

Defund the police?

In Winnipeg, a growing group of Mennonites questions the role of law enforcement, pg. 4

INSIDE

- A more inclusive story 13
- 'Whatever happened to simply living?' 14
- 'A handbook for being human' 23

EDITORIAL

Ordinary time

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive Editor



Traditionally, Mennonite churches have recognized the special times of the church year: Christmas (along with the season of Advent and Epiphany) and Easter (with the season of Lent and the Day of Pentecost). Then there's the time in between—what is labelled “ordinary time” in the church calendar. The season begins with the Sunday after Pentecost; in 2021 that was May 30. It ends when Advent begins, at the end of November.

The term, “ordinary” here has to do with “ordinals” for counting the Sundays between the two great Christian celebrations. But in another sense, it could also refer to the daily-ness, the routine of living as Jesus-followers when there's nothing special to celebrate.

During ordinary time, we may have settled into the patterns that keep things going at an even keel. Or, for some, this has been a time of distraction, with the end of one school year and beginning of another, along with gardening, vacations, and more. This year's in-between time has also included the challenges of a world in pandemic mode. We have struggled with illness and its prevention, with uncertainties and arguments over facts.

Some of us find that the portions of scripture suggested by the Revised Common Lectionary help us pay attention to things of the Spirit, amidst the distractions and the boredom of everyday life. These passages connect us to millions of Christians around the world and they anchor us in the church's

historical patterns of worship. Reading and praying with the Bible, we remember that God is present in all time—both the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Right now, a few themes emerge amidst the ordinary:

Reconciliation. This year, the Canadian government designated September 30 as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This is a time to learn about the past injustices of the indigenous residential schools and to take action toward more respect and equity. Some in the Mennonite community are asking how to better tell the story of their European ancestors, as it relates to the original inhabitants of this land. See, for example, “A more inclusive story,” on page 13.

In this season, our prayers can guide us to see the consequences of past actions and to imagine ways to practice reconciliation in our own communities.

Creation care. The world is in a climate crisis, something that concerns all who love God's creation. September 1 through October 4, the World Council of Churches celebrates its annual Season of Creation, calling Christians to pray and work for a healthy planet. On the back cover of this issue, you'll see examples of Mennonites calling attention to earth-despoiling practices.

This is a season for prayer, as representatives of many nations will gather for the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference, to be held Oct. 31 to Nov. 12, in Glasgow, Scotland. We pray for

fruitful dialogue and concrete actions as the world's nations live out their resolutions to care for the Earth.

Witness. This year Mennonite Church Canada is inviting congregations to celebrate International Witness Sunday, on October 24. This is a time to recognize the ways in which our church's people and financial resources are helping to spread God's healing and hope around the world. It's also an invitation to take part in that ministry. You can find more information here: canadianmennonite.org/iwsunday.

As Thanksgiving Day approaches, we express gratitude for all of God's faithful witnesses, whether on the other side of the world or in our own backyards. We offer thanks for God's many good gifts and for the way in which we can share them with others.

In this ordinary time, when some of us experience life as ho-hum and others find ourselves—like Jesus' friend Martha—distracted by many things, we are invited to discern God at work around us. We pray the words that Jesus taught: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” And we heed Christ's invitation to follow him—in the ordinariness of life.

New writer

I'm pleased to welcome Christen Kong to the *Canadian Mennonite* team, with the assignment to report from Toronto and surrounding areas. She attends Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church and is enrolled in a masters' program in social work. Christen was selected as the official MC Canada delegate for the Mennonite World Conference Global Youth Summit to be held next year in Indonesia. See two of her articles on pages 19 and 22. We look forward to reading more. ☺



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CONTENTS

SEPTEMBER 27, 2021 / VOL. 25, NO. 20

ABOUT THE COVER:

Daniel Friesen, pictured at Vimy Ridge Park in Winnipeg on Sept. 13, 2021, goes to Charleswood Mennonite Church and organizes with Winnipeg Police Cause Harm. See page 4.

PHOTO BY AARON EPP / CANADIAN MENNONITE

MDS launches effort to help drought-affected farmers 16

Mennonite Disaster Service has launched Hay West, inviting donations of hay to family farms in Saskatchewan.

Toronto-area leaders reflect on virtual worship 19

Christen Kong interviewed church leaders about their experiences with onscreen worship.

The end of an era at MHC Gallery 24

Ray Dirks, the founder and curator of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, has retired. **Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe** reviews his legacy.

'What are you hiding behind the mask?' 26

Donna Schulz reports on a Saskatoon calligrapher who creates facemask artwork, for fun and reflection.

Defund the police? 4

Aaron Epp reports on the growing group of Mennonites in Winnipeg who are questioning the role of law enforcement.



Regular features:

For discussion 7 Readers write 8 Milestones 9
A moment from yesterday 10 Online NOW! 29
Schools Directory 30 Calendar 31 Classifieds 31

Holy Space 10

Ryan Siemens

Weak ties matter 11

Arli Klassen

The misplaced pursuit of authenticity 12

Troy Watson

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FEATURE

Defund the police?

In Winnipeg, a growing group of Mennonites questions the role of law enforcement

Story and photos by Aaron Epp
Online Media Manager
WINNIPEG

On March 11, 2020, the day before Manitoba reported its first infection of the coronavirus, Bronwyn Dobchuk-Land stood up in a multipurpose room at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg to give a lecture exploring the question: How is it that Winnipeg has so many police, and so little justice and peace?

Over the course of her hour-long talk, the University of Winnipeg criminal justice professor examined how nearly 30 percent of Winnipeg's city budget is spent on the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS), a bigger single portion than any other spending pot in the city coffers. At the same time, Dobchuk-Land said, the WPS doesn't prevent crime, and officers spend most of their time responding to situations that they don't really have the tools or training to actually solve or resolve—such as domestic violence-related incidents and well-being checks.

Dobchuk-Land wondered what Winnipeg might look like if 10 years ago, when the police budget started to drastically inflate, the city had chosen instead to invest in public housing, treatment facilities, detox centres, 24-hour safe spaces for people using drugs, increases in the minimum wage, increases in social assistance, and crisis response teams with nurses and mental health professionals at the centre.

“People who reached crisis points that we hear about as criminal incidents in the news would not reach those points if they had interventions earlier on,” Dobchuk-Land said, adding later: “We have to shift where we direct energy and resources; we have to stop investing in trying hard to improve institutions that are never going to be well-equipped to solve the complex needs that exist in our society.”



The Winnipeg Police Service sparked outrage in April 2020 when one of its officers shot 16-year-old Eishia Hudson following a robbery, car chase and collision. Hudson died in hospital.

David Driedger, a pastor at First Mennonite, invited Dobchuk-Land to give the lecture in an attempt to start a conversation at the church about the role of police in society. Driedger considered joining the RCMP when he was a young adult, but over the last year-and-a-half, he has become increasingly invested in understanding and promoting the idea of defunding and abolishing the police.

“For Mennonites wishing to fully develop and follow a peace stance, it should be given more attention,” Driedger told *Canadian Mennonite* in June.

Driedger is part of a growing group of Winnipeggers, including a number of Mennonites, who are critical of policing. The murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis Police Department officer Derek Chauvin—while several of Chauvin’s peers watched and did nothing—in May 2020 provoked a reckoning over the role of police in society, but the conversation in Winnipeg started gaining momentum even earlier. The month before Floyd’s murder, the WPS sparked outrage when one of its officers shot Eishia Hudson, a 16-year-old Indigenous youth, following a robbery, car chase and collision. Hudson died in hospital. (The Independent Investigation Unit of Manitoba, which investigates all serious incidents involving police officers in the province, announced in January that no criminal charges would be laid against the officer who shot Hudson.)

Oppressive structures

Julia Thiessen, a member at Charleswood Mennonite Church, chooses her words carefully when describing her interest in police and prison abolition. For Thiessen, abolition is an ideal that she’s not sure society will ever reach. At the same time, it’s worth working toward.

She stresses that she critiques the system of policing, rather than individual people who are police officers. “We all participate in institutions that are flawed and structures that are oppressive, so when I start being critical of



Daniel Friesen is critical of the Winnipeg Police Service. ‘If we reallocate resources away from police and toward programs and services that meet people’s needs... the need for police will shrink and go away entirely,’ he says.

policing, it’s not because that’s the only piece of our society that’s oppressive,” she said, citing herself as an example: “I’m a teacher, and one of the things I had to learn is how education is oppressive.”

Thiessen’s opposition to policing comes from the same place as her opposition to the military: a commitment to nonviolence inspired by the life of Jesus.

“One thing [policing] is very effective at is turning those people who should be our neighbours into our enemies, and that’s where I would come back to my Anabaptist principles,” she said. “To all those who are hesitant about abolition because they feel [that] police protect them, I would ask: Protect you from whom? And why are those people your enemies?”

“We know that by far the people who are criminalized are poor and racialized, and their crimes are largely participating in a street economy and not having the access [to the same resources] that those who are wealthy have. If those are our enemies, if that’s who we need to be protected from, then I think we need to be neighbours differently and be better neighbours.”

Nate De Avila, who goes to Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, has been interested in police and prison abolition for more than a decade. He links those

interests to both his beliefs as an Anabaptist Christian and his grandparents’ experiences as conscientious objectors.

“The recent trend of equipping the police with what were previously military-grade weapons and defenses makes it pretty easy to look at your own [Mennonite] history and think about the types of violence that your own family was avoiding in the past, and realizing those capabilities are walking up and down your street now, as opposed to being only flexed during a war,” De Avila said.

He is quick to point to the history of community organizers, many of them from BIPOC communities, who have long called for defunding the police and abolishing prisons.

“I would hope that people understand police defunding and prison abolition as a movement toward greater safety for everyone,” De Avila said. “Oftentimes, it gets represented as exactly the opposite—as a movement toward chaos—and it’s just not that.”

Reallocate resources

Last month, the *Winnipeg Free Press* published a feature article exploring the rising cost of emergency services in Winnipeg. The article reported that, despite contrary claims of law enforcement, union leaders and criminal-justice policy makers, every academic who spoke to the *Free Press* said there is no relationship between police funding and crime rates.

“How much money we put into policing has no impact on crime—every criminologist, regardless of political stripe, will tell you that,” Christian Leuprecht, a professor at both the Royal Military College of Canada and Queen’s University, told the *Free Press*.

Dobchuk-Land expressed something similar during her lecture: “...We know as a matter of fact that rates of policing are not correlated with rates of crime—there’s very little relationship. The levers of crime, so to speak, and violence, are outside the control of the police.”

In September 2019, a community

(Continued on page 7)

Four police voices

STORY AND PHOTO BY AARON EPP

Gord Friesen recalls some of what he was thinking when, in 1982, he joined the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) at the age of 20: “As Mennonites and as pacifists, if we expect there to be policing in our community... then why shouldn’t we be expected to do it?”

Canadian Mennonite spoke to Friesen and three other current or former members of the WPS. All four grew up in Mennonite congregations in southern Manitoba. One is active in a Mennonite church today; all four identify as Mennonite. They answered a range of questions, including (but not limited to): What drew you to police work? How do you reconcile coming from a pacifist tradition and carrying a gun? What do you enjoy about your work? What do you think about community members who are calling to defund the police?

Michael Klassen was in his early 20s and working in a grocery store when he witnessed first-hand the way the police helped his friend who was in distress. Klassen had been thinking about changing careers to something that would give him more of a challenge, and the incident inspired him to join the WPS.

“After seeing that, [I thought]: that is an important job,” said Klassen, who has been with the service for 17 years. “That is really what I felt was a calling.”

