

CANADIAN MENNONITE

August 22, 2022 Volume 26 Number 17



Gathering 2022

MC Canada invited to declare and embody the gospel

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EDITORIAL

'We Declare' and beyond

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive editor



In this issue you will find reports about Mennonite Church Canada's Gathering 2022. Recently over 300 of us met in person and virtually to explore the theme, "We declare."

I was impressed by the turnout of delegates in Edmonton and by the engagement of younger folks in the business sessions, worship times, workshops and on social media (#WeDeclare2022). Participants seemed happy to renew in-person connections and to celebrate together the faith that sustains us. I was moved by the power of the "We Declare" statement we spoke and acted out in the worship times.

Throughout the four days, we experienced an overall cooperation with the wearing of masks, even though—for some attendees—that pandemic practice is no longer happening in their own communities and congregations. We saw a generous spirit on the part of the local volunteers, who dedicated a holiday weekend to host and serve out-of-town visitors.

The keynote speakers pointed often to the good news of loving and authentic relationships: between humans and God and between neighbours and strangers in our own communities. There was much wisdom to reflect on and live into.

It's clear that we as a church want to be a part of God's good news. And yet, something was largely missing from the conversations at Gathering 2022: the e-word. Evangelism. Or witness and proclamation—words that one would associate with the act of declaration.

One can perceive a divide within the

Mennonite church in Canada between those of us who see evangelism as the primary calling of the church and those of us who relegate evangelism to a regrettable chapter of church history. Some of us proclaim boldly a message of salvation while others of us tie that kind of proclamation to harmful practices of colonialism, racism, patriarchy and more.

That divide is present in our corporate life and sometimes even within our individual souls. So, we need more occasions for having honest and compassionate conversation about how the gospel is proclaimed. It is vital that we as a church move beyond the events of one weekend and keep exploring together the meaning of "We declare."

Are there ways to bridge the divide in how we understand our role as Christian communities? What do we do with calls from some marginalized groups for the church to step away from its traditional way of ministering among them? How do we understand Jesus' "Great Commission" in the 21st century? What might it look like to make disciples in our contexts?

Mennonite Church Canada has offered the invitation for reflection and conversation using the digital resource, "We Declare What We Have Seen and Heard: A Study Guide and Sermon Series for our Nationwide Community of Faith." This six-session guide grounds the conversation in Old and New Testament scriptures and invites individuals and congregations to consider how we fit into God's grand mission of reconciliation. It asks, "Can we renew our joy in the gospel so that

our words and actions are truly good news for us and our neighbours?" and "How might your congregation better integrate words and actions so that your gospel witness is not simply one or the other, but both?"

To accept this invitation, you can start by downloading the guide from CommonWord (bit.ly/3C4lo0M). A preview video is available at bit.ly/3C89cMG.

A thank you and a reminder

This month *Canadian Mennonite* staff says goodbye and thank you to intern Daisy Belec, who joined us during her summer break from university studies. Daisy made her contribution primarily through *CM's* social media platforms, serving with dedication and commitment. She says, "My few months with *Canadian Mennonite* have taught me years-worth about how to live out my faith passionately and actionably. Between the wonderful people I have been working with this summer, those I have interviewed, and those whose stories I have read by talented professionals, I feel inspired and equipped to step out into the world and say, "I have something to offer through the power of Christ in me."

Reminder: the next issue, dated Sept. 5, will be released in a digital-only format. Subscribers can watch for it in their email inbox, and individual articles will be accessible at canadianmennonite.org.

Correction

Bryant Neufeldt, a recipient of Mennonite Church Alberta's tuition bursary, works at Canadian Mennonite University's Folio café. He was incorrectly identified in the article "Bursary helps recipients develop and explore," July 25, page 27. *Canadian Mennonite* regrets the error. ❧



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PHOTO: RUTH BERGEN BRAUN

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FEATURE

Gathering 2022

MC Canada invited to declare and embody the gospel

By Virginia A. Hostetler
Executive Editor

For the first time since 2019, members from across the five regions of Mennonite Church Canada gathered in person for learning, inspiration and decision-making. Meeting at a conference centre in Edmonton, from July 29 to Aug. 1, approximately 215 people experienced the joy of being together again in a large gathering.

Because of the pandemic, some things were different. Gathering 2022 was planned as a hybrid event, with 100 attendees participating through a virtual platform, including one participant from Japan. For the July 31 morning worship service, an additional 100 people joined via YouTube, along with other Mennonites from the Edmonton area who took part in person.

Attendees at the venue wore masks for most of the time, and were encouraged to self-monitor for possible COVID-19 symptoms. But the spirit of Gathering 2022 was upbeat, as evidenced by the whole-hearted singing during the worship times and the engaged table conversations.

The theme “We declare” found expression in a “commissioning and blessing” that concluded each of the four main worship times. Based on I John 1:1-4, the 11-line affirmation reiterated the invitation to declare Jesus, the Word of Life, as experienced through sight, hearing and

touch. (*See sidebar below.*) Attendees learned simple gestures to accompany the spoken words, creating a sense of energy and action throughout the meeting space.

Tany Warkentin, an Alberta pastoral leader, led the worship times, with Anneli Loepp Thiessen and a team of singers and instrumentalists leading the music. The visuals for the meeting space pointed to a mountain theme, through an art installation of stylized, multi-coloured mountains created by Annie Dyck and Ernie Engbrecht of Lethbridge (Alta.) Mennonite Church. Projected images of mountains added to the mood, along with recordings of Alberta Mennonites providing musical offerings.

Exploring the theme

At the opening service on the evening of July 29, speaker John Boopalan, an assistant professor of biblical and theological studies at Canadian Mennonite University, addressed the question, “What is the gospel?”

Looking at stories in the Bible and from past missionary efforts in India, he invited listeners to consider how

Declaration

Gathering attendees participated, with words and actions, in an affirmation based on I John 1:1-4:

We will declare:
what we have heard,
what we have seen with our eyes,
what we have touched with our hands.

We will declare the Word of Life:
so that we might have fellowship with one another,
so that we might have fellowship with God and with Jesus Christ,
so that our joy may be complete.

We will declare the eternal Word of Life.



PHOTOS BY RUTH BERGEN BRAUN

At the opening service of We Declare 2022, keynote speaker John Boopalan inspires, with a touch of humour, reminding listeners that they follow and proclaim an embodied God.



