like camp, prison, wall and apartheid lose their original meaning and become specific to our time and space. Even numbers lose or gain their significance as they become tied to political matters and national history, 1948, 1967 . . .

Where I come from, the living and the dead are also different from what those words mean elsewhere. Here, you can frequently hear terms like “living dead” and



Kholoud Al Ajarma is a young Palestinian now studying at the University of Bergen in Norway

“dead living.” Such expressions refer to the everyday life in which some people die so the others can live, or where the mere act of trying to live can lead to death.

Furthermore, daily calm and peace processes can be mistaken for true interpretations of justice and freedom. While it may appear to be peaceful on the surface it does not live up to the true definition of sustainable peace based on principles of justice.

I will tell you a story. It might help you to understand my homeland.

A few months ago, the sun was shining and small children gathered around me before I accompanied some people on a trip to Jericho. One hundred people were leaving the narrow streets, walls and watch-towers of Aida camp on a day adventure.

I remember a child pointing out the window of the bus exclaiming, “Look, this is a banana tree!” With his brown eyes wide open and a big smile of his small face, Sami turned and addressed his brother, Mohammad. When Mohammad heard his brother’s words, he jumped to the window to see these trees. Out of curiosity, I turned my head to see what they were talking about. I looked out of the window and saw a long line of Palm trees on the road to

Jericho. No banana tree.

I was surprised; I could neither smile at children’s innocence, nor feel sad for this 12-year-old who grew up in a place where he never saw banana trees. People in the refugee camp buy their bananas from the market. These children are very clever, they learn in school that bananas were planted in Jericho, but there is not enough land in the camp for banana trees so they have never seen them grow. Because of their surroundings and living situation appearances and truth have been confused.

That’s sad! However I knew there was hope that someday this child will learn the difference between banana and palm trees. Similarly I hope he will realize the truth that principles like freedom, peace and justice are just empty words if not practiced. That even though there is a peace process or calm, it is not the same as an everlasting peace based on principles of justice.

In Palestine both life and words are confusing, inverted from what they mean elsewhere. But there is hope that with time, peace and justice will be restored to their true meaning and practiced across my homeland. ☿

Fighting against ourselves

While making peace with everyone else, Mennonites are busy fighting other Mennonites

BY SCOTT BERGEN

Special to Young Voices
WINNIPEG, MB



Bergen

I remember standing at the entrance to the cathedral in the German city of Muenster, gazing upwards at the metal cages suspended from the bell tower.

I listened as my Mennonite high school teachers explained that these cages were the place where early Anabaptist leaders were hung to die by the Catholic Church five centuries ago.

“Wow,” I thought to myself, “to think that at one time Mennonites were killed simply for believing something different.”

It would be a few more years before I learned that the early Anabaptists that

hung to die in those cages were not the upstanding spiritual leaders I thought they were, but rather, led a violent sect of Anabaptism which early Mennonites would later take pains to distance themselves from.

Selectively remembering—or even misremembering—our own histories is human nature. Whether cringing when we look at old photos of ourselves (“Did my hair really look like that?”) to misremembering who the Anabaptists that were killed in Muenster really were, we try to avoid those uncomfortable parts of our past, selectively

remembering or misremembering our history to make it easier to swallow.

But just because we try not to think about our shortfalls does not mean they do not exist.

The history of Mennonites which I was taught when growing up went something like this: from our very beginning 500 years ago, Mennonites valued peace, justice, and equality. During the Reformation, Mennonites encouraged women to teach and preach alongside men. When the state church persecuted Mennonites for their beliefs, those early believers chose to be drowned or burned alive rather than lie about the type of God they believed in. Mennonites spent the next few hundred years moving around, facing uncertainty in new lands that promised them a place to practice their peaceful, hardworking lives without having to serve in the military. In the twentieth century, Mennonites established organizations to promote development projects and peace initiatives around the world, began inter-faith dialogues in an effort to reach out to others, and petitioned their governments to spend money on social programs instead of warfare.

While this is all true, it is an incredibly selective history, and it ignores and misremembers large parts of who Mennonites are, and who we have always been.

For example, we forget that shortly after the Reformation, women were largely relegated back to the pews as men regained nearly exclusive control of church leadership. We forget that Mennonite leaders banned members who disagreed with them and threatened that if their spouses so much as spoke with their excommunicated partner, they too would be cast out of the community. We forget that as Mennonites set up farms in places like Prussia, Canada and Paraguay, we displaced Aborigines who had been living there for thousands of years.

One of the biggest things that Mennonites forget is that while we go to great lengths to reach out to those outside of our communities, we have spent centuries arguing amongst ourselves and breaking ranks with one another inside those same groups.

The Mennonite church is rife with divisions and schisms, many of which have

been born out of disagreements between members. Rather than sorting through or living with differences, each side establishes its own church where their specific beliefs could go unquestioned. Many of these splintered Mennonite groups join together today under the Mennonite World Conference, but many others refuse to join, convinced that they alone practice true Christianity.