For Andy Wahl, joining the WPS after spending a decade as a bartender was a way to move into a career where he could give back to the community.

“Every day, we come in and we get to help people,” says Wahl, an 18-year veteran of the force. “It seems like I’m oversimplifying it, but that’s the meat and potatoes of policing. There’s a call for service, someone needs help, and we go and we help.”

Each man said that coming from a heritage that focuses on actively resisting violence and warfare has never conflicted with his work, and that the use of force is always a last resort. The first thing they try

is to mediate the situation by talking with the individuals involved.

“The biggest asset you have as a police officer is your ability to communicate, because every call we go to, we’re engaging with people and we’re talking with people,” Wahl said.

“The police use force to overcome resistance when [they’re] arresting somebody,” added Werner Toews, who retired in 2013 after 25 years with the WPS. “That’s the only reason it’s used. Or, if somebody wants to harm somebody with a knife or weapon,



to stop that threat, you need to use force.... In a society where we want rules, where we want law and order, that’s the price that we have to pay.”

It can be hurtful when people are critical of the police, Klassen said, because the WPS is there to help people.

“I like to compare football players to police officers,” he said. “Just as a football team has a variety of people playing different positions, so does policing.... We may not always agree on everything, but we are all a team, and we all have the same goal.”

“We’re in a crazy profession where the

acts of one person can kind of paint everybody with the same brush,” Wahl added. “It’s a crazy time we live in, but I would just say the men and women of the Winnipeg Police Service [are] there to help. It sounds like a cheesy company line, but it’s true.”

David Driedger, a pastor at First Mennonite Church who is critical of policing, offered a different perspective. Driedger saw a woman in distress lying on the boulevard. He asked her if there was anyone he could call for her. “Don’t call the police,” Driedger recalled the woman saying. “They [called] me an a--h--- and told me to stop wasting their time.” The Instagram account When WPG Police Cause Harm has collected similar stories of police officers allegedly abusing their power and causing citizens distress.

“I just do not see how our current model is in any way adequate, particularly to those most in need of support,” Driedger said.

Friesen, who retired in 2018 after almost 36 years with the WPS, follows Winnipeg Police Cause Harm on Instagram and reads about defunding the police. He is aware of the ways colonialism has shaped policing and the systemic injustice that leads marginalized communities to be overrepresented in the justice system.

While he does not advocate for abolition, Friesen does support police reform.

“I certainly understand defunding the police, and I understand that movement, but I think the police are a bit of a lightning rod for that,” he said. “We come from this community and we’re carrying out community expectations.”

For people like Driedger and organizations like Winnipeg Police Cause Harm, community expectations are changing.

“I totally accept that people will have positive experiences with the police—that in focused situations, [officers will] have done a positive thing,” Driedger said. “I would say that’s in spite of a framework that will inevitably continue to lead to an overall negative impact or is less helpful than we should be working toward.” ☞

(Continued from page 5)

group called Winnipeg Police Cause Harm (WPCH) formed in response to the deaths of several Indigenous and Black people, including Chad Williams, Machuar Madut, Sean Thompson and Randy Cochrane, who died following confrontations with the WPS. The organization does not believe that police and prisons can be reformed, and advocates defunding the WPS and allocating its resources to community organizations that address the root causes of poverty and crime—community organizations that provide the kinds of services Dobchuk-Land outlined in her lecture.

For Daniel Friesen, who attends Charleswood Mennonite Church, joining WPCH in late 2019 was “a no-brainer.”

“It’s a big fight, but it’s very worthy to do,” he said. “[I’m] hoping the arc of history will bend toward a world without police being seen as the obvious way for society to be organized.”

“If we reallocate resources away from police and toward programs and services that meet people’s needs—give people food, give people housing, give people a safe supply of drugs so they can use drugs safely and access to programs so they can stop using if that’s what they want to do, then the need for police will shrink and go away entirely,” Friesen added. “A world without police is a world where we look to meet people’s needs instead of looking for people who seem to be causing problems and [removing] them from society.”

Policing is inextricably linked to Settler colonialism, said River Martin, who attends Sargent Avenue Mennonite and is part of WPCH. As such, not everyone benefits equally from the work of the police.

“[There’s a] culture of serve and protect, but it’s not really that—it’s serve and protect the people we deem valuable,” Martin said. She added that as Black people, she and each of her six siblings have had negative experiences with law enforcement based on their ethnicity (albeit not in Winnipeg). “For

a cause that’s supposed to protect us, it’s really letting us down in a lot of ways and the only people it ends up protecting are rich and white.”

When asked how her views on policing connect to her faith, Martin points to Article 22 in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, which addresses peace, justice and nonresistance. When Martin reads that article, she said, “it’s very clear to me... that [policing] doesn’t fit within the model of peace we’re asked to participate in.” Instead, Mennonites are called to actively engage in a meaningful way with what peace means. “There’s no way you can do that when you are within a system like the police that is inherently built on violence and controlling the population through means of force. There’s no room in there for peace.”

More conversation

Michael Pahl, executive minister of Mennonite Church Manitoba, has tweeted in support of police abolition. The conversation about defunding the police is one that he would like to see more MC Manitoba congregations having.

He points to Defund the Police? An Abolition Curriculum—a multimedia, online curriculum that Mennonite

Church U.S.A. released earlier this year to help congregations and individuals think creatively about personal and community safety in a biblical context—and wonders if Canadian Mennonites could develop a similar resource to aid conversation.

“I know that we have police officers that are... part of our congregations, and we need to do this in a way where they don’t feel personally threatened [and] they can also participate in that conversation,” Pahl said. “There are so many important issues [today]. We can focus on any one of them, but I think it’s important to at least have this as a conversation that’s starting alongside other issues.”

Thiessen wonders why, as the conversation about defunding the police has become more mainstream, the Mennonite church hasn’t already found itself looking at the possibility of abolition.

“I’ve been surprised by the resistance I’ve had from fellow Anabaptists when I share these ideas,” she said. “I think if our nonviolence is going to mean anything today, we need to look at where structural violence is happening in our community and oppose that, whether or not it makes us individually safer.” ❧

❧ For discussion

1. What are some examples of personal encounters you have had with the police? Did you feel respected in these situations? Do you think the police tend to use force or the threat of violence too quickly?
2. According to Bronwyn Dobchuk-Land, the Winnipeg Police Service spends most of its time dealing with domestic violence-related incidents and well-being checks. What are some other ways for society to intervene in these situations?
3. Daniel Friesen believes society needs to reallocate resources away from the police and spend more on people’s needs. Do you agree? What could we do to reduce violence in our society?

—By Barb Draper

See related resources at
www.commonword.ca/go/2541

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OPINION

/// Readers write

✉ What if there had been no war in Afghanistan?

While it is water under the bridge, it is still worth pondering what would have happened if the United States and allies had not gone to war in Afghanistan some 20 years ago. What if the doves had won out and all that money (some two trillion dollars or \$100 billion per year) had been given to Afghanistan's poor? (Afghan per capita GDP is less than \$2,000 per year, compared with Canada's \$55,000 and the more than \$65,000 for the United States.) What we know is that if it could have been done, every Afghan resident would have doubled their income for 20 years and that includes all the Taliban poor as well.

Of course, this is useless pondering, but hopefully one day there will be a world where the world's leading country will not continue to spend more than 10 times that of any other country (including China and Russia) on military expenditures.

PETER A DUECK, VANCOUVER

✉ Shameful to be associated with 'anti-vax' movement

Re: "Will COVID-19 create lasting divisions in churches?" Sept. 13, page 20.

I want to offer plaudits for the excellent article by Will Braun on the thorny issue of COVID-19 vaccines and the divisive role they are playing in our families and churches. While opposition to vaccines first appeared in the early days of immunization for smallpox in the 18th century, the phenomenal historical success of vaccines in vanquishing so many infectious diseases makes it all the more shameful to be associated with the "anti-vax" movement. It feels akin to having survivors of the Titanic bobbing in the frigid waters of the Atlantic, proudly refusing to get into lifeboats as the crew of the Carpathia offered help.

I experience sharp jabs of deep disquietude that such sadly misguided attitudes are openly associated with the Christian church that ostensibly claims to care for others

PAUL THIESSEN, VANCOUVER

The writer is a medical doctor.

✉ Readers respond to CM policy change on pronouns

On Aug. 31, *Canadian Mennonite* posted a

statement on social media, indicating a change in policy to include "they" and "their" to designate individuals who use those pronouns. (See more at "*Canadian Mennonite* responds," Sept. 13, page 8.) Here are selected responses:

Thank you for being open and honest! Thank you for the change in policy. —CHANI WIENS, VIA FACEBOOK

Thank you. It so underscores the fact that words matter, and the respect paid through our choice of words has a priceless effect on individuals throughout society. —RUTH DRIEDGER, VIA FACEBOOK

I'm thankful that @canmenno is taking these steps to prevent this from happening again. I do wish these had been made two years ago when the first article was written. —TIMOTHY WENGER, VIA TWITTER

As a pastor and parent raising a non-binary child in the Mennonite church, I am grateful to see this being acknowledged. I long for my child to see themself accepted and reflected in the broader Mennonite church. Would highly recommend further articles on gender, theology, and Christian community. It is an important growth area for the church. —RACHEL WALLACE, VIA FACEBOOK

If you are determined to portray members of the LGBTQ+ community with understanding and respect, I dearly hope that also means there will be no more homophobic letters to the editor published ever again. —SHAWN KLASSEN-KOOP, VIA FACEBOOK

I affirm this decision. More discussion is needed and very valuable. —JAN FRETZ, VIA FACEBOOK

Thank you for this update. I am grateful for the policy change. —CHRISTY MARTENS-FUNK, VIA FACEBOOK

✉ Church community seems reluctant to speak of God

Re: "Why don't we talk about evangelism?" Aug. 16, page 10.

It is joy to hear that the 2022 Mennonite Church Canada conference has chosen "We Declare" as the theme. I am a product of the tent rallies and films of the 1940s and '50s when revival meetings proclaimed the coming of Christ, like in the next hour,

and the other option would be separation from God in hell. A spectacular Chief White Feather in full feather regalia was the speaker I heard.

Now, more than a half century later, I am not angry about this process. God accepted me. I became a follower of Jesus, which I understood at age 12, meant Christian service. That decision provided a clear goal in life and steered me clear of a lot of sinful activity.

Evangelism is not a welcome word in many of our congregations. I find it difficult that even within the church community there is a reluctance to speak of God in our lives. Faith stories may even avoid any reference to God. This is in the believing body! At times mention is made of luck.

At the same time, we know that Mennonites in southern countries both walk the talk and talk the walk. On the positive side, within the church we are more open to speak of being depressed, discouraged and disappointed.

—JOHN PETERS, WATERLOO, ONT.

We welcome your comments and publish most letters from subscribers. Letters, to be kept to 300 words or less, are the opinion of the writer only and are not to be taken as endorsed by this magazine or the church. Please address issues rather than individuals; personal attacks will not appear in print or online. All letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Send them to letters@canadianmennonite.org and include the author's contact information and mailing address. Preference is given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Bender—Conrado (b. April 2, 2021), to Chris and Arlene Bender, Crosshill Mennonite, Ont.

Kowalko—Ayla Aramburu (b. Aug. 11, 2021), to Caleb and Triana Kowalko, First Mennonite, Calgary.

Majeau—Estée Cathryn (b. Aug. 24, 2021), to Justin and Ladonna Majeau, Morden Mennonite, Man.

Weddings

Friesen/Zappitelli—Julia Friesen and Michael Zappitelli, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., July 29, 2021.

Gyennin/Proudfoot—Kwaku Gyennin and Annora Proudfoot, First Mennonite, Edmonton, Alta., Aug. 28, 2021.