Members of MC Canada's Joint Council, musicians and worship leader Tany Warkentin lead the gathering in words and actions of the 'We declare' affirmation.

God's good news was, and is, embodied in human flesh—both in Jesus' incarnation and in the lives of his followers.

"If God has permanently taken material form and deeply participates in the life of the world, who we are—our witness, how we move with our bodies for or against others—all of that matters deeply," Booplan said. "Bodies matter at all times: in life, in death and what comes after."

"The Gospel invites us into communities of belonging in which bodies depend on each other in non-hierarchical and mutually reciprocating ways." He continued: "When we take such an approach, we resist the temptation to think that we are superior, or that we need to save 'inferior' others, or the temptation to think that only we have the solution to a problem."

He offered a reminder: "The gospel

mends and heals through enfleshment and accompaniment. We do the accompaniment. God does the healing."

Doug Klassen, executive minister of MC Canada, addressed the gathering in the July 31 morning service. He described the spiritual path as one of losing and finding, pointing to the three lost-and-found stories in Luke 15: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. Echoing a song the congregation had just sung, "God lights a lamp," no. 299 in *Voices Together*, Klassen highlighted the image of God searching for the lost ones.

Reviewing Jesus' ministry, Klassen pointed out the physical nature of his presence with people. Jesus ate, drank, walked and lived among them. In this way, he demonstrated his love for them.

These kinds of encounters caused his followers in the early church to say: "*We declare what we have seen and heard.*"

Klassen described their seeing as looking upon, or gazing, which leads to a deep interpersonal experience, and he reminded listeners that "Jesus is first known in relationship. Our God is a god of intimate personal relationship."

Klassen offered his own message from the heart: "How I yearn for us to get to a place in Mennonite Church Canada where our collective life isn't so much fuelled by our doctrines, or confessions or covenants (though they are needed and secondary work). Rather, I yearn, I deeply yearn, for us to be fuelled by the seeing, the hearing, the touching, the gazing upon" that leads to deeper connection with God and with others.

At the closing service on the morning of Aug. 1, Kara Carter, who serves as pastor of Wellesley (Ont.) Mennonite Church, spoke on the topic of "Stumbling blocks and burning bushes:

Transformed and transforming.” Starting with the story of the people of Israel wandering in the wilderness, she pointed out how the pandemic has brought a new reality to the church today. Like in the wilderness of the past, the people are again asking: “Who are we now as a people of God?”

She urged the church to put aside past expectations of what it should look like, and to pay attention to the community around the church building. In this “threshold space” what might God be saying to the church about its identity, programs and building?

“I believe the church is called to be comfortable with ambiguity and unknowing for as long as it takes,” Carter stated. Believing that God is creating something of beauty in the church, she asked, “What needs to die and unravel in order for resurrection to come?”

While affirming the Anabaptist value of community, she pointed out that this can easily cause people inside the church to focus only on themselves. But the idea of “separate from the world” is working against us,” Carter said. She left listeners with an individual and corporate challenge: “When you go home, extend hospitality to one of your neighbours.”

A first at a nationwide gathering was a worship service organized by In This Together, a group of LGBTQ+ Mennonites and their allies. The Aug. 1 evening

service included prayer, singing, storytelling and a ritual involving coloured ribbons. (See more on page 18.)

Indigenous voices

Coming on the heels of Pope Francis’s visit to Indigenous communities in Alberta, We Declare 2022 gave attention to Indigenous voices and presence. Frequent land acknowledgements happened in the sessions, and attendees were invited to sing songs by Indigenous songwriters. All registrants received a copy of the book *Be It Resolved: Anabaptists and Partner Coalitions Advocate for Indigenous Justice* to take home. (It can be ordered online at bit.ly/3PbCj4l).

On the evening of July 29, guest Marilyn Buffalo welcomed attendees to Treaty 6 territory, sharing insights from her early years as part of the Cree community of Maskwacis and from her work as an activist later in life.

Emphasizing the need to keep learning and teaching about the realities of Indigenous communities in Canada, she encouraged the assembly, “We have to share with each other if we are going to make it as one, happy, fit, healthy nation from here on forward.” She continued: “Our children, your children, my grandchildren and your grandchildren must become friends. They must learn to be kind; they must learn to understand; and, more importantly, to

respect each other.”

On July 30, keynote speaker Cheryl Bear addressed the question non-Indigenous people often ask in their desire for reconciliation, “Where on Earth do we go from here?”

Bear, who is a member of the Nadleh Whu’ten First Nation, a respected leader in Indigenous education in Canada, and a singer/songwriter, talked about her deep relationships to her own community. These sustain her in the hard work of addressing issues of injustice.

While she affirmed the work that Mennonites in Canada have done in response to situations of injustice, she urged, “Please keep listening [to the voices of Indigenous people]. Don’t ever think in your mind, ‘I know enough now.’”

To people who ask how they can minister to her community, she said emphatically, “Just please stop! Don’t!” Instead, for a couple years, they should seek to learn more about Indigenous Peoples—their cultures and history. Referring to one of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Bear invited Canadians to see Indigenous spirituality as being as valid as their own. She urged listeners to walk alongside her people and not try to convert them.

On the evening of July 30, Bear performed songs she has written and told personal stories of her life and advocacy.



Ontario pastor Kara Carter challenges the notion that, if congregations just work hard enough, people from the community will see the value of their message and join the church. ‘This, friends, is a stumbling block for the missional church.’



Doug Klassen tells the story of ‘Safari,’ a Mennonite pastor and church planter, who lives in a large refugee camp in Malawi but refuses to leave because of his calling to serve the people there.



MC Canada moderator Calvin Quan chairs Saturday's delegate session. Quan, who attends Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church, completed six years in this role.

witness, evangelism, and cultivating a culture of call.

Visitors also learned about the Edmonton area through a variety of tours, including visits to local communities of faith, a museum, an art gallery and natural areas.

As in other nationwide gatherings, volunteers from local Mennonite churches served in a variety of practical roles, in planning the event and hosting the visitors. Approximately 50 people were part of the volunteer roster.

Preceding the event, pastors and other leaders gathered at Edmonton's First Mennonite Church for the Spiritual Leaders Day, a time of refreshment and inspiration. (See more on page 15.) ❧

Delegate sessions

Delegates from the regional churches gathered for two sessions, for a total of three-and-a-quarter hours. In addition to voting on the usual motions around finance and governance, the 80-plus delegates were given opportunity for conversations at their tables, in response to the reports received. At the end of each session, it was clear that delegates had more comments and questions than what the time allowed for.