Within our congregations and communities, Mennonites put a fair amount of effort into fighting amongst ourselves and condemning each other. I know Mennonites who believe that unless you speak a certain language, you cannot possibly be a Mennonite. I know congregations who have threatened to leave their area conference, and others who have already left out of fear that the conference might choose to affirm gay relationships.

I know of a congregation that split into two because half of the church wanted to use microphones in their services and the other half wanted to worship without microphones. Only a culture that nurtures self-righteousness and division can separate people over such things. It is time that we faced the fact that this destructive culture of infighting and division is as much a part of the Mennonite identity as working for peace is.

What is so upsetting about this culture of division is that it tends to be the most painful for those who are already the most vulnerable. Take, for example, one of the most divisive issues facing the Mennonite church today—whether gay relationships are acceptable or not. While Canada has some of the world's most inclusive laws for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people (LGBT), it is still not easy to be different. LGBTs are at a disproportionately higher risk of being bullied, harassed, and assaulted than the general population.

Bullying has dire consequences, and in this case, it has meant that LGBTs in Canada are at increased risk of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, with LGBT youth at an up to seven times higher risk of attempting suicide than their heterosexual peers (Centre for Suicide Prevention, Calgary; EGALÉ Canada).

It would make sense that Mennonites, given their history of standing up for the

It's time that we faced the fact that this destructive culture of infighting and division is as much a part of the Mennonite identity as working for peace is.

most vulnerable in society and fighting against injustice, would rush to make their congregations safe and inclusive spaces for those who are oppressed. Yet instead of aligning with those who are marginalized by their sexuality—many of whom are members and youth in their own congregations—Mennonites have spent the last number of years fighting with each other over the legitimacy of same-sex relationships, leaving countless LGBT people, along with their families, friends, and allies, even more excluded than ever.

While Mennonites are fantastic at reaching out to those outside our doors, we are

also fantastic at harming the very people who sit beside us in the pews every week. It is absolutely essential that we face the hard reality of how we hurt others, especially those who are closest to us. If we do not, we can never become the peacemakers our selective memory tells us we are, and we will continue to rip the Mennonite church—and each other—to shreds. ❧

Scott Bergen lives in Winnipeg, where he struggles to understand and navigate the ways in which Mennonites are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive.

Church's "green team" turns into area church initiative

BY RACHEL BERGEN

Young Voices Co-Editor
ABBOTSFORD, BC

In an attempt to help their church become more environmentally friendly, Emmanuel Mennonite Church has done some environmental audits and proposals. The ideas proposed have become a basis for a Mennonite Church B.C. environmental stewardship initiative.

When Pastor April Yamasaki called on interested church members to participate in a meeting on Nov. 1 to brainstorm ideas for the church to take the ideas of environmental stewardship to a practical level, people of all ages participated.

We ranged in age from grade 12 to 20-something to middle-aged and retired and there was great energy in the group," she said.

The ideas put forth ranged from putting safe battery disposal containers in the foyer, which they have already installed, to having a Advent children's feature about green Christmas wrapping, Yamasaki said.

Some members of the "green team" even represent Emmanuel on Mennonite Central Committee B.C.'s Service Peace and Justice committee.

According to Henry Krause, pastor of Langley Mennonite Fellowship in B.C. and chair of Mennonite Church B.C.'s Service

Peace and Justice committee, the area church is just in the beginning stages of working on this environmental agenda, but they are optimistic about the future.

"We're hoping to put together a team or group that can work on this agenda on behalf of the Service Peace and Justice committee," he said.

Mennonite Church B.C. is currently working on connections with congregations to invite them to do energy audits of their buildings. They are also connecting more with A Rocha, an international Christian organization that engages in research, environmental education, and community-based conservation projects and the Mennonite Creation Care Network.

The committee is meeting on Nov. 20 to connect with more people and to find ways of empowering them to take the next steps.

"This is obviously a very important issue because it impacts our lives and the environment we live in, as well as a call to take good care of it. It impacts my children, my future grandchildren and it's what we're called to do," Krause said. ❧

Calendar

British Columbia

Feb. 8,9: MCC winter banquet at Sardis Community Church, Chilliwack (8) and Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond (9). Contact MCC B.C. at 604-850-6639 or visit bc.mcc.org/whatwedo/events.

Feb. 8-10: Young adult retreat at Camp Squeah.

Feb. 15,16: MCC winter banquet at Bakerview M.B. Church, Abbotsford (15) and South Langley M.B. Church, Langley (16). Contact MCC B.C. at 604-850-6639 or visit bc.mcc.org/whatwedo/events.

Feb. 23: MCBC annual meeting and LEAD conference.

Apr. 12-14: Youth Jr. Impact retreat at Camp Squeah.

Saskatchewan

Dec. 14: Buncha Guys Concert at Rosthern Junior College.

Dec. 15: RJC Choir Concert at Knox United Church, Saskatoon.

