

CANADIAN MENNONITE

March 21, 2022 Volume 26 Number 6

Worship through visual art

A new hymnal leads the way
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EDITORIAL

'For the joy of ear and eye'

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive editor



As I write, the horrific attacks on the people of Ukraine continue, but recently I witnessed a sign of beauty amidst the chaos. Standing in a grey bomb shelter, with pipes overhead, a Ukrainian musician brings forth a haunting tune from his violin. The video screen pulls back to reveal other quadrants in which other violinists play the same tune. As the camera continues pulling back, more players join the group, adding harmony and complexity to the original tune. Flags on the screen show solidarity with the one violinist seeking protection in that dingy basement.

Solidarity through sound. Beauty in the midst of conflict.

In these grey days before the greening of spring, we welcome reminders that beauty is present—if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Caught up in world events and conflicts close to home, we find it easy to focus attention on the dreariness in the world. Our senses fail to take in the signs of beauty right beside us.

I've been pondering the hymn, "For the Beauty of the Earth," no. 120 in the *Voices Together* hymnal. Tradition has it that Englishman Folliot Sandford Pierpoint wrote the text on a spring day, inspired by the view from a hilltop near his home. In verses 1 and 2 he points to the "glory of the skies" and "hill and vale and tree and flow'r." He writes of divine love "which from our birth over and around us lies," and then in verse 4 he

spells out the joy of human love—of family and friends with us now and of "friends above."

Verse 3 is especially relevant, because this issue of *Canadian Mennonite* includes a Focus on the Arts, starting on page 27. "For the joy of ear and eye, / for the heart and mind's delight, / for the mystic harmony / linking sense to sound and sight."

"We worship a creative and creating God," write Sarah Kathleen Johnson and SaeJin Lee, who served as co-chairs of the hymnal's visual arts committee. "We are called to worship God with our spirits, minds, hearts, and bodies, including all of our senses."

This can be a challenge for Mennonites, as we often find it easier to show devotion through our acts of service. Perhaps less recognized are the ways in which humans engage in visual, tactile and aural arts, by shaping words, images and movement together, fitting sound and sight to create beauty in the world.

Or other times we may be tempted to focus on the power of the mind, espousing a faith that ignores the physical senses and downplays the body God gave to each of us. The Creator who made all things good invites us to create and enjoy works of art as embodied worshippers, raising "our hymn of grateful praise" to the "Lord of all."

The feature in this issue, "Worship through visual art," introduces some of the artworks that appear in the newest Mennonite hymnal. (See pages 4 to 6.) We are invited to learn about the visions

that inspired the artists and to explore how their creations might deepen our connection to God the Creator. Thank you to the artists and the rest of the hymnal team for offering this new visual aspect to Mennonite corporate worship.

Art for a hymnal, choral music, drama—these just begin to touch on the subject of beauty expressed through the arts. *CM's* semiannual Focus on Books & Resources points to the way written words enrich our lives. Perhaps future issues will include stories on Mennonite dancers. And what about beauty experienced through taste and smell?

The arts invite us to stop and pay attention, to enjoy. In an essay titled "Taste and See: Looking at the Pictures in *Voices Together*," Magdalene Redekop writes, "It is a lesson I have had to learn repeatedly when taking in any art: slow down."

Do we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear the beauty expressed through the arts? Sometimes we might simply revel in the pleasure of the moment. At other times that beauty reveals new meanings and connects us to human and divine realities beyond our immediate experience. Beautiful works of art can inspire both hope and loving action. Ultimately, beauty invites us to praise the Creator of all—if we have ears to hear and eyes to see.

Correction

Rosthern Junior College was incorrectly named in "Supporting transformation for years to come," Jan. 24, page 33. *Canadian Mennonite* regrets the error. ❧



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In a piece titled "Migrant Journey," artist Rafael Barahona explores a universal story that includes many perils but also a sense of hope. The art was inspired by Jeremiah 29:11 and Hebrews 11:1 and appears in the hymnal collection *Voices Together*, published by MennoMedia. For more art, see pages 4-6.

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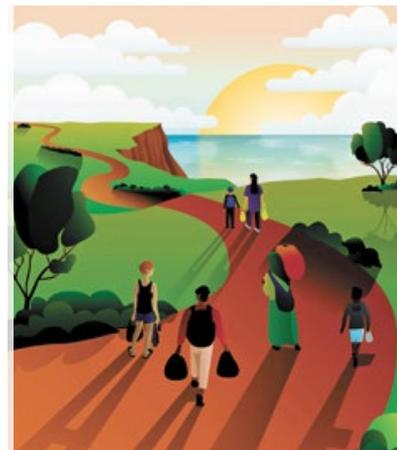
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Images reach into our lives in a different way than written text and music do, writes **Carol Penner**. She explores how a new hymnal leads the way.



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FEATURE

Worship through visual art

A new hymnal leads the way

By Carol Penner
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

One of the striking things about *Voices Together*, the new Mennonite song collection, is that it includes 12 pieces of visual art.

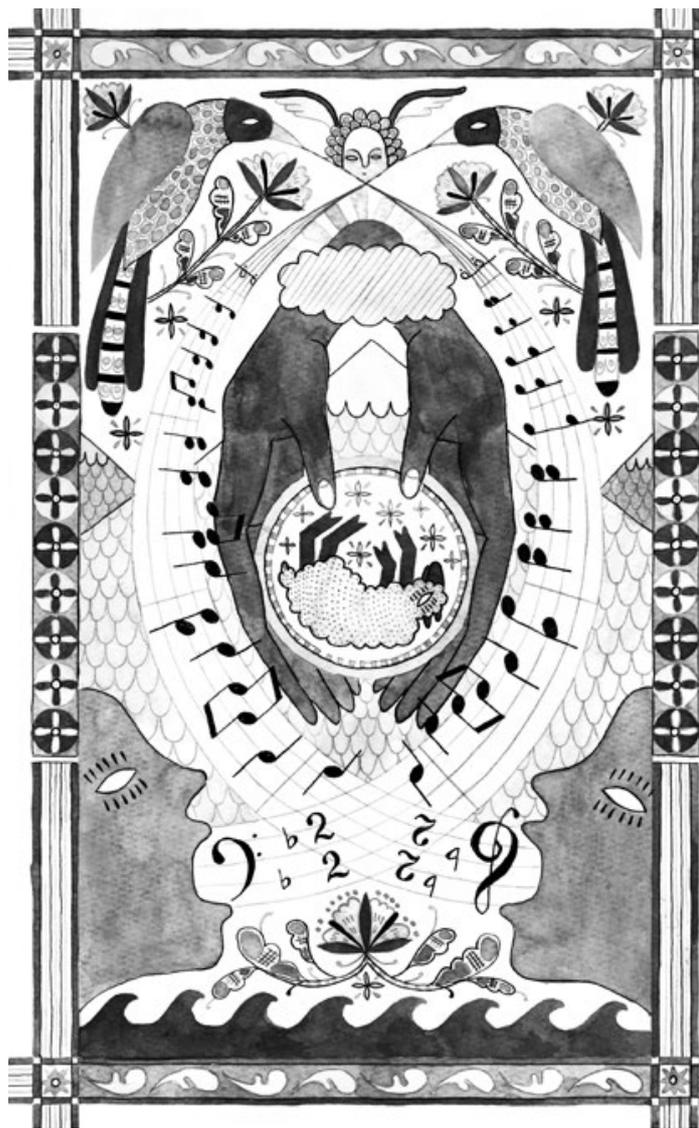
Images reach into our lives in a different way than written text or even music. I remember sitting in church services as a little kid, paging through my Bible and looking for pictures. Children growing up in congregations with the new hymnal will be shaped by the artwork they see there week after week.

For adults too, continued repetitive exposure to a piece of art can have a spiritual impact. Over time we apprehend different things as new layers of meaning emerge from a familiar piece of art. Christians through the centuries have known this, which is why many denominations regularly commission artwork to be placed in their worship spaces.

Sarah Johnson and Saejin Lee co-chaired the hymnal's visual art committee. Johnson, a visiting professor at the Vancouver School of Theology, hopes that the hymnal will encourage congregations to "welcome the gifts of visual artists in worship leadership." She suggests that visual art in the hymnals is "an entry for those who are less comfortable with written words and musical notation, especially children, worshippers who do not speak English, and people with different ways of learning and expressing themselves."

The visual art committee of *Voices Together* put out a call to artists to submit their work for consideration. The artists were invited to produce art on themes related to worship and aspects of the Christian story. The committee chose a dozen pieces to represent the diversity of the church in terms of gender, racial/ethnic identity and geographic location.

One of the artists was Meg Harder, who lives in St. Catharines, Ont. As a visual artist, she observes: "Growing up, the arts in Mennonite culture was typically very music focussed, so it was really exciting to have an opportunity to participate in the cultural life of



ARTWORK USED WITH PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST

In "Sing the Goodness" artist Meg Harder used ink on paper to depict imagery from the Psalms, including human mouths, waters that "roar" and mountains that "sing together."

Mennonites in a way that was more natural to me.”

Harder submitted a sample of her art, and the committee asked her to create something on the theme of “praising,” giving her specific biblical texts on which to reflect. She was drawn to the Book of Psalms for her inspiration and included images from the poetry of the psalms in her piece.

The artists used a variety of media: drawing, painting, printmaking, papercut, photography and digital illustration. One of the challenges for the artists was knowing their work would be reproduced in black and white and grey, and would be reduced to the size of a hymnal page. Harder often creates *fraktur*, a style of art that comes from the Pennsylvania-Dutch tradition. While her *fraktur* work is often characterized by bright colours, for this piece she deliberately used an ink wash, saying: “Grayscale brought a sobriety or sombreness to the work that I had not been able to achieve before. I really liked the effect.”

Artist Saejin Lee talked about the feedback she received from the committee in the artistic process. They encouraged her to create a work of art that would appeal to children. There was “enthusiastic affirmation for keeping the depiction of people with various abilities represented in the final image,” Lee says. “The woman in the wheelchair was part of my initial sketch as well. To include that I think celebrates many people from different backgrounds, including those with various abilities in our midst.”

Experiencing the art

Mennonites have not always been comfortable with visual art in worship. Tom Yoder Neufeld, a Conrad Grebel University College professor emeritus who was also part of the *Voices Together* visual art committee, explains: “While uneasiness about visual art goes back millennia in Christian traditions, including Anabaptism, we have come to value deeply the capacity of visual art to deepen our spiritual sensitivity, our worship and our relationship to God.”

Using visual art in worship is natural



ARTWORK USED WITH PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST

Artist Saejin Lee worked with watercolour paint and coloured pencils to create “Tree of Life.” Inspired by this biblical image of restoration, she writes, “So come, friends, rest, play, and belong.”

for some congregations because they regularly draw on the art of their own church members in worship, whether through featuring it physically in the sanctuary, reproducing it in a bulletin or

projecting it on a Sunday morning. Other congregations may be unsure about how to use visual art. There are resources in the *Voices Together* Worship Leader Edition on how artwork can be

used in worship.

The visual art committee carefully chose the songs or hymns that would appear beside the artwork in the hymnal, as well as the Scripture passages on the reverse pages. Worshippers can be encouraged to look at a work of art while Scripture is read. For churches that have purchased a projection version of the hymnal, the images can be projected on a screen for the whole church to see.

Another option is a guided meditation called *Visio Divina*, in which worshippers encounter God through the sense of sight. The worship leader encourages people to enter the artwork reflectively, meditatively and prayerfully. This practice is based on the belief that God can speak to us through art, as it is a “visual retelling of God’s story.”

In connection with the launch of *Voices Together*, MennoMedia, the collection’s publisher, organized several events. One of these featured 10 of the visual artists talking about their work. (Watch it at <https://bit.ly/3Kr7J4H>.)

An exhibit of the art was organized and is being shown at four Mennonite schools: Bethel College in Kansas, Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, Goshen College in Indiana and at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont. Starting in March, the Grebel Gallery will exhibit art from the hymnal and some companion pieces by the same artists. The exhibit is called “Voices Together: A Celebration of Art and Music.”