Appreciation was offered for the service of outgoing secretary-treasurer Allan Hiebert and moderator Calvin Quan, who both served in their roles for six-year terms. Delegates affirmed a new executive for the nationwide church, with Geraldine Balzer (MC Saskatchewan) as moderator; Bruce Baergen (MC Alberta) as assistant moderator; and Paul Gilbert (MC Eastern Canada) as secretary-treasurer. The Joint Council met before and after the Gathering.

Learning, connecting and serving

A unique aspect of Gathering 2022 was the Young Leaders Experience, a mentorship program designed to foster leadership in the life of the church. Ten young adults took part, with expenses paid for them to attend the entire event. They read scripture in the worship services and participated in various other aspects of the gathering, including conversations with church leaders. (See

more on page 16.)

Attendees participated in workshops, both in person and virtually, exploring topics such as creation care, international

Recordings of some sessions are available on the MC Canada YouTube channel.



For discussion

1. Can you think of a church assembly or gathering that made an impact on you? What are the highlights of such a gathering for you? Do you think online participation will be a sustainable option?
2. Doug Klassen commented that he yearns for Mennonite churches to be less concerned about doctrines and confessions, and more concerned about personal connections with God and with other people. Do you agree? If the Mennonite church moves in this direction, what would it mean for how we manage our congregations?
3. Kara Carter is quoted as saying that the idea of "separate from the world" is working against us." Do you think of yourself, your congregation, or Mennonites in general, as being "separate from the world"? Do you agree that we should move away from trying to be separate?
4. Cheryl Bear invited Canadians to see Indigenous spirituality as being as valid as their own, and urged listeners to walk alongside her people and not try to convert them. How ready are Mennonites today to listen to these words? How have attitudes changed over the last few generations?
5. As you read reports from Gathering 2022, do you think Mennonite Church Canada is moving in the right direction? What advice would you give the church?

—By Barb Draper

See related resources at
www.commonword.ca/go/3098

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OPINION

/// Readers write

✉ **Point: Teachers are fallible, but God can use them**

Over the past decades, as a “dyed-in-the-wool” Anabaptist Mennonite, I have come to value the teaching/preaching of several “new Anabaptists.”

Recently, Brian Zahnd’s sermon of May 29 (Word of Life Church, St. Joseph, Miss.) reminded me of how often we Mennonites, as historic keepers of Anabaptist theology, are losing our enthusiasm about the teachings of our Prince of Peace. He reminded me that loyalty to our Saviour/Lord is a challenge that ultimately offers healing and hope.

I believe these teachers, like all of us, are fallible, sometimes contradicting or minimizing aspects of the gospel. But God has used them in offering me valuable biblical insights. For me, they include Bruxy Cavey and John Howard Yoder (the latter can hardly be called a “new” Anabaptist).

Israel’s King David, the tax collector Matthew, and the Apostle Paul are others. And all of them have demonstrated their sinfulness. Why aren’t we tearing out much of the Old Testament and parts of the New Testament that contain writings about their dishonest, violent and rapacious lifestyles? How can we idolize King David?

Inconsistent judgmentalism has resulted in condemning the musical and theological offerings of people after we identify some aspect of their sinful lives. This results in limitless censorship and destruction. I wonder if Jesus is saying, “*You hypocrites*,” or, “*Those of you without sin throw the first stone*.”

What is happening to our calls for restorative justice and mercy? Surely, we can offer “circles of support and accountability” to our own, just like we do to society’s sexual offenders. And that must include lovingly encircling the victims of those cruel actions.

IVAN UNGER, CAMBRIDGE, ONT.

✉ **Counterpoint: Sinful teachers should find other ways to serve God**

Teachers are fallible, and God loves them even after they have sinned grievously. There are many ways to serve God besides being a teacher.

When public school teachers sexually abuse their students, they lose their employment because student safety is the No. 1 priority. Should the church have a lower standard and care less about the safety of vulnerable people? What is judgmentalism, and what is just common sense in our world today?

Imagine a bank manager stole money from the accounts of people in her community for decades. Dozens of people losing homes and their life savings. Finally the crimes come to light. Should our conference then hire this woman to be chief financial officer?

Jesus did love Matthew the tax collector. But Jesus didn’t put him in charge of the money. Even though Matthew was the money expert, Jesus gave that role to someone else. I think he wanted to keep Matthew out of temptation’s way. People in Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) for sexual abuse should not be leaders in church.

I have met many victims of pastoral sexual abuse, and one of their priorities is that their abuser “not be allowed to hurt anyone else like this again.” Encircling victims means listening to their concerns.

“Limitless censorship”? No one is burning books here. John Howard Yoder’s books are in the library, for anyone to read, and Bruxy Cavey’s sermons are online.

I am very cautious about the writings of those who teach and sexually abuse people in their care at the same time. I will extend mercy to them personally, but that doesn’t mean I have to read and teach their books.

CAROL PENNER, WATERLOO, ONT.

The writer is assistant professor of theological studies at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., and pastoral sexual abuse is one of her research areas.

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

✉ Neopronouns worse than ‘singular they’ when it comes to abuse

Re: “Point: When words don’t make sense, conversation is at risk” letter, June 13, page 8.

A call for new language for nonbinary pronouns is out of touch with the state of the conversation. We’ve had neopronouns —such as ze and zir—for decades, and there are people who use them. But the abuse they receive is even greater than the abuse those of us who use the “singular they” receive.

If someone is confused by my use of they/them pronouns, elucidating it for them is an opportunity to have a conversation about the false gender binary, providing opportunity for even greater understanding.

I’ve never found a lack of understanding to be the source of the bigotry I experience on a regular basis as a queer Christian. Even in cases where those harming me are factually wrong, I’ve never been able to use facts to convince them to stop harming me.

TIM WENGER (ONLINE COMMENT)

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Carther-Krone—Finley Harvey (b. Aug. 3, 2002), to Chris and Tiffany Carther-Krone, Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Dorsman-Zehr—Seth Desmond (b. June 22, 2022), to Emily Brubaker-Zehr and Ryan Dorsman, Hamilton Mennonite, Ont.

Lebold—Rennley Joyce (b. June 13, 2022), to Jonathan and Alexandra Lebold, Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Wipf—Brian Reed (b. May 12, 2022), to George and Lizzie Wipf, North Kildonan Mennonite, Winnipeg, Man.