Dec. 21: RJC Christmas Choir Concert at RJC, 7 p.m.

Jan. 4-5: RJC Alumni Tournament of Memories.

Jan. 18: RJC Friday Night Live Youth Event.

Jan. 25-27: SMYO Sr. Youth Retreat at Shekinah Retreat Centre.

Feb. 3: Choir Concert at Third Avenue United Church, Saskatoon, featuring RJC Chorale, CMU Male Choir, Sonrisa and Buncha Guys.

Feb. 22-23: MC Sask Annual delegate sessions at Rosthern Junior College.

March 17: RJC Guys & Pies fundraising event.

Manitoba

Dec. 3: Westgate Collegiate Christmas concert at Westminster United Church, 7 p.m.

Dec. 9: Sommerfeld Mennonite Church mass choir Christmas concert, Winkler Mennonite Sommerfeld Church, 7 p.m.

Dec. 20,21: MCI Christmas concerts, at Buhler Hall, Gretna, at 7:30 p.m. each night.

Dec. 22: Canadian Foodgrains Bank fundraising concert, "Singin' in the Grain," at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Winkler with Winkler Men's Community Choir, 7:30 p.m.

Jan. 15: Grade 6 day at Westgate Collegiate.

Jan. 30-31: Westgate Collegiate junior high three one-act plays at the Franco-Manitoban Centre.

Feb. 1: CMU Campus visit day.

Feb. 6: Open House at Westgate Collegiate, 7 p.m.

Feb. 7-9: Worship + Imagination at CMU.

Feb. 21: CMU Open House for perspective students.

March 3: CMU Choral Connections.

March 7-9: MCI Musical at Buhler Hall, Gretna.

March 15: CMU Campus visit day.

Ontario

Dec. 1: Wayne Gilpin Singers Christmas concert at St. John the Evangelist Church, Water St., Kitchener, 8 p.m.

Dec. 2: Inter-Mennonite Children's Choir presents "In Excelsis Deo" at St. John the Evangelist Church, Water St., Kitchener, 3 p.m.

Dec 8: Handel's *Messiah* by Menno Singers with Mennonite Mass Choir and KW Symphony Orchestra at Centre in the Square, Kitchener, 7:30 p.m.

Dec. 11: Rockway Mennonite Collegiate Christmas concert at St. Matthews Lutheran Church, Kitchener, 7:30 p.m.

Dec. 31: New Year's celebration at Milverton Mennonite Fellowship with performances by Rescue Junction and Kingsway Quartet. Dessert extravaganza at intermission. Call 519-595-8762 for information.

Jan. 15: Rockway Mennonite Collegiate grade 9 information night, 6:30 p.m.

Feb. 9: Valentine banquet fundraiser for Mennonite and Brethren Marriage Encounter with speaker Ruth Smith Meyer. For more information call 519-669-1005 or visit marriageencounter.ec.com.

March 23: Menno Singers concert, Bach and Zelenka at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Kitchener, 8 p.m. Ticket information at mennosingers.com.

To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send Calendar announcements eight weeks in advance of the event date by e-mail to calendar@canadianmennonite.org.

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For further details and submission requirements, please go to www.columbiabc.edu/careers.

MDS PHOTO BY STEVE CAMPBELL



A Mennonite Disaster Service chain saw crew clears trees from a roadway in Garrett County, Maryland, where Hurricane Sandy brought heavy snow. Volunteers worked in tandem with road crews and line repair trucks to clear roads as the repairs took place. Tree removal and clean-up plans are being made for Rhode Island and Connecticut and MDS volunteers from units in several other states have responded locally to clean-up and repair needs. Immediately after the storm, Kevin King, executive director of MDS, and representatives from MDS Region I travelled to Staten Island to coordinate a plan for a long-term clean up response. King described an area 10-miles-long and over a half-mile wide as “block after block of devastation.” MDS is working with the Oasis Christian Center in Staten Island and will work alongside other NY churches. Readers can follow the response to Hurricane Sandy at mds.mennonite.net or at the MDS Facebook page.

MCC PHOTO BY WAWA CHEGE

Camp Trazily, about three miles south of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, was flooded by the rain caused by Hurricane Sandy. Parts of Haiti received as much as 20 inches (508 mm) of rain, flooding tent camps and killing 54 people according to reports from the Haitian government. Loss to livestock, crops and infrastructure are estimated at \$104 million. More than 370,000 people have been living in tents since the January 2010 earthquake. In response, MCC is distributing relief kits, blankets and canned meat it had positioned in Haiti prior to the hurricane season. MCC also is exploring a response in Cuba, where more than 300,000 people have been evacuated, 200,000 homes damaged and 74,000 acres of crops destroyed. The Cuba Council of Churches, a Mennonite Church Canada partner in Cuba, responded quickly to the crisis. After assessing damages, an emergency committee was struck and proceeded to connect with other ecumenical movements and agencies to raise funds and encourage others to collect food, clothing, and tools for reconstruction.