The exhibit was curated by Rachel Epp Buller, professor of visual arts and design at Bethel College and the director of the Regier Art Gallery. Buller is also one of the 12 featured artists. She curated a gallery book for this exhibit, in which the artists reflect on their work. An essay by Magdalene Redekop (a University of Toronto professor emeritus) describes her own experience of viewing the artwork. (Online at <https://bit.ly/3w5r9IL>.)

Paul Heidebrecht, director of the



ARTWORK USED WITH PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST
For the digitally created image titled “Communion,” Canadian artist Dona Park depicted soup and rice, expanding the idea of communion beyond bread and wine to show it as an international feast.

Kindred Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement at Grebel, says of the usefulness of this gallery book: “Each artist provides details on their contribution, and for those who can’t make it to the gallery, this online resource is a great way for people to see the artwork in its original colours.”

“We are eager to see how people’s experience of the original artwork that is reproduced in the *Voices Together* hymnal will prompt reflection—and provide inspiration for—the role of the visual arts in worship,” he says. ☸



Carol Penner teaches practical theology at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont.

The exhibit at the Grebel Gallery runs from March 14 to May 6. For information about gallery hours and booking a group tour, visit <https://bit.ly/3GZ2aJE>.



☸ For discussion

1. How much visual art is on display in the worship space of your congregation? Has this changed over time? Why do some traditional Mennonite groups keep their worship spaces plain and simple?
2. Carol Penner says that “continued repetitive exposure to a piece of art can have a spiritual impact.” Do you agree? Can you think of times and places where you have been drawn closer to God through contemplation of visual art?
3. Meghan Harder says that Mennonite arts have traditionally been focused on music. Do you agree? How important is it to have visual art included in the new hymnal?
4. If you were re-designing the worship space in your church, what visual art would you include?

—By Barb Draper

See related resources at
www.commonword.ca/Browse/2815

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/// Readers write

✉ A pastoral letter regarding Ukraine

Beloved sisters and brothers in Ukraine: Today, war has come to your homeland.

We grieve the danger, death and destruction that this plague brings.

We stand in solidarity with you as persons of shared faith and hope.

In our prayers we lift you to the sovereign God, who says, *“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you . . . when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned”* (Isaiah 43:1-2).

Sisters and brothers, you are in the fire, and our hearts ache.

We call on Mennonites around the world, and all who confess Christ as Lord, to join in praying for the peace of Ukraine. We grieve violence and we reject efforts by any nation to dominate another. We pray for leaders of Ukraine, Russia and allied nations as they respond to, or participate in, this crisis.

For the love of God and the sanctity of life, we ask that all combatants stop the bloodshed and seek the welfare of all people in Ukraine, Europe and Russia.

We stand in solidarity with you as you cooperate with other denominations and local governments to provide food, shelter and medications to those in need.

Brother Roman Rakhuba, leader of Associated Mennonite Brethren Churches in Ukraine, we hear your call for spiritual and financial support. We applaud the vision and courage of God’s people in Ukraine, and will look for ways we can help sustain

you and your ministry.

As stated in the “Shared Convictions” of Mennonite World Conference (MWC), we believe that the “Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life, so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice and share our possessions with those in need.”

“For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born to us . . . and he is named . . . Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:5-6).

Living God, may your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as in heaven! Amen.

J. NELSON KRAYBILL, ELKHART, IND.

The writer is MWC’s president. Originally posted by MWC on Feb. 24.

✉ Putin needs to learn to ride a donkey

Coincidental to the news of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia last month, I had been looking at the difference between miracles, luck and chance. Miracles traditionally are supernatural wonders orchestrated by God; winning the jackpot at a casino, not so much.

In the process of recalling miracles, I reread all about Balaam, the mean false prophet whose donkey, after enduring considerable torture, is finally given the ability to speak and in pain cries out: *“What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?”* Are you listening, President Putin?

Dina and I both have Ukrainian/Russian roots, and I have travelled the length of lovely Ukraine from Kyiv to Odessa and, while I am no expert in Ukrainian/Russian affairs, a cursory statistical look at their economic and military profiles suggests that this is a classical “big brother” beating up on “little brother” situation.

Russia is the largest country in the world and Ukraine is the size of Texas. Russia is relatively wealthy, while Ukraine is poor. And yet their cultures and history are similar, and logically their relationship should be similar to that of Canada and the United States. I ask, “Where is that ‘talking donkey’ when you most need him?”

The other donkey story that Putin should read is more familiar to most of us and is centred on the first Palm Sunday celebration, when Jesus very specifically chose a donkey for his historic ride into Jerusalem. The donkey symbolized humility and peace, and allowed Jesus to be interpreted triumphantly, but not as an earthly king.

I know that Putin likes his horses, but he really

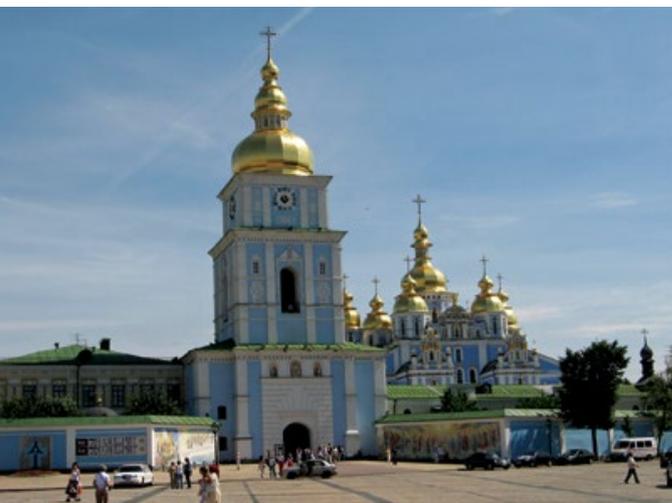


PHOTO BY KARLA BRAUN

St Michael’s Cathedral, Kyiv, Ukraine.

should learn to ride a donkey.
PETER DUECK, VANCOUVER

The writer attends Peace Church on 52nd in Vancouver.

✉ Feature on trans Christians applauded

Re: “God didn’t create you wrong,” Feb. 21, page 4.

Thank you to those interviewed for sharing your stories and thoughts about faith.

The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective served an important purpose. It provided theological unity as denominations merged, and we forged a shared identity. But now we are using it to answer questions it wasn’t designed to answer.

What was once a sharp tool of theological precision has become a blunt object used for exclusion, and it is causing harm. When all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.

When is it time to address our corporate theology and make space for LGBTQ+ identities in our community?

TIMOTHY WENGER (ONLINE COMMENT)

Thank you to Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe for writing on this important topic, and to those who

generously shared their stories.

There is so much to learn, and the examples given here are really helpful and informative as we begin to access the harm done and the ways we can love and learn from our LGBTQ+ neighbours and family members.

CAROL PENNER (ONLINE COMMENT)

For folks looking for resources for congregational singing, the Hymn Society has created a collection of hymns called *Songs for the Holy Other*.

A free copy is available online at <https://bit.ly/35vgThL>. My personal favourite queer hymn is “For All the Children,” but there are lots of great ones!
ANNA NEKOLA (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ Fight climate change by shipping liquid natural gas overseas

I was very disheartened when I first read the 7 Calls to Climate Action from the link that was provided in a recent issue of *Canadian Mennonite* but was reassured after reading the much-more-reasonable “call to action” put out by the executive ministers of Mennonite Church Canada (<https://bit.ly/3v5mHcg>).

It actually encourages us to take some personal responsibility and reduce our own consumption habits, instead of blaming everything on the fossil-fuel industry. Like it or not, we will be reliant on fossil fuels for decades to come. Almost everything you touch or walk on today is derived from, or has used, fossil fuels as a component—from your cell phone to your home’s flooring or the road you drive on.

One of the difficulties of the big push to renewables as the absolute answer to our climate change woes is the poor performance of wind and solar power.

I work at a facility with high-power consumption and, as such, we monitor power production and pricing in Alberta 24/7. Anyone can go to the Alberta Electric System Operators website (<https://www.aeso.ca>) and follow the live updates for themselves.

You may be shocked at the poor performance of wind power and how the price can spike hundreds of dollars per megawatt in a matter of minutes when wind power production drops. Every megawatt of renewable power has to be backed up by natural-gas-turbine-power production, which can be started at a moment’s notice to avoid power brown-outs across the province.

It is ironic that the best thing that Canada can do



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to fight global climate change is to ship more of our clean natural gas through pipelines to the liquid-natural-gas facilities to be shipped to Asia and India, reducing the amount of coal-burning power plants overseas.

BRIAN HILDEBRANDT, CARSTAIRS, ALTA.

The writer is a member of Bergthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury, Alta.

✉ Worshipping in spirit and in truth

Throughout his life, Jesus encouraged people to approach each other non-judgmentally and learn to worship in spirit and in truth. At the same time, it is noteworthy how difficult it was, and is, for the people of Jesus to practise forgiving with integrity.

One day, Jesus travelled with his disciples to Samaria, where they stopped to rest. While the disciples left for the city, a woman came and drew a bucket of water from the well. Jesus asked her for a drink.

She was surprised, because Jews and Samaritans did not normally share. Jesus said that, had she known who he was, she would have asked him, and he would have offered her a drink. She said, *“I can see you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place for worship is Jerusalem.”*

Jesus recognized how corrosive was the rivalry between the two places. He said to the woman: *“You will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. A time has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.”*

The woman said to him, *“I know that the Messiah, who is called Christ, when he comes, will proclaim all things to us.”*

Jesus said, *“I am the one who is speaking to you.”*

The woman said to him, *“Sir, give me this water.”*

Worshipping in spirit and in truth indicates that devotees don't have to go to a special place to worship. People can worship God at anytime and anywhere. Because the Holy Spirit is with us, we are in God's presence. This was epic news for the Samaritan woman. She learned that she was part of God's forgiveness and of the global redemptive story, as are we.

JOHN KLASSEN, VANCOUVER

The writer is an emeritus professor at Trinity Western University in Langley B.C.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Hagerman—Beau Thomas (b. Jan. 26, 2022), to Geordie and Helen Hagerman, Breslau Mennonite, Ont.

Wiebe—Wren Margaret Bishop (b. Feb. 9, 2022), to Stephen and Gabrielle Bishop Wiebe, Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Weddings

Cressman/Finn—Mark Cressman and Shannon Finn, at Wellesley Mennonite, Ont., Feb. 12, 2022.

Deaths

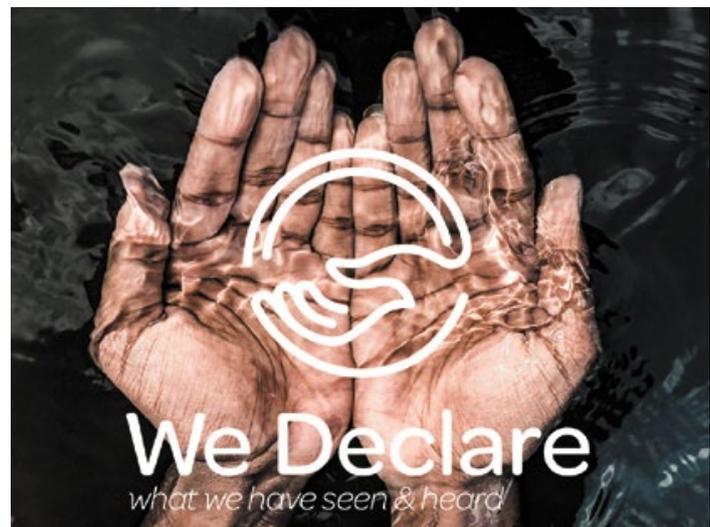
Banman—Bernice (Manko), 90 (b. Sept. 18, 1931; d. Feb. 23, 2022), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Driedger—Henry N., 97 (b. Oct. 6, 1924; d. Feb. 15, 2022), North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Friesen—Irwin (Henry), 93 (b. Jan. 1, 1939; d. Feb. 27, 2022), Charleswood Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Leppky—Jona, 88 (b. Jan. 12, 1934; d. Feb. 17, 2022), Charleswood Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Wiebe—Marie (nee Olfert), 85 (b. June 21, 1936; d. Dec. 14, 2021), Wildwood Mennonite, Saskatoon.