Jantzi/Priestap—Krystle Jantzi and Curtis Priestap, Poole Mennonite, Ont. at the Priestap family farm near Monkton, Ont., on June 25, 2021.

Deaths

Bartel—Justina (nee Sawatzky), 95 (b. Nov. 2, 1925; d. Aug.

17, 2021), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Berg—Diedrich (Dick) Tobias, 92 (b. March 16, 1928; d. June 16, 2021), Wideman Mennonite, Markham, Ont.

Derksen—Duane, 64 (b. Oct. 16, 1956; d. July 2, 2021), Bergthal Mennonite, Didsbury, Alta.

Friesen—Erna (nee Suderman), 89 (b. Jan. 8, 1932; d. June 7, 2021), Point Grey Inter-Mennonite, Vancouver.

Gerbrandt—Frank, 92 (b. Feb. 15, 1929; d. July 23, 2021), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Greenwood—Evelyn (nee Konrad), 69 (b. Dec. 27, 1951; d. Sept. 6, 2021), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Heffelfinger—Margaret (nee Paetkau), 81 (b. March 2, 1940; d. Aug. 6, 2021), First Mennonite, Edmonton, Alta.

Howorth—Brenda Marie (nee Nafziger), 67 (b. July 11, 1954; d. Aug. 19, 2021), Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

Klassen—Herman, 90 (b. Jan. 26, 1930; d. May 25, 2020) Hoffungsfelder Mennonite, Glenbush, Sask.

Koop—Henry, 93 (b. June 15, 1928; d. July 19, 2021), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Kroeker—Linda Stephanie, 93 (b. Dec. 13, 1927; d. June 1, 2021), Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Lazar—Sarah Grace, 29 (b. June 1, 1992; d. Aug. 17, 2021), Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Letkemann—David, 87 (b. Aug. 16, 1933; d. Aug. 2, 2021), Bergthal Mennonite, Didsbury, Alta.

Lundy—David, 75 (b. May 3, 1946; d. Aug. 5, 2021), Crosshill Mennonite, Ont.

Martin—Albert, 95 (b. July 4, 1926; d. Aug. 26, 2021), Breslau Mennonite, Ont.

Neufeld—Vernon (Vern), 87 (d. Aug. 21, 2021), Lethbridge Mennonite, Alta.

Penner—Elvin, 85 (b. Jan. 15, 1936; d. July 16, 2021), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Rempel—Norma, (nee Riekman), 83 (b. June 14, 1938; d. Aug. 21, 2021), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Rempel—Winona Susan (nee Janzen), 85 (b. Aug. 16, 1935; d. July 26, 2021), Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Richert—Lydia (nee Harms), 91 (b. Sept. 1, 1929; d. June 28, 2021), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Siemens—Esther (Toews), 93 (b. Feb. 2, 1928; d. Aug. 27, 2021), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Thiessen—Bobby, 69 (b. Aug. 9, 1952; d. Aug. 26, 2021), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Wagler—Clare Joseph, 74 (b. June 21, 1947; d. June 28, 2021), Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

Wiebe—George, 93 (b. Jan. 24, 1928; d. June 25, 2021), Hoffungsfelder Mennonite, Glenbush, 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 also include birth date and last name at birth if available.

FROM OUR LEADERS

Holy space

Ryan Siemens

When I was director of Person-to-Person, a prison visitation program started by Mennonite Church Saskatchewan in the early 1970s, the V&C Room (Visitors and Correspondence Room) was often a place of holy space. While the prison system has a strict policy of nothing in and nothing out, God seemed to have little interest in following those guidelines. In a place so sealed off for protection and control, when volunteer visitors and inmates gathered around small tables for communion over coffee and KitKats, often the Spirit would show up freely and turn strangers into friends.

I was reminded recently about this holy space between people when I attended the book launch of Betty Pries' new book, *The Space Between Us: Conversations about Transforming Conflict*. As we continue to find ourselves navigating the world of not-quite-but-I-really-wish-it-was-post-COVID-now, we have come to see how our collective experience plays deeply into the polarizations of our times.

Recently, listening to NPR News, I heard that vaccination rates in the

United States can be directly tied to voting patterns of that last election. Districts (ridings) that voted in favour of Joe Biden had higher vaccination rates, while those that voted in favour of Trump, had lower rates.

Vaccinations are widely accepted and encouraged across the political spectrum in Canadian federal elections (with nuance of course), but as hospitals are being stretched to the limit of capacity for care and as our health care system edges towards buckling (at least here in Saskatchewan), there are protesters outside hospitals, demanding a return to pre-pandemic realities. These are deeply disturbing and disheartening scenes to witness. The people who have borne the brunt of this pandemic do not deserve this reaction; they deserve our praise and deep gratitude for caring for our citizens and community members! Thank you.

Yet, we find ourselves unable to move past the impasse. Families, communities, friends and congregations have been divided by the pandemic and the responses. This is causing serious harm in relationship, and in illness, as the fourth wave spreads through the

unvaccinated, especially children and others unable to receive vaccines.

So how do we reach "those" people who refuse to do what is right for the common good? How do we convince "those" people that their behaviours are having such a dire impact on the community and in our health care system?

When we are as polarized as we are, and when we are so certain in our own perspective that the other must be wrong, it is hard to imagine for a moment that their fear, however real or perceived, is directing their actions as much as our fear, real or perceived, is directing ours. Even when we have logic, facts, and reasoning on our side, acknowledging our own fears, and how they impact who we are, will create space to acknowledge the fear of the other.

At the small table visit in the V&C room, not every connection between a volunteer and inmate was a mutually transformative experience, however, when both inmate and volunteer were vulnerable enough to create space, sometimes the Spirit of transformation would create something beautiful, new, and good. ☿



Ryan Siemens is executive minister of MC Saskatchewan.

A moment from yesterday



On the heels of the Second World War, the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church were concerned about scouting programs that promoted patriotism to boys and girls. In 1957, the Wayfarers girls club was begun and in 1958, Mennonite Publishing House published a Torchbearers guide book and manual for boys. Individual congregations were encouraged to start local clubs that focused on "brotherhood, cooperation, mutual helping and loyalty to the kingdom of God." A yellow pendant was given to each boy, who was then encouraged to earn felt badges and medals upon completion of specific skills. Pictured in 1966, boys at Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church in Winnipeg receive their pendants. Can anyone identify the people?

Text: Conrad Stoesz
Photo: Mennonite Heritage Archives /
Walter Bergen



archives.mhsc.ca

THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

Weak ties matter

Arli Klassen

Long ago I studied both sociology and theology, and I remain intrigued by the relationships between culture and faith. We can't have one without the other. Which influences the other more?

One of the ideas that has intrigued me through this pandemic is the growth in understanding of the important role of acquaintances in our lives, the casual friends we see here and there. Research shows that the more acquaintances in one's social life, and the more regular interactions with those acquaintances, the happier people are. (Guy Winch, *Psychology Today*, 2014).

An article in *The Atlantic* in early 2021 by Amanda Mull indicated how "weak ties" are vital for a good life. On National Public Radio she said that interactions with people who don't know all our secrets and background help us to learn new things and bring joy. "What I found in talking to experts is that people use their weak ties for a sense of grounding, for a sense of community, for a sense of belonging to the world outside of themselves."

Some people find this community in sports, book clubs, pubs, coffeeshops, lunchrooms—and we Jesus-followers find it in church. Our local congregation

is full of "weak ties," relationships with people who provide the faith grounding we need, while belonging to a nearby world outside of ourselves.

That same value in church comes from our experience of our regional church, nationwide church, and the global Anabaptist church. We belong to each other in the context of our faith in God, following Jesus together, and the experience of the Holy Spirit. We learn new things in this wide community of faith, even when we hardly know the people.

In my work at Mennonite World Conference (MWC) I have been recently writing to national Anabaptist church leaders to ask them to contribute their fair share in MWC membership fees. I always include some kind of encouraging word:

"Some of us identify with David in Psalm 22 when he says 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' At other times we identify with David in Psalm 23 when he says 'Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me, your rod and your staff—they comfort me.' Both of these statements are true for David, and for most of us. At the times when God feels far away, that is when we most need

each other to be that comforting rod and staff for each other. That is one of the purposes of the church as the body of Christ, to strengthen each other and pray for each other in our times of need."

This is the response I received from Samson Omondi, the general secretary of the Kenya Mennonite Church:

"Thank you very much for sharing the words of encouragement and hope during this difficult and unpredictable time all over the world. Following the Kenya Government decree to close all worship places for a long duration, it is crystal clear that our congregations are in pathetic shape financially, morally and spiritually. Many of our members lost their jobs, businesses came to a standstill, some work for just half salaries or wages. We absolutely trust the Almighty Father to carry us through amidst the challenges brought about by COVID-19."

The theme of the MWC Assembly in Zimbabwe in 2003 was "Walking with each other in suffering and in joy." It is the church, our faith community, across the street and around the world, that keeps us going. It is the church, a very big community of not-very-close-friends, that grounds us socially and spiritually and gives us a place to belong. ❧



Arli Klassen works with Mennonite World Conference from her Kitchener home.

Et cetera

MCC meat canning season a success

Mennonite Central Committee's meat canning faced challenges in the 2020-2021 season. COVID-19 regulations kept changing, and there were supply chain interruptions and rising meat costs. The mobile canner could not come to Canada at all because the border was closed. Two sites, Chambersburg, Pa., and North Newton, Kan., had room to space out volunteers, so these locations each hosted three weeks of canning. Some volunteers came from a greater distance to help out. In the end, the 2020-2021 canning season yielded 320,000 cans (480,000 pounds) of meat, about half of the total for a normal year.



MCC PHOTO/HEIDI HUBER

Gustav Huber (12), Alan Entz, Alice Jantzen and Don Kauffman put labels on meat cans at the MCC Material Resources Center in North Newton, Kan.

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

The misplaced pursuit of authenticity

Troy Watson

Being authentic has always been important to me. However, what authenticity means or looks like isn't always as straightforward as I'd like. Especially as a pastor.

One of the reasons authenticity has been such a big priority for me is because of my past experiences with church. I grew up in an unhealthy church culture that turned me, and most of my peers, away from organized religion and clergy. Most ministers we met growing up came across as ego-driven, authoritarian or fake. Sometimes all three.

The quest for authenticity has led us into nebulous territory, resulting in a rise of self-centred, manipulative and even narcissistic attitudes.

Even the really nice pastors seemed phony. I mean, who is that gentle and kind all of the time? Seriously. What deep, dark secret are they hiding? Unfortunately, sometimes this cynical speculation turned out to be valid.

A large number of Canadians are suspicious of organized religion and clergy today. The fact that clergy is listed as one of the top ten profession choices for psychopaths doesn't help. But it's not only clergy the masses are wary of these days—it is most forms of authority. The anti-hierarchy and anti-authority attitude of postmodernity caused many of us, especially us Gen-Xers, to question, doubt and challenge all authority and institutional "experts."

Over the past few years, this cynical attitude towards authority and experts has entered an entirely new level of intensity, and at times insanity, in my opinion. Again, this suspicion isn't completely unwarranted. People simply

don't know whom or what to trust. The government, media, judicial system, education system, corporations, big-tech companies, economic institutions, organized religion, have all repeatedly betrayed the public's trust.

As a result, each institution, organization or leader is now striving to be perceived as authentic. In fact, authenticity has become a buzzword in 21st century corporate and professional circles. Whether you're a Fortune 500 CEO, a social media brand, a politician or a pastor, everyone wants to be perceived as authentic.