Baptisms

Malachi Dyck, Jonah Dyck, Sam Nolan—Listowel Mennonite, Ont., June 26, 2022.

Rachael Driediger—Ottawa Mennonite, Ont., May 29, 2022.

Weddings

Loepp Thiessen/Zentner-Barrett—Anneli Loepp Thiessen and Josh Zentner-Barrett, Ottawa Mennonite, Ont., at Floradale Mennonite Church, Ont., June 18, 2022.

Deaths

Berg—Susan (Rempel), 89 (b. June 17, 1933; d. July 15, 2022), Grace Mennonite, St. Catharines, Ont.

Cairns—June, 77 (b. June 3, 1945; d. July 8, 2022), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon, Sask.

Doell—Elizabeth, 95 (b. June 11, 1927; d. July 18, 2022), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Dueck—Anton, 90 (b. Nov. 16, 1931; d. June 30, 2022), Altona Berthaler Mennonite, Man.

Dueck—Susie, 99 (b. April 20, 1923; d. March 29, 2022), North Kildonan Mennonite, Winnipeg, Man.

Dyck—Harold, 93 (b. Feb. 18, 1929; d. July 17, 2022), Calgary First Mennonite.

Gutwin—Connie, 83 (b. Aug. 31, 1938; d. June 20, 2022),

Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon, Sask.

Janzen—Helen, 92 (b. Nov. 28, 1926; d. June 5, 2022), Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Janzen—Henry, 95 (b. Aug. 4, 1926; d. June 29, 2022), Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Lichti—Geneva (Schumm), 80 (b. April 16, 1932; d. Aug. 1, 2022), East Zorra Mennonite Church, Tavistock, Ont.

Martens—Mary, 93 (b. May 4, 1929; d. June 22, 2022), Charleswood Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Neufeld—Frank John, 97 (b. March 18, 1925; d. June 26, 2022), North Kildonan Mennonite, Winnipeg, Man.

Neustaedter—Paul, 88 (b. Sept. 4, 1933; d. June 8, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Nickel—Annie, 98 (b. Oct. 27, 1923; d. July 15, 2022), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Pauls—Linda, 60 (b. Aug. 6, 1961; d. June 18, 2022), Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg, Man.

Rempel—Irene, 84 (b. April 19, 1938; d. June 14, 2022), Grace Mennonite, Steinbach, Man.

Ruby—Kenneth, 86 (b. April 19, 1935; d. March 30, 2022), East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Sawatzky—Harold, 94 (b. May 11, 1928; d. Aug. 3, 2022), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Schachowskoj—Margaret (Loewen), 90 (b. Nov. 5, 1931; d. June 29, 2022), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Schaefer—Ann, 88 (b. June 10, 1934; d. June 16, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Tiessen—David (Dave) Isaac, 89 (b. Dec. 26, 1932; d. Aug. 2, 2022), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Wagler—Leander 92 (b. Oct. 1, 1929; d. July 3, 2022), East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Zacharias—Jesse (Froese), 92 (b. May 14, 1930; d. July 2, 2022), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones announcements within four months of the event. Please send Milestones announcements by e-mail to milestones@canadianmennonite.org, including the congregation name and location. When sending death notices, please also include birth date and last name at birth if available.

FROM OUR LEADERS

A season of Jubilee

Melanie Neufeld

“Called to proclaim good news to the poor . . . release to the captives . . . sight to the blind . . . freedom for the oppressed . . . and the time of the Lord’s favour”
(Luke 4:18-19).

Practices of Jubilee are particularly relevant today when we consider this new season of being church.

Similarly, Kara Carter, a speaker at Mennonite Church Canada’s recent Gathering, called this a season of unravelling and reweaving. Jubilee practices include a time of rest, restoration, liberation and redistribution, so that all might have enough and live together in just peace.

Many of us have an acute need for rest, so let’s start here. Step back from the anxiety and urgency of all the messages of the day. Let us declare a season of reflection and listening to our Creator, noticing the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and let us be reminded of Jesus’ call to ministry.

Our congregational vision and mission may need tweaking as we re-imagine our identity as a body. Glen Guyton, the executive director of MC U.S.A., called MC Canada leaders to simplify all that we are doing, at the Spiritual Leaders Day event before the

Gathering began. This simplification could mean reflecting on our church property, collective wealth, and where we spend our time, as well as discerning opportunities for re-distribution.

Recently, MC Manitoba decided to give away surplus funds and redistribute them to congregational projects supporting their local community. In discerning what God has set before us, congregations in Manitoba have a renewed vision for supporting refugees, starting a food pantry, opening a welcome centre, distributing emergency funds, opening up their space for community activities, or putting up a basketball court as a way to get to know their neighbours. Let us pray that an outpouring of joy may result as congregations take a risk and step into new relationships with their community.

John Boopalan, another speaker at the Gathering, reminded MC Canada that the good news is for all of humanity, especially “bodies who unequally bear the weight of the world” when impacted

by systems of cruelty and indifference. As people of privilege, we are being called into right relationship with our neighbours and our earth. With so much justice work that we could step toward, let us again listen and see what God is setting before us in our communities.

At Seattle Mennonite Church, where I recently completed a 15-year term, our small congregation stepped into a ministry of radical hospitality with people on the margins that led to unexpected blessings. Our flexibility in opening our building, and sharing resources, time and space with people rejected and isolated in our neighbourhood, enabled transformation to change the lives of many people as well as a whole community. Instead of resuscitating what once was pre-pandemic, let us look for resurrection and see where new life is sparking in our communities. ✎



Melanie Neufeld now enjoys connecting with congregations in her new role with MC Manitoba as director of mission engagement.

A moment from yesterday



Text: Conrad Stoesz

Photo: Heinrich M. Epp Fonds / Mennonite Heritage Archives

“All beginnings are hard” said J.J. Thiessen. He began his public ministry in 1930 in Saskatoon, hired by the General Conference Mennonite Church to operate the *Maedchenheim*, helping young women find work and providing spiritual guidance, and to give leadership to the emerging congregation in Saskatoon. The 1930s were financially difficult for everyone—including Jacob and Katherine Thiessen (pictured at left). His meagre salary was often late and at times incomplete. In 1934, he wrote to Bishop David Toews, who oversaw Thiessen’s work, saying, “[M]y financial situation . . . has become unbearable. Rent for the house, electricity and water bills have not been paid for two months. The grocer . . . has become unfriendly. I have no prospects for income and it is evident that I can no longer bear this load. I need medication, which has been bought on credit for the past two months. I know you are not pleased with this situation, but what shall I do? We have no reserves, and the credit I previously had at the bank has been discontinued because I couldn’t keep my word.” When economic times are difficult, often church workers feel their hands are tied—unable to improve their situation. (Quoted from *A Leader for his Time*, page 138.)