Gathering 2022 Edmonton, Alberta July 29 – August 1, 2022

Join us on Treaty 6 territory as we re-examine what it means to tell the Good News and bear witness to the Gospel of peace.

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FROM OUR LEADERS

Life can be real

Curtis Wiens

“Life can be real / on a snowmobile,” croons Canadian music legend Stompin’ Tom Connors in one of his many songs about Canadian life and culture. As someone who occasionally dabbles in songwriting myself, I have often had a chuckle when I hear that line with a bit of forced rhyme. What does “life can be real” mean anyway?

But the more that I have thought about it these days, the truer it seems to be. Personally, the feeling of fresh air against my face on the snowmobile feels like real life. My travel follows the natural contours of the land rather than human-built infrastructure. Life on the snowmobile certainly feels more real than when I am sitting in a chair with a screen in front of me, something I regrettably do my fair share of.

Increasingly in today’s culture, we can understand what we do and say online to be real life. This has been accentuated during the pandemic years, when things like church worship, school and family get-togethers moved online. But online interactions are not real life, at least not in the same way as interacting with the world we live in—like on a snowmobile.

In fact, much of what we see online is not real at all. Pictures are touched up and viewed through filters. The image we see on Instagram is not necessarily a true representation of what was in front of the camera when the picture was taken. And even if images are unfiltered, they are carefully curated to portray an image that we want the public to see—a presentable good life. It looks good, but is it real?

The echo-chambers of social media also have another effect of spreading misinformation or creating alternate realities out of facts and figures plucked when convenient. We can no longer even agree on the basic truth of reality.

As an example, in Saskatchewan, Premier Scott Moe recently proclaimed that vaccines were not effective in reducing the transmission of COVID-19. Epidemiologists came to a different conclusion. These two versions of reality influenced how each thought we should navigate public-health policy over the near future.

I sometimes wonder what reality someone is living with when they come to the conclusion it is okay to brandish a swastika or other symbol of hate in a public place. That person and I are

certainly not starting from the same underlying base of truth about the past and present.

Our churches are not immune from these broader societal trends. We don’t necessarily come to a worship service with the same understanding of what is real as the person sitting next to us. A challenge for our congregations is to become places where people can bring their whole authentic selves without a need to present a carefully curated public image.

The presence of Christ is a place where you can experience real life. We also need to continue efforts to dialogue well when we disagree. This involves recognizing when we have different understandings of what is real in life. Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Can we say that within our church, life can be real? ☞



Curtis Wiens is chair of the Mennonite Church Saskatchewan Pastoral Leadership Commission. He likes to occasionally take the snowmobile out for a rip.

A moment from yesterday



Mennonite Publishing House occupies a corner in the Kitchener (Ont.) Auditorium with its bookstand at the Mennonite World Conference assembly in 1962. Three women in the foreground gravitate towards the parenting books and the bestselling *Mennonite Community Cookbook*, while two men browse titles related to missions.

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing
Photo: David L. Hunsberger /
Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

IN THE IMAGE

'Make your tents large'

Ed Olfert

In my federal voting life, I have voted only for the Liberal party.

When I suggested that as the opening sentence for my next *Canadian Mennonite* column, my two eldest granddaughters, 17 and 20, immediately began guessing at the percentage of readership that would immediately condemn me to the lake of fire.

As I look at and listen to what political discourse has become, I think maybe it's time to risk that condemnation. In Canada we sort through the apocalyptic rhetoric and actions that grew out of differing opinions about managing a pandemic, and now in Europe folks are dying or being displaced because we haven't learned the lessons of solving differing views respectfully.

So I'll give it a go.

I'm a first-generation, Canadian-born citizen. My people have not yet celebrated a century here. My mother frequently reminded us that her father taught his children to vote Liberal, as gratitude for the policies of William Lyon Mackenzie King's government that allowed the doors to remain open.

That always made sense. However, it got a little complicated in the late 1960s, when Pierre Trudeau arrived on the scene. My father's family culture had no

idea what to do with "jaunty"; it was probably interpreted as "acting smart," not a good thing. However, I was a rebellious teenager at that moment, so "PET" became a hero, and I attended university in a denim vest with "Fuddle Duddle" scrawled across my back. Google it.

As exploration of faith became a more significant part of my life, political reality was tossed into that thinking. And big L liberalism came out looking pretty good. A significant part of my understanding of spirituality is that of inclusion, welcoming the alien, the widow, the leper, folks on the edge.

Beyond my family's experience, and that of my Doukhobor friend, my Ukrainian friend, there is a readiness to open doors and wallets when folks are in need. Certainly there are difficult stories within the Indigenous history, stories in which nobody comes out clean, but steps toward reconciliation and justice are, in my experience, connected to centrist governing. Equally, if progressive reform is to happen in the justice system, keeping us all safer and saner, it has/will come from the centre. Same-sex inclusion touches our family directly.

Here in Western Canada, it's a little like beating my head against a wall. I

discover the name of my candidate as I unfold my ballot, a candidate typically parachuted in from the university. Few resources are spent here. I get that.

What of our current leader, Justin Trudeau? Again, the vitriol thrown his way is confounding. All of our political governments have had an unprecedented and difficult slog these past few years. While decisions made were not always the ones I might have made, who am I to arrogantly assume that I'm smarter, more morally astute, or that I or my group alone is aware of the facts that should dictate the next decision?

This is my story. I challenge you to tell yours. What stories are central to your political passion? What Bible verse points you to a political expression? I sit with *The Message*, the first several verses of Isaiah 54. What has been life-giving to you as you watch our country move in ways that feel holy and good?

Certainly God isn't found in any one expression. That's what makes it fun and challenging. Can we talk about, write about, or listen to our political passions in a way that respects, honours and builds up? Can we listen to learn, not to argue?

"Make your tents large! Spread out! Think big!"

Send me a message. I'm open to conversation. And conversion. ☼



Ed Olfert (p2peho@gmail.com) gives thanks for those who lead.

Et cetera

EFC launches racism-conversation guide

"Conversations that shape us" is a new resource that uses biblical concepts to understand and respond to racism within a Canadian context. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, of which Mennonite Church Canada is a member; the Canadian Bible Society; Canadian Christians for Justice and Mercy; and Cardus produced the conversation guide, a PDF resource designed especially for use with church staff or small church groups. The guide "invites you into a courageous conversation about racism," says Beverley Muir, a professor of education at Tyndale University in Toronto. "It does not start with looking at injustices, albeit they are plentiful. It starts with the human heart, where each of us is invited to journey inward and talk about our biases and assumptions." The guide has individual reflection time, group discussion questions, and includes a list of Canadian and international resources for further learning. The resource is available online at www.TheEFC.ca/Racism.



MIND AND SOUL

A culture of peace

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

The very day that Russia sent tanks across the Ukrainian border, a book on nonviolence arrived at my door. Sometimes I wonder if God does that sort of thing intentionally.

As an advocate of nonviolence, I have been queried frequently about what can be done about this war. The challenge is whether one can say anything new and practical under the sun. Or is there just a time to kill and then later maybe a time to heal, weep and mourn? That is, is there a time for war and a time for peace?

Those statements come from Ecclesiastes, perhaps the most existentially confusing book in our collection of sacred Scriptures. I like the Bible because it does not have simple answers. The writer of Ecclesiastes struggles not only with faith, but with practice.

I have no experience of war. I have faint experience of nonviolent practices to de-escalate dangerous situations. But the scale between working with a raging young offender and countering tanks and missiles is so disproportionate that I hesitate to say anything about this war.

Ten days after the invasion of Ukraine, almost a dozen of us watched a movie about nonviolent political revolutions. There are many techniques, practices

and strategies for nonviolent action even in the face of brutal and persistent violence. But nonviolence isn't always effective, some people said afterwards. Yes, and violence isn't either!

In last month's column, I mentioned political-science research showing nonviolent protests were more likely to succeed and have better long-term effects than violent forms of political revolution. It was serendipitous. I wasn't expecting war in Europe to break out. Let us also remember that there is violence and war elsewhere in the world, too.

I am glad that Anabaptists have moved from being the "quiet in the land" and simple nonresistance toward active peacemaking. Christians have public responsibilities along with fidelity to Jesus-following. That makes perfect faithfulness far more difficult.

Nonviolence is not only a refusal to do harm, it actively works to create the conditions for peace, good decision-making, reconciliation, democracy, and, dare I say, shalom. Nonviolence can be obstructive—protests and work slowdowns—or constructive—building alternatives. Both help create the conditions we want. Active peacemaking does not avoid, accommodate or conceal violence.

The alternative to war and other forms of violence is to promote a "culture of peace." The UN defines this as "a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts, by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations."

Root causes: To work for justice is to work for peace. Ways of life: A culture of peace means we tell different stories about "heroism" and we focus on different parts of that complicated Bible. It undermines the temptation to use force. It means we examine our own hearts, and how power and privilege shape relations in the church and society. It means we learn better forms of communication. It means we learn new behaviour. It means we actively learn.

The first jointly produced document of the Bridgefolk Catholic-Mennonite dialogues in North America was entitled "Called to be peacemakers." What is particularly interesting is that nonviolence is a woefully minor tradition in Catholic Christianity.

That book that arrived at my door? It was from a new nonviolence initiative promoted by the Catholic peace organization Pax Christi.✚



Randy Haluza-DeLay's first published article was way back in 1996 for The Mennonite Reporter, on the varieties of pacifism.

Et cetera

UN addresses plastic pollution

The United Nations Environmental Assembly met in Nairobi, Kenya, in early March, to address the world's environmental challenges. One of the online sessions, entitled "Faith for Earth dialogue," highlighted the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, an organization connected to the World Council of Churches (WCC) and established in 2016 as a network of 135 organizations working in the areas of health, gender equality, sustainable peace and clean water. The UN Environmental Assembly ended with an agreement among 175 countries resolving to end plastic pollution and to formulate a legally binding contract by 2024.

Source: WCC and UN Environment Programme



WCC PHOTO BY FREDRICK NZWILI

An artist's impression of a giant plastic tap spewing plastic garbage stands outside the United Nations Environmental Programme offices in Nairobi, Kenya.

TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

A blip in the family tree

Joshua Penfold

As I read through long lists of descendants in the first chapters of First Chronicles, some names are familiar, like the sons of Jacob and other names I've encountered in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus.

Achar (also Achin in Joshua 7) gets a sentence of description, reminding us that he was the one "*who brought trouble on Israel by violating the ban on taking devoted things.*" We are reminded that Er, son of Judah, "*was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death.*" That's all that we know about him. Then there are hundreds of other names that are mentioned in passing as the chronology barrels through the names.

I was struck by how fleeting these lives are when they are reduced to nothing but another name in a family-succession account. Each of these people had lives, stories, relationships, feelings and contributions. And these are some of the few who have the honour of their name being recounted; many people are lost to history.

This is somewhat existential musing, but it causes me to pause and wonder about my own life, my little blip in history. Generations from now will I be remembered by my great-

great-great-grandchildren? What will they know about me? Sure, in this age, I suppose my digital footprint will be permanently available but, in the sea of overloaded information, will anyone care to look? Will it matter?

Perhaps it matters in the moment, and the ripple effects of love, kindness and faithfulness are immeasurably valuable, hopefully causing blessings to the thousandth generation. But maybe, just like my great-great-great-grandpa Samuel Penfold, I'll eventually just be a name in a genealogy, a mystery of the past, and maybe that's okay.

One thing you notice when you have two daughters and no sons is just how patriarchal biblical genealogies are. Having a son to carry on the family line is an assumed norm . . . until it isn't.

As I was growing up, my dad pointed out the fact that carrying on the family name was something that was on my shoulders now. I was his only son; he was my grandfather's only son. I think my great-uncle died in the war and didn't have children. I don't know exactly, but the point was that our particular branch of the Penfold tree was depending on me to have a son to continue.