Seth Godin, a writer and entrepreneur, caught my attention recently when he said, "Authenticity is a crock. Authenticity is overrated. Authenticity is a trap ... the last time you were authentic you were three months old lying in diapers with poop in them, crying."

As someone who values authenticity to a fault, I was taken aback by his words.

Godin explained: "You wake up in the morning and you don't feel like going to work. Being authentic means not going. But you do. For the same reason when you hire a professional to do surgery on your knee or paint your house you don't want them to show up and say, 'I had a fight with my spouse, I'm going to do a lousy job today.' That would be authentic. But that's not what we want. 'Please, fake being the best surgeon in the world today, because that's what I hired, and that's what I need.'"

As Godin continued, he convinced me that authentic isn't what we should be striving for and it's not really what others are looking for in us. At least not the kind of authenticity that means saying and doing what feels natural or right to us in the moment. That kind of authenticity is often an excuse to not be and do our best. It's often a license to be selfish, sloppy, difficult, lazy or rude.

Godin says the kind of authenticity people are really looking for is consistency. "Consistent means you made a promise to me about how I expect you to behave, and you keep that promise. Consistent means keeping promises even when you don't feel like it. Especially when you don't feel like it. A person is authentic when they act the same way whether or not someone is looking."

I think he's right. The quest for authenticity has led us into nebulous territory, resulting in a rise of self-centred, manipulative and even narcissistic attitudes. I think a more helpful question for me moving forward is not "How can I be authentic?" but "How can I fulfill the promise I've made to others?" This leads me back to the covenant tradition of the church.

True authenticity means I first need to be clear on what I've promised, what covenant I've made to God, others and the world regarding how I will speak, act, think and relate to others and creation.

Being clear on my promise, my covenant, and then fulfilling this promise is the most meaningful type of authenticity there is. It's called integrity. ❧



Troy Watson is a pastor at Avon Mennonite Church in Stratford, Ontario.

VIEWPOINT

A more inclusive story

Laura Enns

How can Mennonite historical sites become sites of decolonization and reconciliation? This question has challenged and inspired my husband Joshua and me for the past four years, as we have served as hosts of Brubacher House Museum. This is an 1850's Pennsylvania German Mennonite farmhouse owned by the University of Waterloo and operated in partnership with Conrad Grebel University College and the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.

As Mennonites, and Canadians in general, wrestle with the legacy of colonialism and attempt to reconcile this with the much longer history of Indigenous peoples on this land, we have been working to unravel the story of our complicity in the colonization and dispossession of Indigenous lands, and the cultural genocide that has taken place, as detailed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 2015 Final Report.

Article 11 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states: "Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature."

While even today, Indigenous people here on the historical Haldimand Tract are fighting for basic recognition of, and access to their own lands, ceremonies, and cultural teachings, Mennonites in this area are privileged to have Brubacher House and other historical sites and cultural institutions that people can visit to learn more about Mennonite history and culture. For too long, these sites have done violence to

Indigenous peoples by ignoring the important histories of their existence on and caretaking of the land. What could it mean for us to tell a more inclusive story?

In April of 2019, the museum's 40th anniversary year, Marlene Epp, a Grebel professor, invited a group of Mennonite and Indigenous university faculty, staff and students to tour Brubacher House and offer counsel. Over a shared meal, the group reflected on many aspects of the museum, including the tour, film, programming, and displays. Creating new indoor and outdoor information panels that would better reflect current understanding of local Indigenous and Mennonite histories emerged as a collective priority.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario graciously provided funding, and Grebel provided communications staff support to facilitate this important project. We are especially grateful to Margaret Gissing, communications assistant at Grebel, for her thoughtful and striking panel designs.

From 2019 to 2021 we continued to engage this group, as well as other local Indigenous and Mennonite museum professionals, in a process of inter-cultural knowledge-sharing and collaborative writing. Together, we created five indoor panels:

- **The first panel** talks about local Indigenous history, mentioning the Haldimand proclamation of 1784 and the Six Nations.
- **The second panel** provides basic information about the Mennonites and their interactions with Indigenous people in the area.
- **The third panel** discusses the German Company's 1805 purchase of Block 2 of the Haldimand Tract, noting that proceeds from the sale were to go into a government trust that would



PHOTO BY JOSHUA ENNS

Laura Enns and her son Oran view the new information panel in front of the Brubacher House museum.

support the Six Nations for 999 years, in perpetuity. (This did not happen.)

- **The fourth panel** talks about the history of the Brubacher family and invites viewers to trace their own family histories.
- **The fifth panel** depicts a Brubacher House timeline, beginning with the Haldimand Proclamation of 1784.

In addition, we created an outdoor information panel in front of the house, introducing the history of Indigenous peoples on the land, as well as the Brubachers and other Mennonites who eventually settled here. This panel has proven to be especially valuable throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, when the museum has remained closed for tours. We look forward to reopening the museum and sharing the new indoor panels with future visitors.

This signage project is just one part of an ongoing journey of reflection and collaboration between Mennonite and Indigenous peoples at Brubacher House and the University of Waterloo.

History is never straightforward; we learn while we unlearn. We look forward to journeying together through this process. ☞

Laura and Joshua Enns have served as live-in hosts of Brubacher House since 2017. They care for the house and gardens, and host tours and community events.

VIEWPOINT

‘Whatever happened to simple living?’

Part I

By Will Braun
Senior Writer

Going right back to Menno himself, Mennonites have valued simplicity. But to what extent has this ethos survived the age of gadget-saturation, relentless advertising and soul-numbing consumption?

It feels odd to even use the term “simple living” now. It feels outdated and unsophisticated at a time when doing right is often intertwined with constant refinement and reinvention of terminology.

Still, material modesty is deeply rooted in our faith tradition. Jesus was

clear about the lilies of the field and the “least of these.” Early Anabaptists took heed. The material trappings of the Roman Catholic church were rejected. Sharing with others was emphasized over personal accumulation.

Menno Simons wrote: “We are prepared with all our hearts to share our possessions, gold, and all that we have, however little it may be; to sweat and labour to meet the needs of the poor, as the Spirit and Word of the Lord and true brotherly love teach and imply.”

Those words are quoted in the preface to the *More-with-Less Cookbook*, a more recent landmark in Anabaptist simplicity. Written by Doris Janzen Longacre and commissioned by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), the 1976 cookbook is the best-selling Mennonite book ever. The tagline on the cover reads: “Suggestions by Mennonites on how to eat better and consume less of the world’s resources.”

It was part of MCC’s call for “each constituent household” in North America “to look at its lifestyle,” as explained in the preface. “Noting the relationship between North American overconsumption and world need, a goal has been set to eat and spend 10 percent less.” The cookbook is a guide to attaining this goal, tapping into Euro-Mennonite sensibilities around practicality, resourcefulness and thrift.

These sensibilities are codified in our *Confession of Faith* [<https://www.mennonitechurch.ca/cof>].

Article 21, entitled “Christian Stewardship,” reads: “As stewards of money and possessions, we are to live simply. . . . We cannot be true servants of God and let our lives be ruled by desire for wealth.”

The Confession clarifies: “Our tradition of simple living is rooted not in frugality for its own sake, but in dependence on God . . .”

It does not clarify that the distortion of simplicity can be a soul-stifling, justice-ignoring obsession with deals. In my experience, this shadow side of simplicity is as easy to detect among Mennonites as the more virtuous side.

By “simple living” I mean consuming less than the norm—choosing to buy less than you could out of concern for the earth and others. It may or may not be combined with organized movements to change government policies and corporate actions. It is, by definition, the realm of the privileged, or at least those with the potential to have more than enough.

Diverse views

Views on simple living are as diverse as the Mennonite community itself. Joon Park of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, B.C., says that in his experience, simple living has received less emphasis in ethnic communities than Mennonite values like peace, community-centered life or radical discipleship. While Park’s country of origin, Korea, is relatively wealthy (ranking higher on the United Nations Human Development Index than France or Italy), many Mennonites come to Canada from less prosperous countries and they come in part because they want greater security and safety. Many

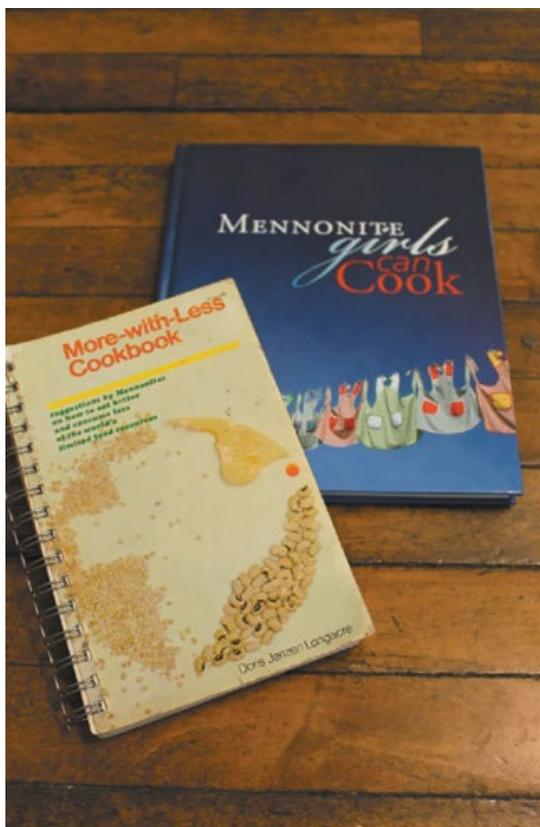


PHOTO BY WILL BRAUN

The More-with-Less Cookbook and Mennonite Girls Can Cook have both been popular.

want to have more than they had back home. This may be symbolized, Park says, as “being diligent, independent, and materially blessed, following the footsteps of the settlers’ spirituality-comfort and enjoyment.”

Park says, within Korean Christianity, simple living is not something that would be spoken of or considered attractive.

He emphasizes that “each person from each specific region of the world brings in a different set of values.” His guess is that many or most of these people have been influenced by “western evangelical missionaries or itinerant preachers” such as Billy Graham. These expressions of faith lean much more toward prosperity than simplicity.

Faith in a land of plenty

That propensity has arguably taken hold among a great many Mennonites in Canada as well. While we may not hear about it from the pulpit, by any global measure, our churches are almost all

prosperous. Some extremely prosperous.

I see a shift away from simplicity as illustrated in the marked difference between the *More-with-Less Cookbook* and *Mennonite Girls Can Cook*, which first came out in 2011. One talks about global food needs, the other talks about comfort foods. One provides many windows into the Global South, the other shows page after page of magazine-perfect, fully first-world delights (all of which I would love to try). One involves a lot more dry beans than the other, as my neighbour pointed out.

I borrowed her near-pristine copy of *Mennonite Girls Can Cook*. She is a highly experienced Mennonite cook and gardener. She says *Mennonite Girls Can Cook* is not “practical” enough for her. Flipping through it as we chat, she glances randomly at the list of ingredients for Stuffed Pork Loin, asking, rhetorically, “Do I have frozen orange juice concentrate in my fridge? Am I going to go to town to get some?” Still,

with genuine admiration, she describes the book as “lovely.”

According to Menno Media, which publishes both cookbooks, *More-with-Less* has sold “700,000–800,000 copies” over 45 years (all editions combined) while *Mennonite Girls Can Cook* has sold “in the range of 50,000 copies lifetime,” with the “Celebrations” edition selling a bit less than half of that. *More-with-Less* sales data for recent years was not provided.

Averaged over their lifetimes, *More-with-Less* has over twice the annual sales. Of course, we cannot conclude much more from this than that both are popular. I would suggest that they also aptly demonstrate two competing emphases. ☺

For the second part of this series, I talk to Kenton Lobe, who teaches a course in simple living, and a group of women from Steinbach, Man., who undertook their own informal simple-living project. Look for Part II in the next issue.