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THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

Can we see it?

Arli Klassen

It's a summer of church gatherings. It's a summer of truth-telling about the devastating impact of colonization by the church. It's a summer of reflection on what it means to be a post-colonial church.

I took in what I could of the Pope's visit to Canada. His language around the impact of the colonial church on Indigenous communities grew stronger each day, ending with commentary on residential schools as "genocide."

However, he did not acknowledge the impact of the Doctrine of Discovery, the Catholic edicts from the late 1400s that gave Europeans the power to claim lands that were deemed empty because the people living there were not Christians, but "savages." Those decrees led directly to colonization by Europeans of much of the rest of the world, with the church playing a heavy role in that colonization. The Pope said that "... never again can the Christian community allow itself to be infected by the idea that one culture is superior to others, or that it is legitimate to employ ways of coercing others."

I was in Indonesia for the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) General Council of delegates and the global Assembly. Indonesia was colonized by Europeans (mostly the Dutch) for about

300 years, declaring independence in 1945. Today, Indonesia has three Anabaptist synods, totalling more than 100,000 adult members, each with a different origin story, and a variety of relationships to churches outside of Indonesia.

What does indigenization of the church look like in Indonesia, a country with 1,340 recognized ethnic groups, more than 700 living languages, and complicated relationships with countries like the Netherlands and China?

The synods generously and graciously hosted this international event. Each evening, local congregations hosted the worship services, and we experienced Sufi dancers, Javanese dancers, *gamelan* music and contemporary worship bands.

I found myself frequently explaining one cultural way of doing things to others from a different culture and reviewing assumptions about each. There were some missteps around cross-cultural interactions, and apologies were offered and accepted. Workshops explored many post-colonial topics. The post-colonial intentions of MWC are clear, and yet the reality was not quite so clear.

I also participated in the Mennonite Church Canada Gathering in Edmonton. There were multiple

opportunities to reflect on what it means to be a post-colonial church through worship, storytelling, and workshops. I am inspired by the words in song No. 1 in our new hymnal, but I also see too many ways where the church does not live up to these standards, particularly around being an intercultural church. The intentions are clear, and yet the reality of our church life is not quite so clear.

On July 31, I met with Roberson Mbayamvula, a Congolese-Canadian pastor of Hagerman Mennonite Church in Markham, Ont., and a delegate to MC Canada. We talked together about our hopes and dreams for the church, about all the good intentions that we see. He reminded me to see the church as God's project, describing us as hinges that are holding the doors open, connecting people to each other. He indicated that our role is to truly listen, to share stories, and to dream together, and we will be surprised by how God is working in our midst.

He, along with others at both MWC and MC Canada, spoke about the inspiring young adult leaders among us who are culturally diverse and eager to take the church to new ways of living and being. Alleluia! ✎



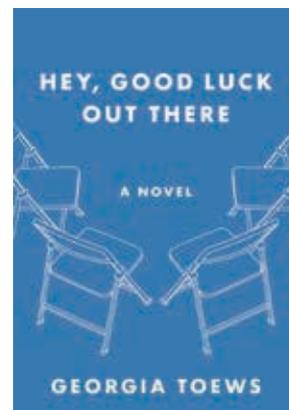
Arli Klassen serves as staff with MWC, and in governance with MC Canada.

Et cetera

Miriam Toews's daughter publishes novel

Georgia Toews—daughter of bestselling novelist Miriam Toews—recently published her own novel *Hey, Good Luck Out There*, with Penguin Random House. In her novel, she writes about the excursions of a young woman named Bobbi struggling with alcoholism. However, this is no "Hollywood tale." In an interview on May 30 with *Maclean's* magazine, Toews explained that she wanted to show where the work of recovering from addiction really is based on her personal experience. She says this is because "a lot of the traditional stories involve addicts suffering, going through detox, violence, that kind of sensationalized thing."

Source: Macleans.ca



VOICES AND STORIES

Sharing across languages

Anneli Loepp Thiessen

“Dear friends, we’re one in Jesus’ love, restored to hope, so trust him fully, he’s the Lord who calls us friends.” *Voices Together’s* No. 525, is a simple and lilting Laotian traditional melody, with lyrics that describe Jesus’ followers as friends. The song is featured in the “Sharing our Stories: Family, Friendship, and Marriage” section of *Voices Together (VT)*, filling an important need for songs that touch on themes of companionship, relationship with each other and friendship in Christ.

Matthew Boutda, music director of Leaside United Church, who grew up at Toronto United Lao Mennonite Church, first encountered the song in its current iteration in the 2000 hymnal, *Sound the Bamboo*, a hymnal of music from around the world that was specifically compiled for Asian Christians. There are several other selections from *Sound the Bamboo* featured in *VT*. These include No. 115, “Praise Be to God,” a Japanese traditional song with text by Nobuaki Hanaoka; No. 567, “Prabhoo Lay lay (Savior Jesus, Enfold Me),” a



Matthew Boutda

piece first written in Urdu by Samuel Paul from Pakistan; and “Nyanyikanlah nyanian baru (Sing to God a New Song),” a song in Indonesian based on Psalm 148 and set to a traditional Batak melody.

To see more pieces in common between the two hymnals, visit Hymnary.com, that allows for a comparison of texts and tunes between hymnals on its website.

Boutda was already familiar with the tune of “O phi nong oei” when he encountered it in *Sound the Bamboo*. He says: “Growing up in the Laotian community, this folk tune melody, also known as Duang Champa, would often be accompanied with dance, especially during Lao festivals and events. It is quite a popular melody!”

Duang Champa, the name of the folk melody, is a translation of the name for the Lao national flower, the plumeria. Unlike the tune, the text of the piece in *Sound the Bamboo* was unfamiliar to Boutda. He says that neither the text writer nor the translator are known. It is speculated, however, that the Christian text was likely written in the 20th century, when the tune name became known as YESU HAK, which translates

to “Jesus’ love.”