I never realized the impact that that

conversation had on me until a good 25 years later, when I had two incredible daughters, but no son. Even now, there is still a part of me that holds on to that bit of information that became an expectation. I keep telling myself that it doesn't matter, but telling myself it doesn't matter is just a roundabout way of me realizing that, for some reason, it does matter to me in some way, however insignificant.

This morning I read about Sheshan in I Chronicles 2:34. It turns out he was like me; he had no sons, only daughters. But guess what? It goes on to say that his daughter married a servant and they had a son, and then the lineage goes on for another 12 generations of fathers begetting sons. There's this little blip in this patriarchal lineage, enough to mention it, but then it just keeps going. That branch in the family tree did live on, almost like the patriarchal system didn't matter.

So maybe I can lay to rest my superfluous and fruitless lament of being sonless and realize that I'm just a blip in the family tree that will continue on just as Sheshan's line did, through his daughters. ☼



Joshua Penfold (penfoldjoshua@gmail.com) is the son of Robert, the son of Neil, the son of Thomas, the son of Samuel, the son of Samuel, the son of Standing . . .

Et cetera

Mexican senate approves issuing of 'Mennonite coin'

Plans are in place for a coin commemorating the arrival of the first Mennonites in Mexico 100 years ago. They left Canada over concerns about education requirements in the Prairie provinces and settled initially in the areas of Chihuahua and Durango. Today, it is estimated that the population of Mennonites in the country is 120,000 people, in various parts of the country. The coin will recognize their economic contributions, which include agribusiness and the metalworking industry. Details about the coin's design are not yet known, but plans call for it to be worth 20 Mexican pesos, with circulation to happen this year. It will be in the shape of a dodecagon (12-sided) and will be composed of two parts: a central section made of a silver-nickel alloy and a perimeter ring of an aluminum-bronze alloy.



Sample dodecagon coins

FILM REVIEW

How I learned to stop worrying and love the comet

Don't Look Up.

Netflix release Dec. 24, 2021. Producer, director, screenplay writer: Adam McKay. Starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Lawrence, Meryl Streep. Rated 14A for language, sexual content, drug content and a brief scene of graphic nudity.

Reviewed by Vic Thiessen

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

What would you do if you heard that all life on earth was about to end? This is the premise behind *Don't Look Up*, an Academy Awards best-picture nominee, released on Netflix in December and already one of the most popular Netflix films ever made.

Don't Look Up begins with doctoral student Kate Dibiasky (played by Jennifer Lawrence) discovering a new comet heading towards Earth. The astronomy professor Kate works with (Dr. Mindy, played by Leonardo DiCaprio) confirms the comet will strike the earth in six months. Unless it is stopped, it represents an “extinction-level event.”

The discovery is taken seriously enough to get Kate and Dr. Mindy a visit to the Oval Office, but President Orlean (Meryl Streep) and her son Jason (Jonah Hill), the chief of staff, are only concerned about the impact of this news on upcoming elections. They want to “slow down and assess,” getting confirmation from their own scientists. So Kate and Dr. Mindy take their warning to the news media, represented by anchorwoman Brie (Cate Blanchett), whose primary concern is ratings and who insists that Kate and Dr. Mindy “keep it light,” a rather difficult proposition.

Even when the president finally takes action, she is quickly convinced by her biggest donor, smartphone and technology giant Peter Isherwell (Mark Rylance), to view the comet as a source

of valuable resources to be mined for trillions of dollars of profit, which can be used to bring everlasting peace and prosperity to the Earth.

Don't Look Up is written and directed by Adam McKay, whose previous satires concerned actual events. Of course, with this obvious allegory about climate change (climate-change deniers dismissing warnings of imminent disaster), McKay is addressing an actual crisis this time as well.

The film has many clever moments of satire that make me think: “Yes, this is the way I’ve been feeling for years. How

can people keep looking down and missing the comet in the sky? How can we allow short-sighted governments to build pipelines designed to carry dirty fossil fuels for at least 50 years when experts say we need to begin phasing out fossil fuels now if disastrous climate change is to be avoided?”

And I couldn’t agree more with the film’s satirizing of climate-change deniers, the smartphone industry, social media and the news media (the call for more independent media is clear). It’s true the film doesn’t say much on those subjects, or about the countless people



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOUCHWOOD PR

A scene from Netflix's *Don't Look Up*, an Academy Awards best-picture nominee.

working to make our lives sustainable, but scientists say it accurately depicts the challenges they face getting their messages heard.

Don't Look Up also offers an unexpectedly profound and moving look at how people respond to the knowledge of their imminent deaths, something we are all capable of denying much of the time, a denial that prevents us from seeing life as the precious thing it is.

The film is well-made, with excellent performances by Lawrence and DiCaprio in the lead roles, solid special effects and a wonderful score that is integral to the success of the film. There are, however, a number of things I find troublesome. The over-the-top performances by Streep, Blanchett and Hill may be exactly what McKay wanted, but their often-silly lines usually made me cringe rather than laugh. Indeed, the film as a whole often veers in unnecessarily silly directions at the expense of a coherent structure and plot.

Some critics have compared *Don't Look Up* favourably with the 1964 political satire, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, which satirizes the nuclear deterrence of the Cold War. However, a comparison of the two films reveals precisely why one is a great classic and the other only a decent film: *Dr. Strangelove* is simple and tight—a perfectly structured film that takes place over two hours. The absurd comments of its characters feel all too real, as they often do in *Don't Look Up*, but the hilarious dialogue is sublime.

Nevertheless, if you can handle the foul language, *Don't Look Up* is a film well worth watching, with much to think about and discuss. ☺



ONLINE NOW!

at canadianmennonite.org



Canadians providing aid in Ukraine

Get an update from the Friends of the Mennonite Centre and the Mennonite Benevolent Society, two Canadian organizations providing aid in Ukraine.

canadianmennonite.org/fmcmbs



Prayer for the war in Ukraine

"God... we pray to you when hope is scarce as our world convulses with the horror of war," Carol Penner writes. "Help us believe that justice will prevail..."

canadianmennonite.org/ukraineprayer



Watch: MCC partner in Ukraine asks for prayer

A Mennonite Central Committee partner in Ukraine requests prayer in a video clip the relief organization posted on YouTube at the beginning of March.

canadianmennonite.org/maxym

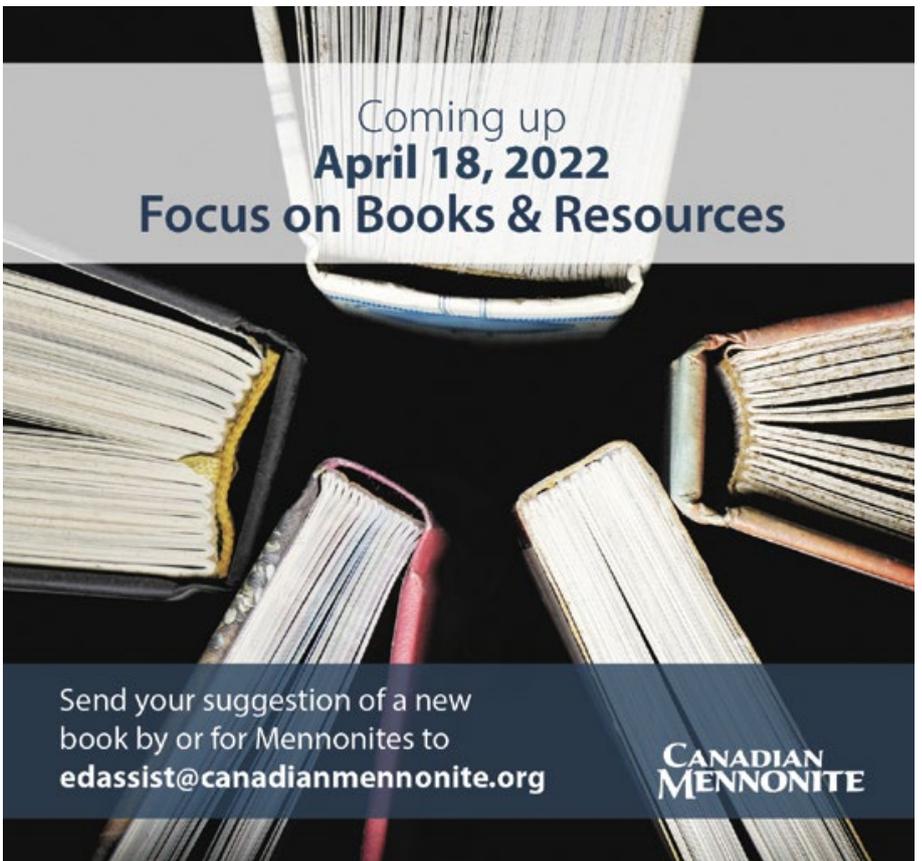


The Mennonite Game's winners and losers

Who is "in" and who is "out" in Mennonite churches in North America? Laura Pauls-Thomas of Lancaster, Pa., reflects on that question.

canadianmennonite.org/mennogame

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NEWS

‘What gives us hope?’

Unity, positivity pervade MC B.C.’s annual general meeting

By Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

With the theme taken from Romans 15:13, “What gives us hope?” Mennonite Church B.C. conducted its annual meeting on Feb. 26 via Zoom. This was the second year for the church gathering to be online instead of the pre-pandemic face-to-face gatherings. Delegates numbered 122.

“We’re all searching for meaningful connections,” said moderator Gerry Grunau in his opening statement. He noted the current events involving the invasion of Ukraine, saying that many ancestors and current family members of those present came from Ukraine, as he prayed for the situation there. He also read the regional church’s Indigenous land acknowledgment adopted in 2021.

As in 2021, delegates could view reports on video before the meeting, and a pictorial montage during the meeting honoured those from MC B.C. churches who died during the past year.

Representatives from MC B.C. congregations who formally closed their doors in 2021—Living Stones Chinese Mennonite Church and Northgate Anabaptist

Fellowship—expressed words of farewell and gratitude for their time in the regional church, and executive minister Garry Janzen led a litany of blessing for them.

Turning to business, the delegate body approved resolutions regarding organizational restructuring, as discussed at the 2021 meeting. The new structure calls for task groups, rather than long-term standing committees, to carry out specific projects.

As explained in the report from the Leadership Board: “The significant shift in our organizational restructuring was formulating task groups to engage in activities more focused on specific purposes. There are now many more persons [65] involved in MC B.C. task groups and committees than had participated on the previous committees [43]. Feedback on the benefits associated with task groups has been:

- **“More commitment** and energy in singularly focused task groups;
- **More focused** and directed;
- **Facilitates ‘passionate’** involvement;
- **Moves at** their own pace (but recognize

limbo risk);

- **More nimble** and fluid when compared to committees;
- **New participants** not previously involved are engaged in MC B.C.”

Some attendees expressed regret that the change to specific task groups involves less regular and personal contact with a wider group of people.

Cheryl Berto of Living Hope Christian Fellowship said she wishes she could still meet face to face with more people a few times a year. “I really miss the feedback from other people; I feel disconnected from people not in my ministry,” she said. “I feel the loss of not having opportunity to have that perspective. Zoom is not same experience!”

Delegates passed a resolution asking for 65 percent approval to pass the restructuring proposal. They also passed resolutions regarding final approval for the organizational restructuring proposal presented at the 2021 annual meeting as identified in the 2022 MC B.C. organizational framework and procedural guidelines; and that the regional church bylaws be amended to incorporate the organizational framework and procedural guidelines dated February 2022. The new bylaws will be presented for adoption to delegates at the 2023 annual meeting.

Financial statements and budgets from MC B.C. and Camp Squeah were also approved. According to the finance committee report, the regional church showed net income, after transfers, of \$53,112 for 2021 and, “the 2022 budget is based on the assumption that revenue and expense levels will remain close to those in 2021.” The report goes on to state: “the proposed budget continues to provide a \$100,000 subsidy to Columbia Bible College, as we have in previous years” and projects a net deficit of \$51,409.