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NEWS

MDS launches effort to help drought-affected farmers

Mennonite Disaster Service Canada
Winnipeg

Nine years ago, farmers in Saskatchewan sent hay to drought-stricken livestock producers in Ontario through Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada. Now farmers in Ontario are preparing to repay their generosity the same way.

“Farmers in Saskatchewan are really challenged this year, due to heat and drought,” said Nick Hamm, chair of MDS in Ontario. “For them, the weather this year is a disaster.”

In 2012, farmers in that province sent

hay to farmers in Ontario struggling with drought through an MDS project called Hay East.

“They helped us when we needed it,” said Hamm. “Now it’s our turn to return the favour.”

Through Hay West, MDS hopes to send 50 truckloads of donated hay to Saskatchewan this fall. Ontario trucking companies are being asked to transport the hay for free or at reduced costs. The first two trucks were scheduled to arrive in Saskatchewan by mid-September. The hay will be made available to family farms in Saskatchewan at a current competitive cost of ten cents per pound for dairy grade and seven cents per pound for beef grade.

“That is what hay used to cost before the drought,” said Henry Schmitt, Chair of MDS in Saskatchewan. “Now, with the shortage, it’s going for up to 20 cents a pound. That’s way too expensive for smaller farmers, who lack the resources to pay that much for hay.”

“If the farmers can’t get hay, they may have to sell off their cattle, he said, adding, “That would severely endanger their livelihoods as farmers.” Funds

collected by the sale of the hay will be used to offset any transportation costs, Schmitt added, together with donations.

Ike Epp helped organize the delivery of about 50 truckloads of hay from Saskatchewan to Ontario in 2012. For him, it is encouraging to see farmers in that province giving back.

“They have excess hay while livestock producers here are really scrambling,” said the retired farmer. “Through MDS we can help each other try to get through this challenging time. It’s how we work together.”

Non-farmers are also welcome to participate in the project by making a charitable donation towards the cost of transportation. More donations of hay are also welcome. Farmers who want to donate hay can take it to Marhaven Agri Services in Alma, Ont., or call 519-584-4171 for information. Transportation to Saskatchewan will be arranged from there.

Farmers who want to receive hay can fill out an application form on the MDS Canada website at www.mds.org or call 306-716-5909 for more information. ❧



MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE CANADA PHOTO

Bales of hay at Flynn Farms in Clinton, Ont., are being loaded onto a truck owned by Hutton Transport of Paisley, Ont. MDS hopes to send 50 truckloads of hay to Saskatchewan.

❧ News brief

MCC Alberta’s GO!100 campaign continues into 2021

WATERTON NATIONAL PARK, ALTA.—Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Alberta’s GO!100 campaign originated in 2020 to replace funds from the cancelled relief sale and to celebrate a century of relief, development and peace work around the world. When the sale had to be cancelled for 2021, GO!100 was ready to repeat. Participants biked, practised music, made quilts and more to encourage donations. As of Aug. 27, \$241,251 had been raised, including a \$50,000 matching fund from the Frank J. Flaman Foundation. The campaign drew to a close on Aug. 31.

—BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD



PHOTO BY JIM MOYER

‘Wheels to Waterton’ registered as a GO!100 team and raised more than \$9,600 with their efforts. Pictured from left to right: Doug Wiebe; Dave Neufeldt; Ernie Engbrecht, the MCC Alberta board chair; and Ron Esau.

MCC sends aid to earthquake survivors in Haiti

'Thank you for not leaving us alone'

By Linda Espenshade
Mennonite Central Committee

Boxes of canned meat and relief kits from Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) brought joy and relief to recipients who are struggling to recover from the Aug. 14 earthquake that devastated the southern peninsula of Haiti.

The supplies were the first of any to reach Saint-Jean-du-Sud, a southwestern municipality, made up of several towns, on Aug. 31, more than two weeks after the 7.2 magnitude earthquake occurred. Two thousand people died. It destroyed homes and buildings, leaving 650,000 people in need of emergency management assistance.

"Thank you for not leaving us alone," one woman told Paul Shetler Fast, MCC's health coordinator and former representative in Haiti, who was present for the Aug. 31 distribution. "We've felt very alone these last days waiting after the earthquake, hoping someone would come, hoping someone would not forget us."

Relief organizations, including MCC, struggled to get supplies to people because the main road to the south was unsafe. Gang activity and robbery of supply trucks as well as tropical storm Grace, which came three days after the earthquake, kept trucks grounded.

Gradually police were able to establish more security on the road, so two members of MCC's assessment team drove to Saint-Jean-du-Sud on Aug. 29 to help set up for the distribution. And two days later, MCC sent its first shipment and two more assessment team members by a Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) airplane. MAF provided its services free of charge.

The distribution unfolded smoothly, Fast said, because MCC's partner AVOREDES was organized and prepared. Fifty families received a relief kit and 12 cans of meat,

which represents the maximum the aircraft could hold. AVOREDES chose the recipients whose homes were damaged or destroyed and were especially vulnerable in other ways. They included pregnant women, people with disabilities, and families headed by elderly persons or single women.



MCC PHOTO/PAUL SHETLER FAST

Prescione Roger stands in front of her home that was destroyed by an earthquake on the southern peninsula of Haiti in August. Four people shared the house with her in Saint-Jean-du-Sud.

"All of them that we talked to mentioned, you know, a neighbour who they knew was facing hard times—family member, cousin, someone who they knew needed help, who they would be sharing some of their cans with," Shetler Fast said. "We weren't telling them to do that. We weren't encouraging them to do that. But they said, 'You know, when God gives you a gift, then you give gifts to others.'"

Their generosity and compassion also sustained them before help arrived.

"Everywhere you look, people are doing what they can to rebuild, patching houses that can be patched," Shetler Fast said.

"Neighbours have been letting neighbours stay in their house, especially when it rains." Otherwise, those without safe housing sleep outside.

About half of the vulnerable recipients were members of Mennonite churches in the area, which are part of Assemblée de la Grâce, a member of Mennonite World Conference. AVOREDES, the Creole acronym for Association for the Reform and Development of Saint-Jean-du-Sud, is associated with Assemblée de la Grâce.

MCC intends to send two more shipments to this area in the next couple weeks, with MAF.

This area is still recovering from Hurricane Matthew which caused a lot of devastation in 2016, said Shetler Fast. People remember how MCC helped them rebuild their livelihoods then and are asking for similar assistance this time.

MCC anticipates that its long-term response is likely to include trauma healing and long-term livelihood recovery, said Raquel Conde Guevara, interim MCC representative in Haiti from Oakville, Ont. Conde Guevara said MCC also will work with another southern MCC partner, SOFA, the Creole acronym for Solidarity of Haitian Women. Its work is focused on preventing gender-based violence.

In the midst of a disaster, women are more vulnerable to abuse, said Conde Guevara. She expects MCC's support of SOFA's abuse prevention and psychological and social support to increase as part of the earthquake response. SOFA staff in the town of Beaumont report that more than 300 houses were damaged and destroyed, in addition to livelihoods, gardens and livestock. MCC is sending meat and relief kits there too. ☸

Love your neighbours and share vaccines

Mennonite World Conference

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) is calling on its members around the world to love their neighbours by donating to UNICEF's campaign to share coronavirus vaccinations around the world.

While some countries are removing health restrictions, allowing vaccinated citizens to resume economic and leisure activities, others, like Tanzania, do not have enough supply to vaccinate their health-care workers. This leaves the population vulnerable to illness and risks health-care worker shortages. Some data models project it could take until 2024 to vaccinate the world population.



UN PHOTO BY NICK SELLS

In Tanzania—home to 66,744 baptized members of Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania—less than 1 percent of the population has received vaccination protection against COVID-19.

“The world has a lot of COVID-19 vaccines, but currently less than 1 percent of global supply is reaching people in low-income countries,” UNICEF reports. It aims to distribute two billion doses in more than 180 countries before the end of 2021.

Through the global agreement known as COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (Covax), UNICEF, in collaboration with the PAHO Revolving Fund, has been entrusted to lead vaccine delivery. Donations to UNICEF cover the

costs of purchasing and distributing the vaccines, including transportation, cold chain protection, health-worker training and safe disposal of waste.

In Canada, more than 70 percent of adults have received at least one vaccine dose.

Aware of their privilege, leaders at Hagerman Mennonite Church, Markham, Ont., created a vaccination project to help multiply funding for more vaccinations worldwide.

“Our first step is to encourage our congregation to make personal donations,” says Andrew Reesor-McDowell, a church member. These donations are matched by Hagerman Mennonite. (The Government of Canada has agreed to match the donations of individual Canadians until the end of September, to a maximum of \$10 million.)

“We felt it was important to try contribute where we can to this vaccine gap between Canada and poorer countries Reesor-McDowell says.

MWC joins with other faith-based organizations to call its members to share vaccines around the highly interconnected world by donating to the UN's vaccination program through UNICEF.

“The story of Cain and Abel teaches us about the deep relationship of brotherhood and sisterhood that exists among all human beings (Genesis 4:7-10),” says César García, MWC's general secretary “The shepherd and the farmer, though they express different ways of relating to God, are relatives. This global pandemic challenges God's invitation for us to take care of all humanity. Are we going to consider the wellness of others over our interests?”

To donate through the auspices of MWC, visit <https://bit.ly/mwc-vaccine>.



☞ Briefly noted

Second year of Common Read begins



Sara Wenger Shenk

HARRISONBURG, Va.—In September 2020, Mennonite Church Canada, Mennonite Church U.S.A. and Herald Press began encouraging Mennonites to engage in a “common read,” a shared reading experience focused on specific books written to nurture Christian faith in this cultural moment. Common Read continues September 2021 through November 2021 with *Tongue-Tied: Learning the Lost Art of Talking about Faith* by Sara Wenger Shenk. Common Read participants can join the author on a live Zoom event on Oct. 19, at 7 p.m. ET. Books are available from Common-Word and other retailers. Many Christians easily talk about movies, sports, politics, jobs, and emotions, but they struggle when it comes to talking about faith. In *Tongue-Tied*, Wenger Shenk investigates the reasons that people who claim the name of Christ are so reluctant to talk about him. She served as president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) for almost ten years. After reading *Tongue-Tied* this fall, Common Read will continue in January 2022 with *Been in the Struggle: Pursuing an Antiracist Spirituality* by Regina Shands Stoltzfus and Tobin Miller Shearer and April 2022 with *Not Quite Fine: Mental Health, Faith, and Showing Up for One Another* by Carlene Hill Byron.

—MENNOMEDIA

Toronto-area leaders reflect on virtual worship

By Christen Kong
Toronto

“It is important to let go of perfectionism and the desire to get things right. We will make mistakes. People forget to go on mute, there is background noise, videos don’t work. Despite all this, it is still worship,” says Peter Haresnape, a pastor at Toronto United Mennonite Church. Virtual worship during this past year has inspired church leaders to refine and reimagine the meaning of worship.

What is essential to worship? Many church leaders ask this question when developing virtual worship services each Sunday. “What goes into creating a worshipful experience? What does giving with gratitude look like?” asks Haresnape. He reflects: “Now, it is a time to consider a variety of elements and how they contribute to worshipping God for the life that we live.”

Glyn Jones, pastor at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church near Markham and Community Mennonite Church of Stouffville, comments, “It’s not the church’s job to entertain. We need to focus on what we do and why we need to be together as a church.”