A consultant on Laotian resources for *VT*, Boutda agreed to write a piano accompaniment for the piece. His arrangement is simple enough for many pianists to feel comfortable playing, but it contributes to the flowing, forward motion of the piece. The accompaniment edition and pew edition of *VT* also include guitar chords for the piece, making it a suitable choice for guitarists who want to lead music from inter-cultural contexts.

When teaching the song, Boutda encourages communities to share a video with some context on the song, which can be found on MennoMedia’s YouTube channel under the Anabaptist contributors playlist. On how he hopes that the piece will impact Mennonite communities, Boutda says: “Especially during Asian-Heritage Month through the month of May, I encourage congregations to sing this song in community. I hope it will stir up some good discussion and invite congregants to ask, ‘Why should we sing this song?’ If you have any Laotians in your congregation, extend an invitation for an opportunity to song lead collaboratively.” ❧



Anneli Loepp Thiessen is a PhD candidate in interdisciplinary music research at the University of Ottawa. She is co-director of the Anabaptist

Worship Network and was a committee member for Voices Together.

Et cetera

Peace churches call for ‘more creativity in our peacebuilding’

A meeting of the Moravian and historic peace churches took place in June to consider how to further the cause of peace. That concern for peacemaking indeed became central in the discussion of the 11 participants, particularly as statements coming before the WCC central committee were addressing issues of conflict and war, and calls for divisions and censure are growing across the world. “There is a complication between keeping dialogue open to have some sort of influence and being prophetic,” said Fernando Enns from the Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany. “If censure and division is one way, what way is reconciliation? ... From my church, we would like to see more creativity in our peacebuilding,” continued Enns. “We have letters and humanitarian aid. From our perspective, a peace church goes to where the fire is.”

Source: World Conference of Churches (WCC)



WCC PHOTO BY PETER WILLIAMS

Representatives of the Moravian and historic peace churches met in June to discuss peace.

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

In the tension

Troy Watson

A couple weeks ago, I came across this verse in I Samuel 18: *“David continued to succeed in everything he did, for the Lord was with him.”*

I stopped reading and paused to process this bizarre statement. You see, the context of this passage revealed what David had succeeded in the most—the killing of his enemies in armed combat. In fact, a few verses earlier, David is celebrated for slaying tens of thousands of Moabites, Ammonites and Philistines. What was the secret to David’s success in battle? According to the author of I Samuel, it was because the Lord was with him.

Really? Did God actually help David slay other human beings who were also made in the image of God?

The notion was offensive to my modern Anabaptist values and beliefs. It seemed impossible, ridiculous even. This clearly contradicts the way of Jesus. I quickly disregarded the statement as a reflection of the biased and limited perspective of an ancient author, yet I found myself struggling to move on, simply dismissing it without further reflection.

I wondered if I might be missing out on something valuable, by taking the easy way out. Perhaps, instead of immediately writing this notion off, there was value to be found in living with the tension this passage created in me.

As I sat with the tension, I became surprised at my surprise that the Bible creates tension in me. Why shouldn’t the Bible create tension in us? It’s rooted in real life after all, and real life creates tension in us all the time.

For example, I know a number of Mennonites with roots in Ukraine. Some still have family living there. I see the tension the Russian invasion has created in some of my Mennonite friends, colleagues and acquaintances. It

has created tension in me as well.

On the one hand, we are pacifists. We believe the way of Jesus calls us to practise nonviolence and nonresistance. On the other hand, we empathize with Ukrainians standing up to protect their homes, farms, families and country.

I certainly don’t feel I’m in a position to judge Ukrainians who are resisting the invading armies, yet, at the same time, as a person of peace who tries to follow the way of Jesus, I struggle to

I certainly don’t feel I’m in a position to judge Ukrainians who are resisting the invading armies yet, at the same time, as a person of peace who tries to follow the way of Jesus, I struggle to support their acts of violence and war.

support their acts of violence and war. I also recognize that if I were in their shoes, this tension would be much more real, terrifyingly real. It is far too easy to hypothesize on the sidelines, like a smug armchair quarterback or backseat driver.

As I get older, I have less black-and-white answers on most issues. What I’m learning to do is live in the tension of our complicated and multi-faceted reality. Instead of looking for clear answers, I’m learning to focus on being open to what the Spirit is pointing or calling me towards.

So when I read Bible verses like *“David continued to succeed in everything he did [on the battlefield] because the Lord was with him,”* I’m learning to ask, “What is the Spirit revealing to me or calling me towards?”

As I stayed in the tension, I wondered:

- **Is it possible** that God interacts with people differently, in different cultures, eras and contexts?
- **Is it possible** that God would bless

and help a warrior like David in his time and culture, yet might condemn a person for acting the same way in my time and culture?

- **Is it possible** that God meets us where we are, in our unique contexts?

Perhaps this means God has different expectations for each of us, depending on our situations and the cards life has dealt us. Maybe God has different expectations of someone born into a stable, nurturing and loving family with privilege, power and wealth, than someone struggling with trauma, abuse or oppression. Maybe God has different expectations for you than God has for me.

I think there might be some truth to this, as Jesus says, *“to whom much is given, much is expected.”*

I’ve learned that when I’m looking for clarity in this chaotic and complicated world, I’m most likely to find it when I focus on these two questions:

- **What is expected** of me?
- **What action or attitude** is the Spirit calling me towards?

And often it’s in unresolved tension where God creates an opening for me to sense the answer. ☘



Troy (troy@avonchurch.ca) is a pastor of Avon Mennonite Church in Stratford, Ont.

For more on dealing with the tension this topic creates, read these features from Canadian Mennonite: *“Let nobody judge them”* (bit.ly/3p29IE1), and *“Caring for the least of these”* (bit.ly/3bEft7O).



PERSONAL REFLECTION

Looking back, looking forward

Danforth Mennonite celebrates more than a century of ministry and a pastoral transition

Ruth Dueck Mbeba

Danforth Mennonite Church is a small, urban congregation on the Danforth in Toronto. In late June, we met, in person and virtually, to celebrate 115 years as a congregation. It was also a special time to recognize our congregational transition following the retirement of our long-time pastor, Tim Reimer. Our interim pastor, Stephen Reist, led us in this time of reflection.

Together we formed a human timeline at the back of the sanctuary and told stories of our arrival and participation at Danforth, from the 1940s to the present. Special highlights from the decades were shared, including: a vibrant Mennonite Voluntary Service unit; the beginnings of Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church; music over the decades; community Vacation Bible School; “Welcome the Stranger” refugee programming; a building renovation project in the early 1990s; and, most recently, “Sowing for Peace,” a Toronto-based ministry to cultivate a peace culture in a multicultural context among Koreans and other Canadians.