Five individuals who began MC B.C. pastoral roles this past year were introduced:

- **Anne Herridge** of Crossroads Community Church, Chilliwack;
- **Rachel Navarro and Rod Suderman** of Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford;



PHOTOS BY KEN DUECK:

Although Mennonite Church B.C. delegates had to meet virtually this year for their annual general meeting, pastors and families were glad to meet in person for a retreat at Harrison Lake last November.

- **Dan Forrest** of United Mennonite Church of Black Creek; and
- **Jorge Hoajaca** of Sherbrooke Mennonite Church, Vancouver.

In keeping with the theme of the day, each gave a brief video presentation on “My hopes for MC B.C.”

Camp Squeah director Rob Tiessen reported a good year at the camp, despite pandemic limitations. Added bonuses included the youth hockey team that had sheltered at the camp during the floods in November offering to come clean up trails as a thank you, and a generous donor who gave the camp a significant donation to pay off debt.

The Growing Community, Engaging God’s World and Cultivating Anabaptist Vision task groups all reported.

Congregations who used the Mountainview revitalization funds also reported how they are using the funds to strengthen their congregations and communities: Eben-Ezer Mennonite of Abbotsford, Chinatown Peace Church of Vancouver, Peace Mennonite Church of Richmond, First United Spanish Mennonite Church of Vancouver, and Living Hope Christian Fellowship of Surrey.

With Garry Janzen planning to retire this summer after 15 years as executive minister, Darnell Barkman of the five-member task group searching for his replacement reported on the group’s progress. The group announced they had upcoming interviews with potential candidates.

“There was a generous feeling seeping through the Zoom screens at the MC B.C. AGM,” commented Gerry Grunau after the meeting. “The delegates were positive about the feedback on the organizational restructuring proposal conditionally approved last year and resoundingly said ‘proceed.’ We felt God’s blessings on our morning together.”

Other online comments following the meeting included: “So glad to be a part of MC B.C. A great sense of unity in the meeting today and I’m so thankful for that,” and, “What a grace-filled communal gathering to come and decide matters to bring God’s kingdom here.” ❧

MC Manitoba reflects on shared life together

Annual gathering focuses on moving through pandemic and LGBTQ+ inclusion

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

For the second year in a row, the members of Mennonite Church Manitoba came together on Zoom screens, instead of in a church sanctuary, for their annual gathering, due to the risks of COVID-19.

But rather than dwelling on the past, the energy of the meeting was directed forward. The theme of the 75th annual gathering was “Koinonia,” from I John 1:3, meaning a shared life together and with God. Nearly 105 delegates representing 30 of MC Manitoba’s 38 congregations, plus dozens of guests, met on March 5 to celebrate the regional church’s shared life together and reflect on what it could look like moving forward.

Michael Pahl, executive minister of MC Manitoba, said that budgets are stories written in numbers. The 2021 budget tells the story of COVID-19. It was a tough year, with the camping budget particularly under strain. Yet through the diligence of MC Manitoba staff and the generosity of donors, MC Manitoba received \$56,000 more than budgeted in donations for camping ministries, \$52,000 more than budgeted in grants from the Winnipeg Foundation, and unexpected government subsidies.

This left MC Manitoba with a \$72,000 surplus, instead of the deficit it expected, much of which will go to the regional church’s reserves. The 2022 budget calculates a manageable deficit that will be covered by the reserves, with the acknowledgment that COVID-19 can create unpredictable changes. The budget, minutes, board actions and nominations slate were all passed.

With COVID-19 restrictions easing, Camps with Meaning (CwM) is eagerly looking ahead to the summer. Camper



SCREENSHOT BY DARRYL NEUSTAEDTER BARG

Michael Pahl, executive minister of MC Manitoba, preached on I John 1:3, a text that calls Christians to a shared life together, with God.

registration is on par with 2019 numbers, and guest groups are expressing interest in rentals. However, camp is still predicting a \$25,000 deficit for 2022, said Dorothy Fontaine, director of CwM, so it will be launching another fundraiser in spring. Donors have already kicked off the campaign by funding a new ropes course and meditation trails at Camp Assiniboia.

MC Manitoba has reorganized its structure to better serve its different areas of focus. The four areas of its work are now pastoral ministries, congregational ministries, mission ministries, and CwM. This shift has resulted in the transition of Kathy Giesbrecht from associate director of leadership ministries to director of congregational ministries, and Dorothy Fontaine from director of missions to director of CwM. Melanie Neufeld has been hired as director of mission engagement, a new role encompassing some of Fontaine’s previous responsibilities and filling the need for church engagement.

Pre-recorded video reports from MC Manitoba staff and partner organizations like CommonWord, Canadian Mennonite University, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical

Seminary and MC Canada joined a morning of question and answer periods, voting and worship.

Breakout rooms gave participants the chance to hear about program focuses like congregational health, pastoral leadership, finances, local mission, international witness and Camps with Meaning.

In the local mission breakout room, dozens of participants shared how their congregations are supporting their communities. Altona Berghaler Mennonite Church offers a free monthly community meal, and North Kildonan provides space for the local food bank to operate. Bethel Mennonite formed a committee for Indigenous-Settler reconciliation, while Douglas Mennonite partners with a Syrian group that uses its building for youth programming and summer camp. Home Street Mennonite donated enough to the World Health Organization's COVAX fund so that 200 people could receive COVID-19 vaccines and Grace Mennonite in Steinbach planted 450 trees in Manitoba.

A recurring theme was that the pandemic has turned congregations inward, as they have struggled to simply make it through. Even so, these stories showed the passion Manitoba Mennonites have to create shared lives with their neighbours.

Later in the afternoon, breakout rooms covered current issues like climate action, LGBTQ+ inclusion, Indigenous solidarity, Palestine-Israel and the post-pandemic church.

One of the reoccurring conversations of the day was LGBTQ+ inclusion in the life and ministry of the church. In addition to the breakout-room discussion, which had around one third of participants in

attendance, several questions arose during the question period.

In 2017, MC Manitoba congregations agreed to make space for different understandings of marriage in the church and put a three-year moratorium on the conversation of same-sex marriage. But the discussion wasn't revived in 2020 because the pandemic hit Manitoba.

A Listening Circle was formed in 2021, with representatives of 27 of MC Manitoba's 38 congregations sharing how the Spirit has been leading their congregations on this topic. The MC Manitoba board created a committee to attend the listening circle and determine next possible steps.

From what the committee heard at the listening circle, it reported that the regional church cannot take a unified stance on the subject of same-sex marriage at this time. Its recommendations include that MC Manitoba clarify its policies, provide resources to affirming congregations and host more listening circles to listen to the voices of LGBTQ+ people in the MC Manitoba community.

"Regardless of our stance on this, we do need to be able to listen to the LGBTQ+ folks among us," Pahl said.

Some delegates expressed concern that their congregations would be pressured into adopting an affirming stance, while others asserted that deciding not to take an official position is taking a position.

Pahl replied that the goal is not to mandate any one position and that resourcing affirming congregations makes the statement that the regional church is allowing for differences of opinion. "It's about making sure we take care of all our congregations no matter where they are at on this," he said. ❧

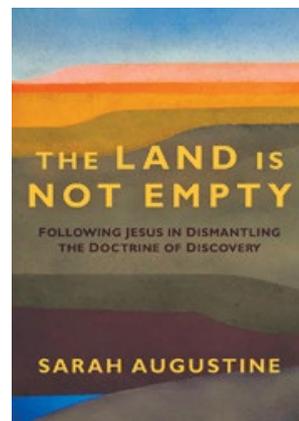


SCREENSHOT BY DARRYL NEUSTAEDTER BARG

Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg donated enough to the World Health Organization's COVAX fund so that 200 people could receive COVID-19 vaccines. A paper chain of people representing these recipients ran one-and-a-half times around the sanctuary.

News brief

The Land Is Not Empty named in *Outreach* magazine



Outreach magazine selected the Herald Press book *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* by Sarah Augustine as an "Also Recommended" resource in the Social Issues and Justice category of its Resources of the Year. The book is featured along with the other selected resources in the March/April 2022 issue of *Outreach*. The titles selected for Resources of the Year address issues in evangelism, apologetics, the church, leadership, social issues, and justice, among other concerns. More than 150 resources were submitted for consideration. An expert in each category evaluated the resources and chose what they considered to be the best. "Sarah Augustine is an important voice in our society," says Amy Gingerich, Herald Press's publisher. "We are proud of her work and thrilled that others like *Outreach* recognize her value as well." In *The Land Is Not Empty*, Augustine investigates ways that the Doctrine of Discovery continues to devastate Indigenous cultures in North America. "The United States was founded on ill-gotten gains. And it has prospered," writes Augustine. "Indigenous Peoples have been systematically disenfranchised and dispossessed as a matter of church policy for 500 years; by United States policy for 240 years."

—MENNOMEDIA

Plans announced for hybrid MWC assembly

Less on-site, more creative options

Mennonite World Conference

How will participants gather for Assembly 17?

The Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Executive Committee has opted for limited on-site attendees and many options for online attendees at the hybrid assembly to be hosted by the three Indonesian Anabaptist-Mennonite synods in Central Java, Indonesia, from July 5 to 10.

Although previous assemblies have welcomed thousands of Anabaptists from around the world, Assembly 17 will welcome 700 on-site participants with the option of additional Indonesian guests for the opening night and closing service. Due to COVID-19 regulations, 700 is the number currently possible.

A little less than half of the 700 registration spaces for the on-site assembly are reserved for Indonesian registrants, divided up between full participation and daily participation. The remaining registration spaces will be divided equally between the four registration categories (based on national gross domestic product figures), to give members from each region opportunity to participate.

“This mode for Assembly increases complexities in planning but offers more opportunity for local church members to engage with international visitors, creates more opportunities for online participants to get to know Indonesia and to respond faster to possible health concerns,” says Liesa Unger, MWC chief international events officer.

Sangkakala Seminary (STT), a seminary located outside Salatiga, will host most of the plenary sessions. In addition, “satellite” meeting places at four local congregations will livestream evening plenaries, while the international choir sings at the seminary. The closing service will be celebrated at JKI Holy Stadium in Semarang.

“This way, online participants can ‘travel’

with us to different places in Indonesia,” says Unger.

The Global Youth Summit (GYS) on the theme “Life in the Spirit: Learn, Serve, Worship” will be attended by GYS delegates and 60 full-time participants from July 1 to 4 in Salatiga. Local Indonesian young adults can join for the evening worship organized by GYS delegates of different continents.

The General Council meetings scheduled to precede Assembly 17 will take place online.

“With additional visa required and quarantine periods changing frequently, the financial risk of ballooning lodging costs and rescheduling flights for more

than 100 General Council delegates is too great,” says César García, MWC’s general secretary.

Meetings involving the Executive Committee, Commission chairs and secretaries, and MWC staff, will take place in Indonesia. These groups, which normally meet face-to-face, have not been together in person since before the pandemic began.

“We want as many people as possible to come,” says Paulus Widjaja, chair of the National Advisory Committee in Indonesia. “We first dreamed of it in Paraguay in 2009. The pandemic discouraged us, but we are still very enthusiastic to bring people to Indonesia.” ❧

Registration for online participation for Indonesia 2022 at mwc-cmm.org opened in December 2021. Registration for on-site participation will start on March 8 at the same URL, along with further information regarding workshops, network meetings, Assembly Scattered tours and lodging options.



MWC PHOTO

The Mennonite World Conference Assembly planning team meets with the Indonesian National Advisory Council in Semarang, Indonesia.

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'I know you're my neighbour, I know you're in need'

MCC local partners in Ukraine supply essential care

By Jason Dueck
Mennonite Central Committee

Try to imagine hearing air raid sirens scream out their warning. In your panic, you seek shelter. Your freezing fingers remind you of the warm coat you've forgotten back home. Or maybe you pack the car full of blankets and food, planning to flee to a safer location. You hope you won't get stuck in a kilometres-long line at a checkpoint. But as your child runs a fever, you realize you didn't pack any medicine.

These are the kinds of stories Linda Herr, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) area director for Europe and the Middle East, is hearing from MCC partners and staff in Ukraine every time she picks up her phone. But amid the incredible hardships Ukrainians are facing, she also hears stories of communities coming together in extraordinary ways.