Leah Harder, enrichment coordinator at Community Mennonite Church of Stouffville,

says that worship is a collaborative process and she expresses her gratitude for Mennonite Church Canada’s weekly public posts of church services. These served as a shared resource for spiritual teaching when churches were learning how to create their own content.

Jones has witnessed smaller churches begin to partner with other congregations to support one another in carrying each other’s loads. As a pastor of two churches, he says, “There are some advantages in sharing pastors and services. You have one preparation time for two churches.”

Zoom is a complex platform with challenges in sharing pictures, powerpoints and other Zoom features, says Jones. “It becomes complicated for one person to lead worship or a sermon.”

Virtual worship also reveals roles within a worship service that would otherwise not be seen. “The background preparation work is only noticed when it doesn’t work,” says Haresnape. “There is a lot more recognition of those roles.”

Linda Wall, a member of Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, explains that “virtual worship has reinforced our understanding

the barriers faced by individuals in care homes, who may be ill and unable to participate in worship services in person. They can now join in new, digital, ways.

Jones also comments about a congregational member who is sick and at home: “He usually attends church, but there was one time where he had been in the hospital for a week. He was provided a computer on Sunday and was able to share.” He continues, “In pre-COVID times there was no way someone who was ill was going to show up in church. Having them join virtually was powerful both for him and for us.”

Worship is inclusive, as reflected by Jesus’ compassion to meet and engage all people towards spiritual togetherness despite their location and circumstance.

“We have opportunities through technology that help us to innovate, be creative and think beyond our box,” says Jones. He muses, “On Zoom, you see people’s faces instead of the backs of people’s heads. When we return back to in-person worship, will churches choose different seating patterns? How do we want to rethink space? How will we interact with one another?”

Regarding worship, Wall concludes, “We need to provide both the familiar and the new—the familiar to make people feel comfortable and the new to keep people growing spiritually.”

Virtual worship has made congregations reimagine the possibilities for how church is conceptualized to be inclusive and collaborative, and how worship is meaningful to all. ☞



SCREENSHOT FROM MC CANADA WEBSITE

Churches across Canada are sharing online services. Here Moses Falco leads worship at Sterling Mennonite in Winnipeg.

that church is a community of people, a community of believers that don’t have to meet in a building to be church.” The church has even encouraged worship leaders to invite congregational members to sing where they are, instead of attending as if it were a musical performance.

Haresnape highlights that “music is something we create together even if we don’t hear each other. It is meaningful to sing along.”

Togetherness is foundational to worship. “We should help people participate,” emphasizes Wall. She describes

Preserving history

Saskatchewan family hosts fundraiser to help preserve church building

By Donna Schulz

Saskatchewan Correspondent
MAYFAIR, SASK.

The Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church, near the village of Mayfair, Sask., needed new siding and windows, but there was no money left in the operating fund. So the Toews family decided to hold a barbecue.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAURA TOEWS

The Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church building in Mayfair, Sask. is no longer open for regular services, but a small group of members and former members still want to see it maintained.

“Our family has been part of that church from when it was first built,” says Laura Toews. “My grandfather was a lay minister.”

Laura worked with her sisters, Teresa Toews and Dorothy Reinbolt, to plan the fundraiser. They decided on a barbecue because it was something they could do outdoors. They advertised locally but also contacted relatives across Canada, inviting them to make a donation if they couldn’t attend.

About 60 people attended the August 14 event on the church grounds, including area residents and people from farther away who had grown up in the church,

“It was like a family reunion,” says Laura.

According to the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO), Mennonites immigrated to the Mayfair area, about 140 kilometres northwest of Saskatoon, in the late 1920s. They joined Mennonites from Glenbush, Rabbit Lake, Mullingar and Bournemouth to form the *Hoffnungsfelder Mennonitengemeinde*, a large church with five small member congregations. Though officially registered as Bethel Mennonite Church, it has been known in Mennonite Church Saskatchewan as Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite, Mayfair.

In 1934, the congregation purchased land and built a church building. Laura

says that, sometime later, members dug out the cement foundation by hand so they could add a basement.

Though regular services haven’t been held in the building since 2017, the church continues to host a Christmas service each year on December 23 at the community hall in Mayfair. Regular attenders include members of the Mayfair Roman Catholic Church and other area residents.

“It’s the only one around where we still sing the traditional Christmas hymns,” says Laura.

The last Christmas service was held in 2019, and she says that, if allowed to do so because of the pandemic, the tiny congregation will probably host the service again this year.

The church has never officially closed. Laura says her sister, Teresa, files taxes for it each year, just as their father did



Former members and friends of Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church in Mayfair, Sask. gather for a fundraising barbecue on the church grounds.

before her.

“I don’t know why church was never closed,” Laura says. The building is left unlocked, and a guest book at the front indicates there are several visitors each year.

“There’s nothing of value [in the building] other than memories,” she says. “The hymnbooks are kept in [someone’s

home] because we didn’t want them to get ruined.”

The Toews family raised \$3,500 for the church. They know they will have to do more fundraising if they are to pay for new siding and windows. But they are committed to maintaining the structure.

“We want to see the church maintained for historical purposes,” says Laura. “It

was a focal point for our family—for my dad and his siblings—and for a handful of other community folks who attended right up until they had to move into care in the city.” She adds, “Our goal is to maintain it and the grounds and graveyard out of respect for the history.” ❧

COVID outbreak at Mennonite care home

By Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

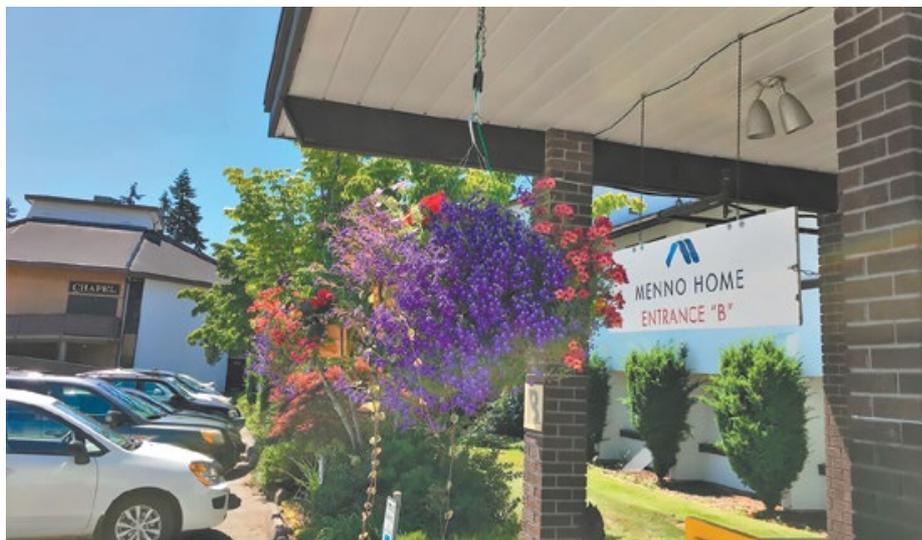
Menno Home, one of the residential care homes on Menno Place senior care campus in Abbotsford, experienced a COVID-19 outbreak the first week of September. It was announced by Fraser Health on Sept. 2.

Menno Place is operated by the Mennonite Benevolent Society, formed in 1953 to provide long-term care and housing for seniors in the Fraser Valley. With some 700 residents at all levels of care, it is one of the largest elder care facilities in B.C.

As of Sept. 10, there were 36 reported COVID cases on the E1 wing, including 22 residents and 14 staff. A breakdown of numbers among vaccinated and unvaccinated is unavailable. Because of the outbreak, personal visits were suspended at Menno Home but allowed at other locations on the campus.

“At this time, all four of the neighborhoods within the Menno Home building are cohorted,” says a report on the facility’s website. “This means that staff only work in their one specific unit with separate entrances and break rooms minimizing any transmission between units.”

The pandemic has complicated staffing at Menno Place and other health care facilities in B.C. Single-site staffing requirements were put in place in 2020, declaring that workers in long-term care and assisted living are allowed to work



MENNO PLACE PHOTO

Menno Home in Abbotsford has experienced challenges this past year, both with staffing shortages and COVID outbreaks.

at only one site for the duration of the provincial orders. This, along with workers off due to illness, caused a shortage of long-term care workers.

To help solve the problem, Karen Biggs, Menno Place CEO, recruited friends and family of residents for temporary hiring to replace lost staff in positions such as laundry and housekeeping. Last December, 54 people, including residents’ grandchildren, applied to work at Menno Place, just to be able to see their family

members during the lockdown.

Provincial mandatory staff vaccination requirements that begin Oct. 12 could further affect the staffing at Menno Place. Biggs recently told the *Vancouver Sun* that she feared up to 10 percent of her staff could be lost to community health work or acute care facilities. Workers in senior care facilities are required to be immunized against COVID, while staff at hospitals and health care workers who work in the community are not. ❧

B.C. churches kick off new church year

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

Mennonite Church congregations in B.C., most of whom are just resuming in-person worship, are celebrating the beginning of the church year in various ways.

Youth and young adults from Chinatown Peace Church in Vancouver started off the year in August with tent camping on Mt. Seymour.

“[We] had some great campfire conversations around anxiety and relationships (God, our parents, romantic, friends) during this season of COVID,” reports English pastor Tim Kuepfer. “It was so good to get to do this again (an annual thing) because last year COVID had cancelled it.”

Sunday, Sept. 12 was kickoff Sunday for many churches. Members of Cedar Valley Church in Mission celebrated

Launch Sunday with a “launch lunch” following the worship service. A bouncy castle, bubble-making, chalk-drawing and indoor wall-climbing were included as entertainment for the younger generation. Participants from Canadian Blood Services, The Manor seniors residence, and Christ Family Church, who meet on Cedar Valley’s campus, were invited to participate.

Crossroads Community Church of Chilliwack started off the year with its first worship service back at its usual location at Vedder Middle School. Following the worship service, members enjoyed a potluck lunch featuring pulled-pork sandwiches. Other entertainments included potato-sack races, a bouncy castle and road hockey. ❧



PHOTO COURTESY OF CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CHURCH

Anne Herridge (director of children’s ministry) and Gerry Binnema (lead pastor) enjoy some lighthearted moments as they help launch the church year at Crossroads Community Church in Chilliwack, B.C.

❧ Briefly noted

Green spaces a new sanctuary



PHOTO BY CHRISTEN KONG

After worshipping outdoors, the people of Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church garden together.

Toronto Public Health encourages churches to host virtual or outdoor church services to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church is one of many that meets outdoors. Sunday services continue, at first on the sandy beaches of Lake Ontario, then on the grass lawn outside the church. Inspired by the forest church movement, the congregation strives to participate with creation, drawing on traditions where sacred places and practices were expressed outdoors amidst nature. “I appreciate that after church we get to garden together. These garden initiatives are more than just activities, as it creates accessible opportunities for conversation about faith,” says Felix Kwong, a graduate student attending the church. “Being on the front lawn of the church also increases visibility in the community,” explains Kwong. “We’ve had people come ask us about our church and gardening from the sidewalk and even people in cars too.” Outdoor services not only reclaim green spaces as new sanctuaries for gathering but become an open call for curiosity about church.

—BY CHRISTEN KONG

A 'handbook for being human'

New book described as 'essential reading' on conflict

By Janet Bauman

Eastern Canada Correspondent
KITCHENER-WATERLOO, ONT.



At the Sept. 9 launch for Betty Pries' new book, called *The Space Between Us: Conversations About Transforming Conflict*, Jennifer Ball called it a "handbook for being human," and "essential reading for anyone navigating conflict."

Paul Okoye, senior consultant at Credence & Co., where Pries is founder and CEO, facilitated the evening. Credence, based in Kitchener, works at organizational health, conflict transformation and change management with business and faith groups and "across the denominational spectrum" of churches.