Strong themes emerged in our time of reflection, showing Danforth as a place of diversity, caring and acceptance. Our Anabaptist values resonate with people here, and we are committed to reaching out to the community, worshipping together and making music together.

At the conclusion of our storytelling, we gathered around the “present” in our timeline. It was placed strategically at the historic doors exiting the sanctuary, where Pastor Reist brought our time together to a close with these words:

“And so here we are together in the present . . . a particular group of God’s people in this particular time and this



PHOTOS BY CINDY ROSE

A human timeline at the back of Danforth Mennonite Church’s sanctuary stretches from the 1940s to the 1980s.

particular place. As we look back at who we were together, what has brought this community of faith together today, and what we value about our community, we are grateful to God for God’s many gifts and the gift of community. Having taken inventory of who we are, we can face the future, trusting in God and listening for the Spirit’s movement.

“We acknowledge the fragility of what we have, times of uncertainty, the threats to our community that sometimes loom large. However, we also notice and acknowledge the opportunities around us to serve and love. . . . Our loving, caring community and familiarity with one another is precious to us. What do we do with it?”

“We could turn inward and strive to preserve the family at any cost for as long as possible. Or we could find ways to use that superpower to serve others. Adapting our traditions and practices to be welcoming is risky and uncomfortable, but it’s the only way to grow. God invites us to invest our talent of being a loving community. . . .

“This door can represent the future, full of possibilities. We take our gifts, our history, our uncertainties, and an unknowable future as we walk with one another into that future, trusting in the goodness and faithfulness of God.

“As we leave now, let us prayerfully walk through this door, symbolically into the future together with God.” ☯



Bonnie Wright, Tessa Rose and Ed Ford, foreground left to right, lead the congregation out of the sanctuary during the Danforth Mennonite Church’s 115th-anniversary celebrations.

A focus on rest and renewal

Spiritual Leaders Day event held during Gathering 2022

By Emily Summach
Saskatchewan Correspondent
EDMONTON

Pastors and other leaders from across the five regional churches joined together at First Mennonite Church in Edmonton for Spiritual Leaders Day, part of the Mennonite Church Canada's Gathering 2022.

After breakfast together on July 29, attendees were invited to spend the morning in worship. The theme for the morning was "be at rest."

"We'd like to invite you, as leaders, to be able to take this time and receive, rather than on giving, as leaders so often do," said Sarah Kathleen Johnson, one of the worship leaders for the morning.

Johnson, along with Anneli Loepp Thiessen, led attendees in songs, prayers, scripture readings, stories, personal meditations and small-group discussions.

The two-and-a-half-hour worship time was divided into five movements designed to help leaders articulate their experiences during COVID-19: lament, anger, fear, praise and rest.

Attendees were also invited to participate in a special time of prayer and anointing, offered by regional and nationwide church leaders.

The morning's worship resonated with Len Rempel, a pastor from Saskatchewan: "I did find the worship time very valuable. The theme of 'resting in God' is an important one for all leaders, and,

in fact, all who seek to be a part of God's kingdom. It was good to have this guided time, because it is not just rest, it is resting in God. The music, psalm readings, reflection and sharing all led us into an encounter with God. For me, this time set the tone for the days of Gathering 2022 that followed."

Glen Guyton, MC U.S.A.'s executive minister, was the guest speaker for the



PHOTO BY RUTH BERGEN BRAUN

Glen Guyton, MC U.S.A.'s executive minister, was the guest speaker for the afternoon session. His session focused on key concepts from his book *Reawaken: Activate Your Congregation to Spark Lasting Change*.

afternoon session. His session focused on key concepts from his book *Reawaken: Activate Your Congregation to Spark Lasting Change*. Guyton encouraged leaders to guide their congregations into knowing who they are—their unique identity as a church—and then allowing their identity and their story to shape who they are as witnesses in their communities.

"I really appreciated Glen's whole idea of not just what do we believe? Or

News brief

Volunteers at 'We declare': Friendly, welcoming and helpful



Volunteers Ruth Friesen, left, and Paul Bergen are hard at work at the hospitality desk at 'We Declare: Gathering 2022' in Edmonton.

EDMONTON—"It's been amazing. Everyone I called to serve came on time and with enthusiasm," says volunteer coordinator Jan Wilhelm. "We had willing and capable volunteers and gracious participants." Wilhelm was part of a group of more than 50 volunteers who helped as hosts, drivers, tour guides, coordinators, ushers and food service personnel during Mennonite Church Canada's "We Declare: Gathering 2022" in Edmonton from July 29 to Aug. 1. As the faces and voices of the local church community, Gathering 2022 volunteers were excited to welcome and host people from across Canada. Whether they were helping participants find things or spaces, or answering questions about the venue, program, meals or the city, they always stepped up to the task. "Being a part of this event was amazing," says Wilhelm. "We did what needed to be done to help the attendees feel welcome, at home, safe, included, and valued, and to help ensure the Gathering ran smoothly."

—STORY AND PHOTO BY JESSICA EVANS

what are we thinking? But, really, what are we doing? How are we, the church, being physically present in this world?" said Gord Driedger, pastor of Petitcodiac Mennonite Church in New Brunswick. ☘

‘Do you hear what I hear?’

Young Leaders Experience

Story and Photo by Jessica Evans
Alberta Correspondent

Who has ever been a young adult? Who has ever interacted with a young adult at church? Who has witnessed a young adult leaving church? Who has witnessed a young adult stepping into leadership?

These were the questions asked of the audience during the workshop entitled “Do you hear what I hear?” at Mennonite Church Canada’s Gathering 2022.

continue forming young leaders in the church. Other younger adults also attended Gathering 2022.

Larissa Pahl, the YLE coordinator, was excited to welcome the young leaders.

“Each region was offered a certain number of spots, representative of their size, and they worked out their own process for choosing participants,” she said. “We were looking for people who

workshop by young adults. Liam Kachkar of MC Alberta planned trips in the city and took care of organizing weekend activities, including a campfire.

“They worked hard to bring everyone in and connect personally with each participant while helping them connect with the wider Gathering participants, who were largely much older,” Pahl said. “I planned the weekend and took care of logistics throughout the conference. It was definitely a team effort!”