She says that MCC partners in Ukraine are already meeting essential and immediate needs on the ground where they are.

"We are seeing a very local response," she says. "Many of our partners are taking funds that would have been used for local projects that can't happen now, and they're buying food, medicine, blankets, mattresses—anything and everything that people need."

They are bringing mattresses to people who are sleeping in basements or stairwells, that are serving as makeshift bomb shelters. They are setting up rooms in schools that provide shelter for people on the move. Partners are also providing fuel for vehicles and food for families on their way to other, more secure parts of the country.

"They're saying 'I know you're my neighbour, I know you're in need. Maybe you're just passing through from some other part of the country, but you need something, and I can help you,'" she says.

With Ukraine's ports now blocked off by Russian military forces, and no air access, supplies are hard to come by. MCC partners are focusing on what they can do in the moment, purchasing what they can find and transporting supplies in whatever size vehicles they have available.

Local church partners are also doing their best to provide essentials for people who were struggling even before the conflict broke out.

"Churches are sharing contact information of people who are elderly, disabled or sick—those who normally are unable to leave their homes," says Herr. "People who don't have a lot of resources and can't just call for help anymore."

That sharing of information means vulnerable people can receive resources they wouldn't be able to get themselves while their city is in conflict. Churches have been hubs for supply distribution, and they also serve as places of comfort during times of trauma and stress.

"Churches are gathering to pray and to encourage each other when they can," she says. "And when meeting in person is too dangerous, they send photos to each other as a source of encouragement."

While MCC partners are finding creative ways to provide emergency relief, they are also working with MCC to plan medium- and long-term responses to the devastation. Future projects will likely address needs in the areas of food, shelter and trauma care, especially for those who are being displaced by violence.

"It's humbling to be between the people who want to give and the people who are seeing the need, who are trying to get resources into people's hands," she says. "But the partners, the people in Ukraine, they're telling me they're tired. So many people have left, and for those who remain, there is so much work yet to do."

"Please pray for the people here. Every minute this conflict continues, the humanitarian impacts worsen. Pray for peace. And pray that our partners will continue to have the strength to carry on their good work." ❧



PHOTO COURTESY OF MCC

MCC partner, Kharkiv Independent ECB Churches, evacuated residents, housing them at a local Christian school and at the House of Hope, a seniors residence in a village community 50 kilometers from Kharkiv. (The names of the people pictured are not provided for security reasons.)

'I have never been this stressed in my life'

Mennonites across Canada in angst over Russian invasion of Ukraine

By Aaron Epp
Online Media Manager
WINNIPEG

It's 10:30 a.m. in Winnipeg, but for Valerie Alipova, it might as well be after supper.

Alipova, associate pastor of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, has been living eight hours out of sync with the rest of Manitoba ever since Russia invaded Ukraine towards the end of February. Alipova was born and raised in Zaporizhzhia, where her mother and two sisters were living at the time of the invasion.

Her sisters have since left the city. One of them, who has two children under the age of 10, is now in the Czech Republic. The other, who is six months pregnant, has fled to a small town in western Ukraine. Alipova's mother, a Mennonite pastor, has decided to stay put so that she can help her community.

"Because of the time change, I don't go to sleep until I hear from my mom—that she is awake and safe and alive," Alipova says. "During the day, I'm [watching] the news the entire time, making sure that while my family sleeps or tries to sleep, nothing bad happens."

"I have never been this stressed in my life," she adds. "It has been very difficult to be far away from my family and not be able to help."

Alipova is one of the many Mennonites across Canada worrying about family and friends in Ukraine, where Russia has instigated the largest military conflict on European soil since the Second World War.

"It's been stressful, to put it lightly, for all of us," says Emma Giesbrecht of Ottawa, who is close friends with two families in Ukraine as a result of her late grandfather John Giesbrecht's frequent trips there. Giesbrecht accompanied her grandfather on one of those trips in 2013. One of the main reasons for the trip

was to visit Schönsee—the village in the Molotschna Mennonite settlement where her great-grandparents were married.



PHOTO BY AARON EPP

Winnipegger Valerie Alipova is worried about her family in Ukraine, where she was born and raised. 'I have never been this stressed in my life,' she says.

Watching the invasion unfold has left Giesbrecht feeling stuck, she says.

"I'm calling it the Catch-22, where you need to be informed at all times, but then what you're being informed of is just not nice," she says.

When *Canadian Mennonite* spoke with Giesbrecht on March 4, she and her family had been in constant contact with one of the families they are close to. The family lives in Odessa, a port city on the Black Sea in southern Ukraine. The Giesbrechts had

yet to hear from the other family.

"We're just trying to make sure that they're safe and trying to help any way we can, even though we're literally an ocean away," Giesbrecht says.

Otto and Florence Driedger feel the same way. The Regina couple who co-pastor Peace Mennonite Church have visited Ukraine frequently over the last 30 years. They have made hundreds of friends there while helping to develop social-work and restorative-justice education at Odessa University.

Since the invasion began, the Driedgers have been in touch with a few of their Ukrainian friends. They have also enlisted their church community to provide prayer support.

"It's heart wrenching," Florence says, "but what carries us through is our strong faith."

Canadian Mennonites are resonating with the crisis in Ukraine for a few different reasons, says Aileen Friesen, associate professor of Mennonite studies at the University of Winnipeg and co-director of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies.

One of the key reasons is that there is a direct tie to Ukraine for Mennonites whose families came out of that country in the 1920s and 1940s, and who grew up hearing stories about Ukraine.

Another reason is that heritage trips to the former colonies of Molotschna and Chortitza have given Canadian Mennonites a direct experience of the land and the people living there. At the same time, Mennonite historians like Friesen have developed relationships with Ukrainian archivists and academics who have assisted them with important research.

"They could have erased our history,

they could have easily just forgotten about us, but the people around Zaporizhzhia have been so supportive of Mennonite history,” Friesen says. “They’ve been interested, they’ve asked questions, they’ve helped put up monuments, they’ve helped us find archival documents—these are the people who are being bombed and these are the people who are fleeing their homes.

“These are people who helped us understand our own history, and that should make it personal for Mennonites who have roots in Ukraine.”

Friesen, who has visited Ukraine and had been planning before the invasion began to travel there in May, has been

checking in with her friends to make sure they are okay.

“I study Russian history, I study Ukrainian history, and I never thought this [invasion] would happen,” she says. “It’s been heartbreaking.”

Alipova keeps thinking about a phrase she once saw online: “The only thing that separates us from refugees is luck.”

“This just gives us perspective on how important it is to have peace in our lives and be in safety and have a good night’s sleep,” she says. “Just those simple things have so much more value now, knowing that people in Ukraine don’t have them.” ❧

MCC pulls staff from Ukraine

By John Longhurst

Russia has begun military operations against Ukraine, but North American Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) staff who were working in Ukraine are safe.

That includes Winnipegger Andrea Shalay, MCC’s peace engagement co-ordinator for Europe. Shalay and three other staff, all Americans, were evacuated from Ukraine just before the Russian invasion began on Feb. 24.

“I had just 36 hours to pack up and go,” says Shalay, 42, who has lived in Winnipeg since 2003. “It was very stressful leaving under those circumstances. There wasn’t time to say proper farewells to people I love and care about.”

MCC made the decision to evacuate its North American staff from the country after both the United States and Canada urged their citizens to leave the country. Shalay and three American staff members of MCC scrambled to leave Ukraine.

Laura Kalmar of MCC Canada says the workers were moved to another country, but she didn’t disclose their location. Ukrainians who work for MCC in the country are following security protocols and staying in touch with MCC, she says, adding, “The safety and security of all our staff and local partners are of utmost concern.”

Shalay says she feels a sense of unease

and heaviness about the situation, and fears for her Ukrainian friends who are still in the country. She doesn’t know if she will be able to get back to her apartment.

Yet Shalay, who started her three-year assignment with MCC last year, feels confident and well taken care of by MCC. “MCC has lots of experience working in crisis situations,” she says. “They want all their staff to feel supported.”

The decision to evacuate North American staff was made in consultation with MCC’s partners in Ukraine, she says. “They were part of the decision about whether to stay or go.”

Shalay also feels supported by family and friends in Canada, including from her home congregation, Saint Benedict’s table, part of the Anglican Church of Canada.

For someone whose job is peacemaking, the trouble in Ukraine raises interesting questions, she says. “How do you be a peacemaker when there is the possibility of war?” she asks, noting her role is to support the work of Ukrainian peace organizations.

When she talks to Ukrainians, she says they tell her they have no desire to go to war with Russia. Her friends and colleagues in Ukraine are “taking things one day at a time,” she says, noting they have faced the threat of military action



PHOTO COURTESY OF EMMA GIESBRECHT

Emma Giesbrecht of Ottawa, front row, third from left, is pictured with her grandfather, John Giesbrecht, front row, left, and their friends in Ukraine in 2013. ‘We’re just trying to make sure that they’re safe,’ Emma says.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREA SHALAY

Andrea Shalay of Winnipeg, pictured, and three American Mennonite Central Committee staff members scrambled to leave Ukraine.

since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea.

“For them, this time doesn’t feel a whole lot different,” although there is “a strong sense of nervousness now, for sure,” she says. “Ukrainians believe any conflict with Russia is pointless. They just want to be left alone.”

MCC’s operations in Ukraine are based in Zaporizhzhia in the southeastern part of the country, about 300 kilometres from the border with Russia. ❧

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‘His love for the church is a joy to see’

Doug Klassen will serve second term as executive minister of Mennonite Church Canada

Mennonite Church Canada
Winnipeg

Doug Klassen’s term as executive minister of Mennonite Church Canada has been renewed for a second three-year term beginning June 1.

“We received strong affirmation for Doug’s renewal from Joint Council,” says Calvin Quan, moderator for Mennonite Church Canada.

Joint Council, the governance body made up of representatives from across MC Canada’s five regional churches, reviewed feedback from a 2021 survey sent to staff, the Joint Council, the Executive Staff Group and members of partner organizations on Klassen’s leadership.

“Doug’s energy, deep commitment to Mennonite theology and practice, and his love for the church is a joy to see,” Quan says.

Klassen’s noted strengths were his relationships across the regional churches, the way he represents MC Canada to its partner organizations, and his work on consolidating church policy and structure.

Since April 2021, Klassen has led a review of governance policies with the goal of clarifying how the regions carry out the vision for MC Canada effectively through the roles of executive minister, the Executive Staff Group (regional executive ministers) and Joint Council.

“Doug brings genuine warmth and care into every conversation,” says Leah Reesor-Keller, executive minister of MC Eastern Canada. “He is committed to collaborative decision-making and draws on his strength of building relationships to lead nationwide ministry.”

Klassen has demonstrated a strong vision for intercultural church, one that recognizes and more fully embraces the cultural diversity of its members, Quan says. Klassen formed the Intercultural Church Steering Committee in 2021



MC CANADA PHOTO

Doug Klassen looks forward to beginning his second term with planning for meaningful fellowship, worship and discernment at Gathering 2022 in Edmonton. His first term began in June 2019.

and has advocated for strengthening the diversity of Joint Council representation.

Over the past two years, Klassen has also led the development of a Shared Revenue Agreement, which clarifies

how the regional churches share financial resources to support local congregations, which are the locus of worship and mission in the world. The agreement will be ratified at Joint Council meetings in April.

“I believe with all my heart that the gospel of reconciliation, as lived out in and through local congregations, is a healing balm for our suffering world,” says Klassen. “Together with the regional churches, I am excited to build a strategic plan for the nationwide church that will centre us in our vocation as a people of God.” ❧

❧ News brief

Communitas wins non-profit of the year award

ABBOTSFORD, B.C.—The Communitas Supportive Care Society won the Non-Profit Organization of the Year Award at the 25th annual Business Excellence Awards presented by the Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce and the *Abbotsford News*. The award was presented at a sold-out event on Feb. 10. Karyn Santiago, chief executive officer for Communitas, received the award and said it was an honour to be nominated and to be recognized. “People are at the heart of our organization, and winning this award is truly a reflection of the person-centred care that our staff provide every single day,” she said. “These past two years have been so difficult, and yet we’ve seen our staff go above and beyond, over and over again. I am so grateful to be one part of the Communitas team and the difference we are making in the lives of others.” Communitas is a faith-based, registered charity providing care in communities across British Columbia to those living with developmental disabilities, mental-health challenges and acquired brain injury. The organization provides services for people in the Fraser Valley, Lower Mainland, and Vancouver Island that range from 24-hour home-based options to skills-based day programs and respite care for families.