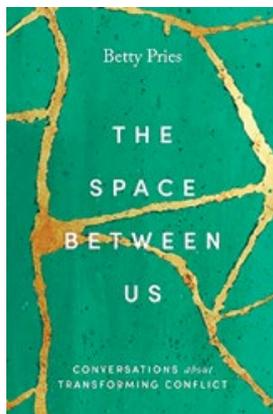
Okoye said the book "couldn't have come at a better time," considering the "broken selves and broken relationships" in our world. He commended Pries for the way she lives out what she teaches.

Ball, as assistant professor in the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) program at Conrad Grebel University College, called the book "refreshingly holistic and practical." Pries took "highly theoretical and philosophical" material and made it accessible.

Pries is a regular instructor in the PACS program at Grebel, and a trainer in its conflict management certificate program. She earned a PhD in 2019 in conflict transformation from the Free University of Amsterdam.

Pries got into mediation by accident. While studying at the University of Manitoba, a friend suggested she would be a good fit for a job in mediation. She took the course thinking it would be temporary—she was planning to become a professor or a pastor. "I didn't see it right away," she says, but other "people started saying it was a calling."

Now, with nearly 30 years of education and experience, she has become a specialist



The book reflects the effort to have a conversation between conflict transformation and contemplative spirituality.

in supporting leaders and organizations to be at their best. She is also a specialist in equity, diversity and inclusion training, and a chartered mediator.

Early in her mediation career, Pries began exploring contemplative spirituality. Her thesis is "a conversation between conflict transformation and contemplative spirituality."

The kernel of the book is a concept she calls the architecture of selfhood. It has three levels:

- **The descriptive self** is your "first skin," and the container you were given to wear at birth, including your characteristics, strengths, limitations and life circumstances. You can't change much of it. It is unique and delightfully neutral.
- **The defended self** is your second skin, ego, or false self. It includes your masks, your shame and your misplaced centre of identity.
- **The deeper self** is the house or breath of God within—the place of perfect goodness, generosity and grace. Here you are at one with others and with God.

Understanding this structure changes how we deal with conflict, Pries says. "Conflict takes place at the level of our defended self," where we tend to judge and rank each other. But if we allow our deeper self to be our centre, a seed of grace takes root and a new capacity for compassion emerges. Judgment falls away, we realize we share a common humanity and we allow ourselves to see the world through the eyes of the other.

In her work she sees how the self keeps getting in the way. But when people "pay attention to their own stuff first," including their brokenness, they develop grace and generosity in approaching a conflict.

"The biggest learning for me...is how freeing it is to take responsibility for our stuff," she says. "We can't be transformed without a real healthy dose of self-compassion," which is an invitation to rest in God's grace. "Our compassion for the other is directly correlated with the level of compassion we have for ourselves."

When it comes to churches, she says most of them avoid conflict because they perceive differences as something negative.

"We are human and we bump into each other," she says. But it's about how to be human together. "None of us gets it 100 percent right all the time . . . pretending that we are going to get it right gets us stuck." Meanwhile we could reduce the conflict at church if we could disagree with each other better, without getting hooked into "us/them" thinking.

Getting in this kind of thinking does not help, she says. "We lose the capacity to see the God-light alive in each person."

Pries attends Waterloo North Mennonite Church and chairs the board of Rockway Mennonite Collegiate. Her book is intended for a broad audience and is available through CommonWord and other book sellers. ❧

The end of an era at MHC Gallery

Ray Dirks leaves a legacy of welcoming, valuing artists

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

Manitoba Correspondent

WINNIPEG, MAN.

The founder and curator of the Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC) Gallery, Ray Dirks, retired after 23 years of leadership. His career at the gallery, which ended on July 31, has included producing four books and countless exhibits, receiving multiple awards and building dozens of relationships with artists and visitors.

Dirks established the MHC Gallery in 1998. He previously curated exhibits of contemporary African art for development education with non-governmental

organizations, working in 15 countries. When Dirks moved back to Winnipeg, he wanted to use his experience to create a new kind of gallery. He proposed the idea to Ken Reddig, the director of the Mennonite Heritage Archives, as there was empty space in the building.

“I wanted it to be a place where Mennonite artists can feel appreciated and feel at home,” Dirks says. “Perhaps you didn’t feel valued in the past but here is an institution of the church that says you are.”

The Mennonite church supports people

who can preach, write, sing and play instruments, so “why not the gift of being able to create visually?” he asks. “They can introduce new or different ways to worship than what we’re used to.”

With Dirks’ proposal in hand, Reddig approached Mennonite Church Canada, which approved the plan—as long as Dirks raised one hundred percent of the funds. He started completely from scratch, with no contacts, money or exhibits. While the gallery got a few vital contributions at the start, fundraising was difficult.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RAY DIRKS

Ray Dirks travelled to Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 2001 to hear stories from Mennonite families and meet artists for his book, In God’s Image: A Global Anabaptist Family.



PHOTO BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

Ray Dirks founded the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, located on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University.

“In those first few years I remember there were many times that I was planning up to two years in advance, knowing we had a month or two of money,” he says. He asked to have his pay cut to part-time and crossed his fingers.

It was Dirks’ book, *In God’s Image: A Global Anabaptist Family*, and the support of John Wieler, who helped coordinate the financing and distribution of the book, that got the gallery on a stable foundation. The book tells stories from the lives of Anabaptists around the world through photos, art and text. Getting to know and spend time in-person with other members of the global Anabaptist family was a huge highlight of Dirks’ run at the gallery.

To his surprise, they sold enough books to secure some financial cushion. The loyal and generous donors that have since followed, who Dirks considers not only supporters but friends, have kept the gallery alive.

“For me, a lot of the most humbling highlights were the relationships that I had with individuals . . . and I think it happened

because this place was, and is, unique.” Those connections continued, even when the gallery went through changes and ownership passed from MC Canada to Canadian Mennonite University.

The gallery became a place for not only Mennonites to display their art, but also for people of other religions and backgrounds. “I wanted it to be a place that was open to the diversity that is now in Canada and always increasing. I wanted it to be a place where you could say to artists from other cultures and other faiths: so long as you are a person of goodwill, here’s a place that you can consider to be like a home . . . we want to learn from you and we want you to learn from us,” says Dirks.

Art has the power to bring people together. For Dirks, it led to working with Muslim artist Isam Aboud and Hindu artist Manju Lodha. In 2009, they created *In the Spirit of Humanity*, a project focusing on cultural diversity in Manitoba. Travelling to schools and EAL centres, they taught art workshops to thousands of students, helping them express who they are. That project ended in a book and

more than 500 pieces created by students in the gallery.

Lodha and Dirks have done further work together focusing on the diversity of faith and spirituality in the province, for which they were jointly awarded the Lieutenant Governor’s Award for the Advancement of Interreligious Understanding in 2018. They have created a documentary, led workshops and are currently working on their final phase of the Leap in Faith project, a book exploring faith diversity through the eyes of ordinary people in Manitoba. It will be available in 2022—Dirks’ first task for retirement is to finish it.

Dirks is looking forward to more projects in retirement, such as compiling his journals from his years working in Africa and creating a series of paintings for a Mennonite museum. The MHC Gallery is celebrating and honouring Dirks at its annual fundraiser taking place on Oct. 1, two weeks after the gallery’s reopening. His books are available for purchase at CommonWord bookstore. ☘

‘What are you hiding behind the mask?’

Saskatoon calligrapher creates facemask artwork to have fun and reflect

By Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON, SASK.

Whether they’re covering faces, hanging from rear-view mirrors, lining pockets or lying in gutters, facemasks are ubiquitous. But for Lois Siemens they are also a blank canvas.

Siemens is spiritual-care director at Bethany Manor, a seniors housing complex owned and operated by the Mennonite churches of Saskatoon and area. When residents at Bethany Manor were required to wear masks, Siemens posed the question, “Who’s behind the mask?”

She took pictures of residents and posted them on a common bulletin board, inviting people to guess who was behind each mask. One week she posted pictures of 21 women whose first name was Ann (or Anne) and asked residents to see if they could tell which Ann was which.

After a while, the question intriguing Siemens changed from “Who’s behind the mask?” to “What’s behind the mask?”

“What are we hiding behind the mask?” she wondered.

Siemens, who is a calligrapher, began taking her paper masks home and laundering them. Then she would sit down and write on them. On one mask she wrote the word “yawn” because, she says, “I can yawn behind my mask and no one will see.”

During the long hours of pandemic lockdown, the calligraphy guild she belongs to offered free enrichment sessions with teachers from all over the world. She started using techniques learned during these sessions on her masks.

At first she hung her finished masks on the wall behind her desk at work, and residents would comment on them when

they stopped by her office. Then she thought it might be fun to cover a whole wall with masks.

When Siemens learned that Osler Mennonite Church, where she attends, was having an art show, she decided to create a larger artwork using masks. She lettered “faith,” “hope,” and “love” on three masks, which became the tops of three columns of connected masks.

“That’s the basis of our faith,” says Siemens, “and everything I’m trying to do at Bethany Manor comes out of those three things and is connected to them.”

Siemens found that paper masks work well as an art medium. With a little experimentation, she learned that felt-tip markers and pastel watercolour pencils worked best.

At first she wrote down words as she thought of them. Once she decided on a larger project, she says, “I would grab



Wall hanging from used (and laundered) paper facemasks, by Lois Siemens.

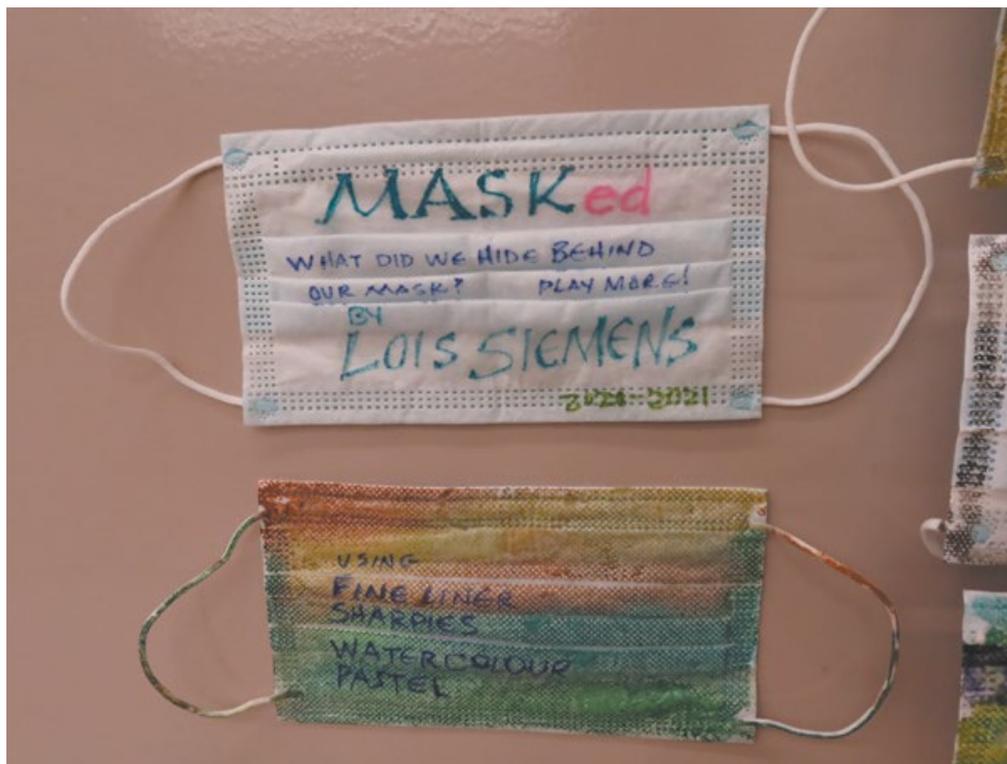
five or ten and just play around for an hour or so.”