—COMMUNITAS



Karyn Santiago, chief executive officer of the Communitas Supportive Care Society, holds the Non-Profit Organization of the Year Award given out by the Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce and the Abbotsford News.

'I feel like the luckiest man alive'

Mennonite peacemaker Leonard Doell receives lifetime achievement award

By Emily Summach
Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON

A Saskatchewan man was recently recognized for his decades-long work in peacemaking and community building, especially between Mennonite settlers and Indigenous Peoples. Leonard Doell was honoured with the 2022 Global Citizen Lifetime Achievement Award from the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation.

The council's mission is to "build momentum towards a just, equitable and sustainable world by enhancing the capacity of our members, educating and inspiring the public to take action, and creating connections among those we serve." The lifetime achievement award is given to someone who embodies the the council's mission and values in their life and work.

Doell says he is humbled by the honour: "You know, I have mixed feelings about winning. There are so many people who came before me, who built lots of goodwill and made my work and relationships possible. And there are so many people still doing the work. I'm very humbled and honoured to be the recipient, but I think of the many other deserving people who haven't received an award."

The work that Doell refers to began when he was 22 and was asked to do research on a conflict that was brewing between Mennonite and Lutheran settlers in the Laird, Sask., area and the Young Chippewyan Indigenous Band.

The First Nation community had originally been given the land near Laird by the federal government for a reserve as

part of the Treaty 6 agreement in 1876. Just three years later, though, the land was reassigned to Mennonite and Lutheran settlers.

It was the unwinding of what had happened, determining how justice should be served, and how peace could potentially grow, that began Doell's decades-long labour of love in reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Randy Klassen, the Indigenous Neighbours Program coordinator at Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Saskatchewan undertook filing the nomination to the council's awards committee.

"It was my supervisor at MCC, Amanda Dodge, who suggested that we nominate Leonard, and right away I said, 'Yes, I want to do the application.' He truly embodies the work of reconciliation," Klassen says.

"Leonard has a deep connectedness to the land, the history of the area and the Mennonite story. That placed him so well to build relationships with our Indigenous neighbours for whom land is central. His ability to understand others, to listen well, and his deep rootedness to place is not the same as a mainstream Canadian thinking. Leonard was engaging in reconciliation with humility and humour long before reconciliation was a buzzword," he says.

Although the award was given to Doell in recognition of the work he has already done, for him, so much of his excitement and hope in reconciliation lies in what may come in the future.

"I see a growing understanding in settler people, Mennonites included, that our lives and futures are bound together with all our neighbours," Doell says. "The more we can take the opportunities to get to know one another, and develop relationships, the more there will be a realization that our lives are our neighbour's lives.

"Chief Ben Weenie told me that what



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LEONARD DOELL

Leonard Doell speaks at a City of Saskatoon event honouring residential school survivors.

would bring Mennonite and Indigenous together is our shared love of the land, and that we're all spiritual people. We agreed that the Creator bound us together. I became a grandpa in 2007, and it made me more conscious about those who will come after me. What kind of world are we giving to our children, born and unborn? And our Indigenous neighbours understand this so well; their whole worldview is about living with future generations in mind."

In spite of the challenges and how much reconciliation is yet to be done, Doell expresses deep gratitude for the path his life has taken: "My life has been so enriched and so blessed, the worldview, hospitality and kindness I've experienced in relationships with members of Indigenous communities. Even with all the hard stuff, I'm so thankful that this is my vocation. It's more than a career. I feel like the luckiest man alive." ❧



In 2017, Senator Lilian Dyck invited members of the Stoney Knoll Band, as well the Mennonite and Lutheran communities, to share their story with MPs and senators at Parliament Hill in Ottawa. They are gathered outside the Parliament Building to commemorate that event. Leonard Doell is pictured second from left.



A group of leaders from the Stoney Knoll Band, and the Mennonite and Lutheran communities meet to share stories, information and connection. Doell is pictured in the back row, left.



PHOTO BY TAYLOR SUMMACH

Three generations of women are helping to make comforters for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Material Resources. Grandmother Nora Halliday, left, poses with her daughter, April Hisey, second from right, and granddaughters Rachel, second from left, and Blair, right, in front of their completed comforters. The sisters pieced together their quilt-top designs, and sewed the tops with guidance from their mother. The tops were then knotted by the comforter-making group that meets at Langham (Sask.) Mennonite Fellowship. Once the tops were finished, Halliday took the blankets home to complete the binding. Their comforters, along with 82 more completed by the Langham group, will be delivered to MCC in the coming months.

Growing a business during the pandemic

Florist learned life lessons from her parents

By Maria H. Klassen
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
ST. CATHARINES, ONT.

It was at the end of February 2020 that Lydia Rekrut shook hands with the owner of a floral shop in Thorold, Ont., and bought the business, which included the stock and equipment. March was spent relocating to another building and doing renovations. The official opening was to be April 1, 2020.

And then the pandemic hit, and with COVID-19 came the lockdown. Construction workers were not able to meet their timelines, workers were limited to five in the construction area at a time, materials were backlogged, costs doubled and then tripled, and the lockdown continued.

Weddings were cancelled. Rekrut couldn't advertise a business that wasn't open. There were no people in the store. And she couldn't get her name out to the public.

Some problems were not pandemic related. The apartment above the store flooded the shop. The new fridge malfunctioned twice, and all the flowers had to be thrown out. On a hot summer's day the air conditioner didn't work, and the flowers wilted.

The daycare her son attended was closed, and her parents, Renate and Randy Klaassen, were stuck in Uruguay, and it took them weeks to return to Canada.

The grand opening scheduled for May 1 also did not happen.

While all this was happening, she was taking a few orders and made some arrangements at home.

How did Rekrut come to own this business?

Her interest in floral design started a decade before, when she was at a cousin's wedding and ended up arranging the bridal bouquet, as well as other centrepieces. She



PHOTO BY LYDIA REKRUT

A floral arrangement designed by Lydia Rekrut.



PHOTO COURTESY OF
CREEKVIEW FLORAL ARCHIVES

Lydia Rekrut sets up a floral arrangement.

thoroughly enjoyed this experience and a new passion was born.

She attended Niagara College in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., and graduated with a certificate in floral design. She started as a bucket scrubber and worked in various floral shops in Niagara, eventually working her way up to creating floral arrangements.

Rekrut had already started doing floral arrangements for weddings and events from her home, and she needed to buy a larger fridge. A floral shop came up for sale as the owners were retiring after 32 years. With the encouragement of her husband, Rekrut took the leap of faith and shook hands on that day in February, not knowing what was ahead of her.

The name of the floral shop also changed with the purchase. Rekrut had grown up with a creek running through the backyard of her parents' home, and she wanted to incorporate those childhood memories into the name of her new venture: Creekview Floral Company.

How did she get through that first year?

"I learned many lessons watching my parents as a child growing up," she says.

Both her parents are pastors—Randy at St. Catharines United Mennonite Church and Renate at Niagara United Mennonite Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake—and she saw them dealing with people in key moments of their lives, conducting baptisms, weddings and funerals.

With God's help, her parents handled these key moments with care, prayer, consideration, and empathy, she says. They were professional and compassionate in the stressed times of other people's lives.

And Rekrut wanted to bring this same care and compassion to the lives of the customers she was dealing with, whether at a wedding or a funeral.

Now, as she celebrates the second anniversary of that handshake, she has experienced a very steady growth in her business.

During the first year, many arrangements were ordered for private homes, people wanting to add colour to their homes and their life at a time when social activities were limited.

Although the walk-in business is still slow, she is fully booked for this year with wedding floral arrangements and is taking bookings for 2023. Funeral arrangements also keep her busy.

The life lessons her parents modelled for her, she says, have helped her through a very tough two years. ❧

Singing through the pandemic

By Melissa Miller

Menno Singers
WATERLOO, ONT.

The Menno Singers choir of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ont., has been making music since 1955. At that time, Abner Martin, a recent graduate of Kitchener's Rockway Mennonite School and a student of music, established a choir simply for the joy of singing choral music. The choir has continued to sing throughout the pandemic, albeit with significant adjustments.

In February 2020, the choir recorded songs to accompany MennoMedia's new hymnal, *Voices Together*. In November 2021, the choir gathered in person to record a lessons and carols service, which was broadcast during Advent.

into ensemble pieces, available to online listeners.

- **Music education** about the voice.
- **Outdoor singing** in backyards, on a church lawn and in the parking garage of Kitchener Market.
- **As cool** fall evenings arrived in late 2021, members—well-masked, distanced and vaccinated—happily returned indoors to the normal rehearsal space of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

“Since Love is Lord of heav’n and earth, how can we keep from singing?” Leis says, quoting from Robert Lowry’s hymn, “My Life Flows On.”

Zoom rehearsals.”

Gerry Steingart has sung tenor with the Menno Singers since the mid-1970s. He says he sings because he “would be lost without that regular outlet for making music,” adding, “There is something transcendent about harmonizing with a group of likeminded singers.” He laments pandemic limitations, saying: “I long for the day when we can sing again without masks. Special masks designed for singing are very hot and humid, and eyeglasses fogging up is a constant problem.”

“The pandemic offered us new ways to create music and probe how meaning in a musical community is created,” says



MENNO SINGERS PHOTO

Director Brandon Leis leads Menno Singers in an outdoor rehearsal at Pioneer Park Christian Fellowship Church, Kitchener, Ont., last fall.

In between, artistic director Brandon Leis, ably supported by an executive committee, offered a range of ways to make music focused on creating and maintaining engagement, meaning and relationships with the community, the music and each other.

Activities included:

- “**Virtual choir** pieces,” in which recordings of individual members were merged

Alto Susan Dueckman joined the choir during the pandemic. Her childhood experiences in an accomplished church-singing family were a factor. She says she values “the friendship and sense of belonging that comes with learning to blend my voice with others,” adding, “Most of all, I love the music and sense of accomplishment after a performance!” She credits Leis for doing “an awesome job of keeping us engaged during our

Leis. Even with restrictions, Dueckman, Steingart and dozens of other singers have continued the Menno Singers choir’s mission of making simple joy through choral music. ❧

To watch a video of the Menno Singers choir singing Rheinberger’s *Abendleid* in the Kitchener Market garage, last fall, visit <https://youtu.be/rSiNMIdTcdY>.



FOCUS ON THE ARTS

Sharing art and building community in the digital space

By Brendan Kinnon
Theatre of the Beat

Since 2011, Theatre of the Beat has been sharing stories and starting conversations about a wide array of social justice issues, with the goal to make the world a safer, more just place.

Pre-pandemic, this looked like touring in a van; billeting with community members; and presenting our work in churches, classrooms, and community spaces across the continent; meeting the community where they were at, both in terms of understanding of the issue and also physically in their own spaces.

Cut to Theatre of the Beat's ninth year as a touring social-justice company and the world is forced two metres apart, with capacity limits that meant there was no way of meeting our communities in their spaces. In this new world of isolation, we knew that now, more than ever, communities needed reasons to come together, and Theatre of the Beat got to work! Two years in and we've learned how to stay connected with our incredible "Beatnik" community using the incredible power of the digital space.

Our first venture into the digital space came by reimagining our classic production, *Yellow Bellies*, a historical drama highlighting the experiences and public response to Mennonite conscientious

objectors during the Second World War, as a three-part audio drama series available to listeners across the country from the comfort of their own homes.

In the fall of 2020, we began developing a new Forum Theatre show in response to the rise of gender-based violence due to the pandemic. On Nov. 23, 2020, we premiered *Unmute* on Zoom, allowing us to have real-time conversations with patrons about these issues, and to share tools and resources just like we would if we were touring in the van from city to city across Canada. *Unmute* eventually became a podcast available to audiences around the world and will be touring the digital space again in 2022.