Siemens hopes people who see her facemask artwork will ponder the question she poses with it.

“What’s behind the mask?” she asks. “What kinds of things are we hiding in our lives that need to come to the light of Christ?”

But serious reflection isn’t her only motivation. She also hopes her own creative efforts will inspire others to do something similar.

“Sometimes elders say they have so much time on their hands,” she says. “Here’s an idea. Take your waste and do something creative with it.” She adds, “I just want people to have fun. Yes, this is serious, but we can also laugh a little bit.” ☞



PHOTOS BY LOIS SIEMENS

Lois Siemens saw used facemasks as a canvas for calligraphy.

☞ Staff change

Pastoral transitions in Ontario

Zac Klassen began as pastor at Bloomingdale Mennonite Church in August 2021. He has an honours bachelor of arts in biblical and theological studies from Canadian Mennonite University, and a masters in theological studies from Conrad Grebel University College. He completed a PhD in religious studies at McMaster University in Hamilton. Previously Zac served as a pastoral intern at FaithWorks Mennonite Brethren church in Winnipeg, and as a pastor at The ConneXion (Evangelical Mennonite Church) in Arborg, Man. Zac says, “Despite all of the challenges that this pandemic has created for churches, I have been impressed with the ways that Bloomingdale MC has fostered community with creativity and resilience. I look forward to contributing to the work of ministry here in my role as pastor, as God continues to inspire Bloomingdale MC in its mission to be a house of prayer and a community of grace.”



University of Toronto. She has previously served as pastor for the Nithview Community, a seniors community offering several types of accommodations and services in New Hamburg, and also for Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church and Floradale Mennonite Church, all in Ontario. Nancy says, “I look forward to worshipping with this faithful congregation and exploring God’s call for us in these times.”

Myrna Miller Dyck began as a supply pastor at Erb Street Mennonite Church in September, 2021. She has a masters of divinity from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind. She previously pastored at Steinmann Mennonite Church. During that time she also served on the MC Eastern Canada Leadership Council, and she currently serves as a coach in MC Eastern Canada’s Transition into Ministry (TiM) program. She is looking forward to working with the Erb Street congregation in this time of transition.



—BY JANET BAUMAN

Nancy Mann began as pastor at St. Agatha Mennonite Church in June 2021. She has a masters in theological studies from Conrad Grebel University College and a masters of education from the

Cycling 801 km for MCC a 'baptism into nature'

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

This summer, Gerald Warkentin cycled 801 km from Winnipeg to Thompson, Man. A member of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Warkentin made the trip in support of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Manitoba's GO! 100 fundraiser. He raised \$2,755, far exceeding his goal of two dollars for every kilometre cycled.

Departing from Winnipeg on Aug. 1, the 59-year-old passed through small towns and travelled long stretches of road completely alone. Many nights along the way he was tenting and he encountered wildlife like a bear and fox.

"It's a baptism into nature," Warkentin says, repeating how he once heard cycling trips described. "You're so in tune with every sound you hear and everything you see. That, to me, is why I cycle—I'm so much closer to God than I ever am riding in the vehicle anywhere. For me that's what it's all about: connecting with nature and with God and with my place."

After seven days of riding and two



PHOTO COURTESY OF GERALD WARKENTIN

Gerald Warkentin takes a break in Pisew Falls Provincial Park, 700 km north of Winnipeg. From here he cycled to reach his end destination of Thompson, Man.

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days of waiting for smoke and wind to clear, he arrived in Thompson on Aug. 9. Warkentin has always loved cycling, doing long trips ever since high school, including coast to coast across Canada, "But I've never done a trip like this, because it's so isolated in the bush. Going 150 km before you see another service station, that presents a whole new challenge."

He has also been very involved with MCC, from being on the committee for the Bike the Whiteshell cyclathon to

hosting International Volunteer Exchange Program participants. Last year he cycled to The Pas, Man., an 865-km trip he made for MCC's first year of the GO! 100 fundraiser.

"I love to cycle and I love MCC and to bring that together just makes it really meaningful for me," he says. The number of waves, friendly honks and words of encouragement he received biking north were special too. ❧

News brief

Witness workers in China return to Canada



George and Tobia Veith

After 30 years of serving in Hong Kong, Macau and the mainland of China, Witness workers Tobia and George Veith are returning to Canada. Tobia most recently taught at a Chinese university and George developed Anabaptist resources for use in the church in China. The Veiths have been spending time over the past few weeks with the Macau Mennonite Church, which they were instrumental in starting. "How do you put 30 years into a few words? Relationships, growth, living life, laughter, tears, uncertainty, . . . that's probably why we need the time of a two-and-a-half-month journey from our last step out our door in Harbin, China, to our first step out our door in Winnipeg, Canada, to bring to words the stories of God's faithfulness in a complicated time." The Veiths plan to spend several months visiting and speaking in Mennonite Church congregations across Canada, and they will finish their term with Mennonite Church Canada at the end of January 2022. "While we will no longer have any Witness workers in China, our commitment to ministry and partners there remains," says Jeanette Hanson, director of International Witness. "We appreciate the Witness Support Network of Mennonite Church Canada congregations committed to ministry in China and hope to continue working together with our Chinese siblings in faith," she says.

—MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA



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at canadianmennonite.org



Watch: "Rainmaker" by Upside of Maybe

Michael Bannerman of Stratford rockers Upside of Maybe talks about "Rainmaker," the band's reconciliation-themed music video. canadianmennonite.org/rainmaker



CMU honours Class of 2021

The Canadian Mennonite University community gathered late last month to celebrate the Class of 2021 during an outdoor ceremony. canadianmennonite.org/cmugrad



Canadian Foodgrains Bank celebrates good harvests

Favourable weather and good farming practices means many farmers have had a fantastic growing season at CFGB project sites in Africa. canadianmennonite.org/goodharvests



International Witness Sunday set for Oct. 24

Mennonite Church Canada invites congregations to celebrate International Witness Sunday next month, and has made resources available for congregational use. canadianmennonite.org/iwsunday

Coming up
in the November 8, 2021 issue
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/// Calendar

Nationwide

July 29-Aug. 1, 2022: MC Canada Gathering 2022, in Edmonton. Theme: "We declare what we have seen and heard." Information about Gathering 2022 will be regularly updated at mennonitechurch.ca/gathering2022.

British Columbia

Oct. 15-17: MC B.C. women's retreat, at Camp Squeah, Hope. Theme: "Our God, our healer."

Nov. 5-7: MC B.C. Pastor/Spouse Retreat at Harrison Lake Hotel, Harrison Hot Springs.

Alberta

July 31-Aug. 4, 2022: MC Canada National Youth Gathering at Camp Valaqua. Theme: "Amplify! Giving voice to what we have seen and heard." Information will be regularly updated at mennonitechurch.ca/amplify.

Saskatchewan

POSTPONED: Mennonite Church Saskatchewan "Songfest of Thanks," at Rosthern Mennonite Church, with Duff Warkentin as conductor and Glenn Sawatzky as accompanist. Concert attendees must be masked and vaccinated, or provide a negative test. For updated information, visit www.mcsask.ca.

Manitoba

Oct. 16: Canadian Foodgrains Bank "Singin' in the Grain" virtual fundraising concert at 8 p.m. Proceeds to MCC's relief in Haiti. Find the video link at www.foodgrainsbank.ca/singing.

Oct. 26-28: Pastors and spiritual leaders retreat at Camp Assiniboia. Theme: Resting in Belovedness. To register, go to www.mennochurch.mb.ca/events.

Ontario

Until March 7, 2022: Not Traumatic Enough for a Shock Blanket exhibit at the Grebel Gallery, Conrad Grebel University College. For more information, visit <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-peace-advancedment/grebel-gallery>.

May 13-15, 2022: "Indigenous-Mennonite encounters in time and place" academic conference and community education event, at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo. The event will include academic presentations, community storytelling, artistic offerings, and both Indigenous and Mennonite ceremonies. Programming proposals must be submitted by Sept. 30. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/2UhmHu>.

International

July 1-4, 2022: Mennonite World Conference's Global Youth Summit, in Salatiga, Indonesia. Theme: "Life in the Spirit: Learn. Serve. Worship." To learn more, visit mwc-cmm.org/gys.

July 5-10, 2022: Mennonite World Conference's global assembly, in Semarang, Indonesia. Theme: "Following Jesus together across barriers." For more information, visit mwc-cmm.org/assembly/indonesia-2022.

Online

Oct. 19: Common Read online conversation with Sara Wenger Shenk at 7 p.m. ET. Find more information at www.commonword.ca.

To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send Calendar announcements eight weeks in advance of the event date by email to calendar@canadianmennonite.org. For more Calendar listings online, visit canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.



/// Classifieds

Employment Opportunity

Associate Pastor of Children and Youth Ministry Steinbach, Manitoba

Steinbach Mennonite Church (SMC) is hiring an Associate Pastor of Children and Youth Ministry. This position will begin as soon as a successful candidate is found and could be anywhere between 0.5 FTE and 1.0 FTE depending on the candidate's availability and specific skills. We are looking for an energetic and outgoing person able to cultivate relationships with SMC's children and youth, their families and build community beyond the SMC congregation.

Please send your resume and cover letter to steinbachmennonite@gmail.com. For more information, visit www.steinbachmennonite.ca.



Advertising Information

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Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue	Ads due
Oct. 25	Oct. 8 (Early Deadline)
Nov. 8 Focus on Books Resources	Oct. 25
Nov. 22	Nov. 8
Dec. 6	Nov. 22

Simultaneous protests resist Enbridge pipeline

By Carolyn Regehr

On Aug. 22, members of Hope Mennonite Church, joined other participants in a protest of the Enbridge Line 3 pipeline. Line 3 is currently being built and runs from the Alberta oil sands through Gretna, Man., and into Minnesota. The event took place at three different locations: at the Notre Dame TD bank in Winnipeg; near the Enbridge pumping

station in Gretna; and online through Zoom. The intention behind all three was to show solidarity with water protectors in Minnesota who are actively resisting the expansion of Line 3. It is currently being built without the consent of the Anishinaabe people.

At the same time, people at each location prayed, sang songs, read scripture, learned

more about Line 3 and shared ways to resist the pipeline. Each location had a unique way of nonviolent protest; people meeting virtually wrote letters to the TD bank, asking them to divest from fossil fuels; participants at the Notre Dame TD Bank wrote messages on the building's windows; participants in Gretna, planted "seeds of hope." ✎



PHOTO BY CAROLYN REGEHR

Near the Enbridge pumping station in Gretna, Josiah Neufeld answers the question: "What is Line 3?" The Canadian-owned pipeline runs from the Alberta oil sands through Gretna, Man., to Superior, Wisconsin.



PHOTO BY JOSIAH NEUFELD

At a nonviolent protest in Gretna, Man., Carolyn Regehr plants wildflower seeds to protest the expansion of Enbridge Pipeline Line 3.

PHOTO BY MACKENZIE NICOLLE

The Justice Team of Hope Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, organized a service of prayer and protest outside a Toronto-Dominion (TD) Bank on Aug. 22. Since 2016, TD has invested over 13 billion dollars in Line 3, a Canadian-owned pipeline that runs from the Alberta tar sands to Superior, Wisconsin. Over 50 people gathered to sing, pray, and call on TD to divest from Line 3. (Text by Allegra Friesen Epp.)