We have also developed a new digital presentation of another classic, *Forgiven/Forgotten*, combining an audio drama with simple animations to create an audio-visual storytelling experience. This digital presentation of *Forgiven/Forgotten*, along with a resource package and study guide, are currently being presented in correctional institutions across the country.

The digital space offers exciting new ways to build community and break down barriers, so that we can connect with more Beatniks across the country and the world. ☞



PHOTO BY BRENDAN KINNON

Actor Peter Fernandes is pictured in the recording studio taking notes from director Erin Brandenburg during the recording process for Theatre of the Beat's digital audio-visual presentation of *Forgiven/Forgotten*.

To learn more about the work Theatre of the Beat has developed during the pandemic, or to bring one of these digital shows to your community, visit www.theatreofthebeat.ca.



'I feel blessed and fulfilled musically'

Founding chorister reflects on retiring from his beloved choir

Pax Christi Chorale
Toronto

"Singing has always been life-giving for me."

Gary Harder moved to Toronto in 1987 as pastor of Toronto United Mennonite Church. His arrival coincided with the

founding of Pax Christi Chorale, which was inspired by the success of a choir assembled as part of the celebrations of the 1986 Bicentennial of Mennonites in Canada. Harder has been a member of

the group from the beginning.

Pax Christi Chorale has grown into a vital, ambitious community choir, performing repertoire ranging from the masterpieces of the oratorio tradition,

FOCUS ON THE ARTS

passions and cantatas, to newly commissioned, modern works. The choir's overarching aim is to experience the deep joys of choral singing and to communicate that joy to its audience.

Under the 20-year leadership of artistic director Stephanie Martin (1996-2017), a Toronto conductor, composer and educator, the choir recorded four CDs, became established as an oratorio choir, and created education and outreach programs that are still a vital part of the choir's mission.

Pax Christi Chorale continues to broaden its community and deepen its impact as one of Toronto's leading arts organizations under the expert leadership of artistic director Elaine Choi, a Toronto conductor, educator, church musician and instrumentalist.

Although rooted in the Mennonite community, Pax Christi Chorale welcomes



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAX CHRISTI CHORALE
Members of Pax Christi Chorale rehearse a piece by Haydn.

A particularly momentous performance was when we sang Miziwe, by Odawa composer Barbara Croall in Koerner Hall in 2019. We singers were accompanied by drums and Indigenous prayers; powerful, emotional stuff!"

Harder is moving away from Toronto. As he retires from Pax Christi Chorale, he does so contented, but with moist eyes. "I feel fully blessed and fulfilled musically and with deep personal connections made," he says. ❧

choristers from across the Greater Toronto Area, from different walks of life and faith, or non-faith, emerging professional singers and church musicians, from young adults to seniors. Two-thirds of its choristers have sung with Pax Christi Chorale for 10 years or more.

Harder, a bass, reflects: "We sang an incredible variety of wonderful music. We sang in small churches, in huge cathedrals.

Pax Christi Chorale's upcoming performance is Considering Matthew Shepard, a modern oratorio composed by Craig Hella Johnson. It's a secular Passion based on the true story of a young man who was beaten to death because he was gay. For more information, and to learn more about Pax Christi Chorale, visit www.paxchristichorale.org.



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Along the Road to Freedom

Mennonite women of courage and faith
Paintings by Ray Dirks



**Mennonite Heritage Museum Gallery Exhibition
February 15 - June 3, 2022**



A Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery project
Inspired by the Along the Road to Freedom Committee:
Wanda Andres, Henry Bergen, Nettie Dueck, Hans Funk.

MHM
mennonite heritage museum

1818 Clearbrook Road
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604.758.5667
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UpComing

Youth Gathering 2022 registration goes live

Registration for Mennonite Church Canada's Youth Gathering 2022 is now open. "Amplify! giving voice to what we have seen and heard" is a nationwide gathering for youth aged 12 to 18 at Camp Valaqua near Water Valley, Alta., from July 31 to Aug. 4. "At Amplify!, we are listening for the love of God speaking out in all kinds of voices: soft voices, human voices, the voice of all of God's creation, 'outsider' and 'insider' voices, and even unpopular voices and the voiceless," says Kirsten Hamm-Epp, planning team member and MC Saskatchewan's regional church minister. Campers will take part in activities and workshops throughout the week and engage with Amplify! speakers Christy Anderson and Christine Kampen Robinson from Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. Early bird registration ends after April 4. For more event information, or to register online, visit www.mennonitechurch.ca/amplify.



—MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

UpComing

Applications open for MDS Canada summer youth group program

Making trails, building a new rope course, repairing cabins and enjoying a week in beautiful New Brunswick: These are the things awaiting youth groups that want to do service with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada this summer. "We are inviting youth groups to come to Atlantic Canada to help us fix up a Bible camp," says Murray Bunnett of the MDS Atlantic Unit. "It's a great opportunity to see another part of the country and do something to help others." Youth will be serving at Camp Shiktehawk, located northwest of Fredericton near the Maine border. The camp, which is owned by the Northwest Association of Baptist Churches, serves about 600 to 700 campers every year. While at the camp, youth will do siding, flooring and foundation work on cabins, build bunk beds, create new trails and do maintenance on current ones, and build a new rope course. The MDS Canada summer youth program takes place this year from July 3 to 30. It is designed to give youth groups a chance to serve with MDS Canada. Youths must be 15 years of age and older to participate. Youth groups that want to sign up should email Kelsey Friesen at kfriesen@mds.org.



—MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE

Calendar

Nationwide

July 29-Aug. 1: 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.

July 31-Aug. 4: MC Canada National Youth Gathering at Camp Valaqua, Water Valley, Alta. Theme: "Amplify! Giving voice to what we have seen and heard." For more information, or to register online, visit mennonitechurch.ca/amplify.

British Columbia

April 2,3: Lenten Vespers with the Abendmusik Choir: (2) at Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, Abbotsford; (3) St. Philip's Anglican Church, Vancouver. Both services at 7:30 p.m. Donations go to the Menno Hall project at the University of British Columbia.

Manitoba

Until April 2: Artist Jane Gateson presents "Daily diaries by the Assiniboine River and Lake Winnipeg" exhibit, at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg.

Ongoing: Join an MC Manitoba gratitude group every second week for six weeks on Zoom, for 40 minutes of gathering with others in encouragement and sharing gratitude. Leader: Laura Funk, MC

Manitoba's spiritual director-in-residence. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/2YbxzRf>.

Ontario

Until May 6: "Voices Together: A Celebration of Art and Music," the Grebel Gallery, Waterloo. Featuring more than a dozen works of art found in *Voices Together*, the exhibition offers visitors a more intimate view of the art found in the new Mennonite hymnal. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/3GZ2aJE>.

April 29-30: MC Eastern Canada hybrid annual church gathering (on Zoom and in person at Redeemer University, Ancaster). Reflection on the parable of the mustard seed in Luke 13. (29) worship celebration from 7 to 9 p.m. (30) church business including the regional church's updated identity and mission statements, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Registration will begin sometime in March.

May 12-15: "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. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/2UhmHnU>.

International

July 1-4: 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: 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.

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.



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Announcement

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Employment Opportunities



Employment Opportunity
Teacher and Music Director

RJC High School is inviting applicants for the full-time position of **Teacher and Music Director** for the fall of the 2022/2023 school year.

RJC High School is a grades 10-12 boarding school rooted in the Anabaptist faith tradition and open to all. We strive to teach the whole child, and invite our staff to embrace and contribute to this vision. We teach the Saskatchewan curriculum, and are associate members of the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF).

Within a wide variety of curricular and extracurricular offerings, RJC High School boasts a robust arts and music program. While nurturing the school's strong choral tradition, the program has expanded to include band, dance and theatre. We are seeking a teacher to bring vision and energy to this program as it continues to grow.

Read the full job description at
www.rjc.sk.ca/about/employment-opportunities/

For more information, contact the Principal,
Ryan Wood, at ryan@rjc.sk.ca.

Come and join our team!

Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
April 18 <i>Focus on Books & Resources</i>	April 4
May 2	April 18
May 16 <i>Focus on Mental Health</i>	May 2
May 30	May 16
June 13	May 30
June 27	June 13
July 11 <i>Digital-only Issue</i>	June 27
July 25	July 11
Aug. 8 <i>Digital-only Issue</i>	July 25

Good to be together again

Shrove Tuesday supper first for congregation since the pandemic began

By Maria H. Klassen
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, ONT.

In good faith, Niagara United Mennonite Church's home church group planned a pancake supper for Shrove Tuesday, which fell on March 1 this year.

Led by the John Tiessen, the congregation's engagement minister, the group of about 15 volunteers who were willing to make the supper had no idea what the pandemic regulations would allow. As it happened, the need for a vaccine passport was dropped that very day, although masking and social distancing requirements were still in place. This was the first meal served in the church building since the pandemic began two years ago.

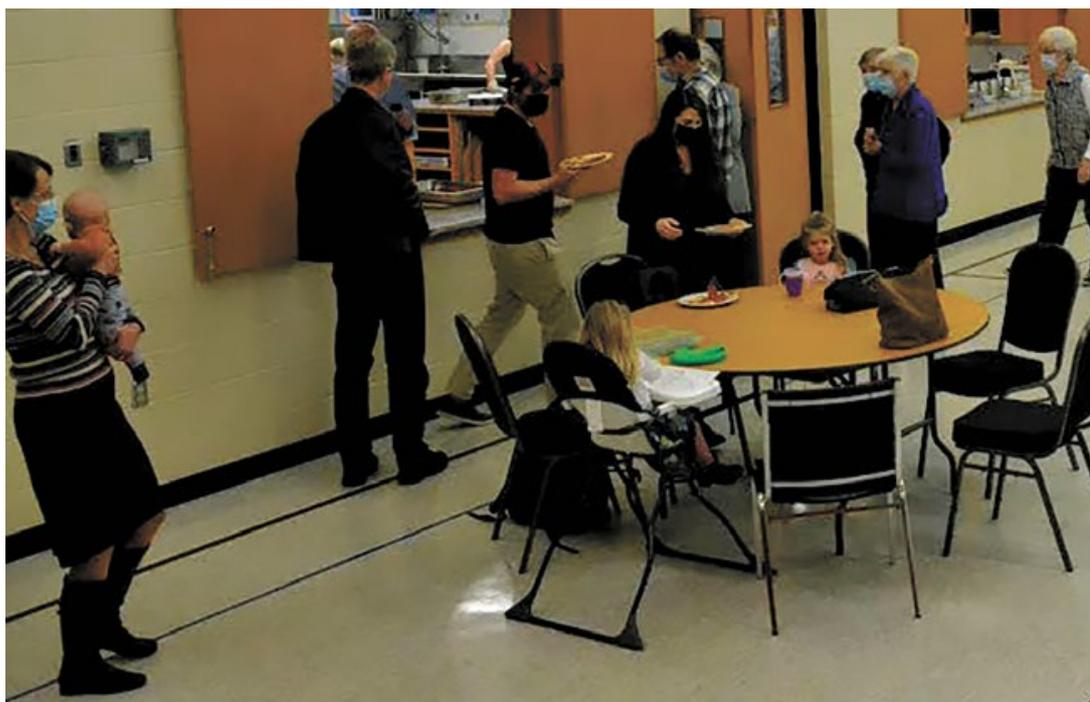
About 80 people came out to enjoy the meal, which consisted of pancakes, waffles and crepes, sausage and bacon, and various toppings of jams, fruit sauces, vanilla sauce, maple syrup and whipped cream.

Money raised from the supper was donated to Mennonite Central Committee.

It was good to be together again agreed those who took part. ☸



John Tiessen, engagement minister of Niagara United Mennonite Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., serves pancakes at the church's Shrove Tuesday supper in aid of Mennonite Central Committee.



PHOTOS BY EMILY FIEGUTH
The Shrove Tuesday pancake supper is served in the gym of Niagara United Mennonite Church.