On the afternoon of July 30, Kong, a member of Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church, moderated a panel discussion along with Nadya Langelotz of Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Rebecca Janzen of Edmonton First Mennonite Church, Riley Koop of Vineland (Ont.) United Mennonite Church, Liam Kachkar of Edmonton First Mennonite Church and Louisa Adria of Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary.

Through engaging dialogue surrounding young adults as they navigate their place in the church, the group also gave the audience practical ways to encourage and include young adults in their own congregations.

Koop, a recent Grade 12 graduate, spoke on how important the church is for youth, even when transitions take them away. “I think the church serves as a home base, a home beyond my family,” he said. “Whatever is changing around you, church is always familiar, and you can be comfortable in your home congregation.”

Janzen mentioned the resistance to change in a church setting and how the church is possibly going through an identity crisis. She mentioned topics such as new worship music and inclusion of people on the fringe. “The church is changing, and we are changing, and what is our goal in that?” she asked.

The panel was excited to pass along advice and practical ways that young people can engage in the church.

“Be intentional about taking their calls, when young people are involved in committees or councils; this leads to ownership,” said Koop. “They are equal members, not a separate group in the church. He added that, depending on interests, they may want to help with



Riley Koop and Rebecca Janzen take part in the panel discussion around young leaders in the church.

Ten young adults were chosen from across the regional churches to take part in the Young Leaders Experience (YLE) at Gathering 2022 from July 28 to Aug 1. Through their own activities, the Gathering’s main sessions and as delegates with voting power, the 10 young adults were fully immersed in the event.

Their participation was part of the ongoing effort within MC Canada to

are engaged in their local congregations and interested in learning more about the wider church.”

Four hosts helped guide YLE participants throughout the weekend. Phil Campbell- Enns of MC Manitoba led an opening worship service for the group and prepared the scripture readers throughout the weekend. Christen Kong of MC Eastern Canada coordinated and ran the

worship or take on leadership roles. “I’ve developed a lot of strong intergenerational connections in my youth, and that’s what kept me interested in the church.”

So how can the church trust young adults?

Adria told the story of how she was looking for a place to hold piano lessons for a client, and a person in her church offered her a key and said, “Here is a key and don’t give it back.”

“I think powered by the need to meet young adults where they are at means whatever they need help with,” she said. “If we are not afraid of it being done a little differently, when we ask them to lead something, I think trust and communication are key to making youth feel like they belong.”

What does renewal mean for young adults?

“At the worst, the church has been exclusive and demanding and confusing, and inflicted pain,” said Langelotz, “but I also think that the church is one of the most profound tools of hope. I really do, when we get it right.”

Lorena Diller Harder of MC Eastern Canada and a member of YLE, spoke of her experience at Gathering 2022: “It was a really positive experience, understanding how delegate sessions work, understanding the business side and the layers of how the regional churches work, and MC Canada as a whole. I’ve learned the value of worshipping together as a whole national body. I think coming here as a young leader allowed extra opportunities, including being led into a space rather than showing up without knowing what to do or where to go.”

She added: “I have been able to connect with other young people who I haven’t met before and their experiences in their churches, making sure that everyone had an opportunity to have a voice, as well as making it affordable and accessible.”

When asked what is next for MC Canada’s young leaders, Pahl answered: “We have plans to write a report based on feedback from the YLE group. We hope to stay connected, and there was a desire to help a future group of young leaders in a supportive way. Stay tuned!” ❧



PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY JESSICA EVANS

Fanosie Legesse, part of Mennonite Church Canada’s Intercultural Church Steering Committee, leads a workshop entitled ‘When evangelism meets interculturalism.’



Through story and song, Cheryl Bear shares childhood memories of life on Nadleh Whut’en First Nation and the Indigenous connection to the land. Bear also spoke at the Saturday morning worship service.

In This Together aims to widen the circle of inclusion

Anabaptist LGBTQ+ network presents workshops, leads worship at nationwide gathering

By Emily Summach
 Saskatchewan Correspondent
 EDMONTON

In This Together [ITT] is one way to feel those prophetic nudgings of the Spirit,” said Alissa Bender, pastor of Hamilton (Ont.) Mennonite Church, and a member of the ITT steering committee, as she led more than 75 people in a worship service that celebrated the gifts that LGBTQ+ people offer to the church, on July 31 in the evening.

The event featured songs, prayers and stories that centred on queer theology and members of LGBTQ+ community, an encouraging step forward for queer Anabaptists and their allies.

The network was formed in the spring of 2019, as Anabaptist congregations began to ask, “What next? Where do we go after the 2016 Becoming a Faithful Church process?”

ITT’s mission statement reads: “We envision and work toward a just world where LGBTQ+ people are fully integrated, recognized, respected and valued in a spirit of mutuality in Anabaptist communities in Canada.”

The group aims to accompany and provide resources for congregations and individuals from across the Anabaptist tradition. Its goal is to meet congregations where they are at, and to help minimize the harm that queer people experience.

“We’re not here to just resource Mennonite Church Canada,” said Pieter Niemeyer of Toronto United Mennonite Church and a member of the ITT steering committee. “We work with many Anabaptist groups, not only denominations who are fully affirming, but also those who are in different places on this journey.”

“Our group was really in an emerging state at the 2019 national gathering held in Abbotsford [B.C.],” said Niemeyer. “We had a display table there, and a sign-up



PHOTO BY EMILY SUMMACH

Pictured from left to right are the In This Together steering committee: Matthew Froese, Leah Harder, Alissa Bender, Pieter Niemeyer and Mauricio Palacio.



PHOTO BY JESSICA EVANS

Pieter Niemeyer shares his story at the service.

sheet, but that was basically it.”

The posture of the nationwide church towards the group has evolved in encouraging ways over the past three years, he

said. “We were in ongoing conversations with Doug Klassen [MC Canada’s executive minister] about MC Canada wanting us to do a workshop at this gathering, and to develop an ongoing working relationship with MC Canada, as one Anabaptist entity that we partner with. We pushed back on the initial request [of one workshop], indicating that we would like to have even more of a presence, as just one workshop might be seen as tokenism. And they received that really well, and we worked together on it.”

In the end, ITT led two workshops, one in person and one online, as well as the worship gathering.

“The tone of the worship gathering is to be joyful in nature,” Bender said, in



PHOTO BY EMILY SUMMACH

Attendees at the Gathering 2022 worship gathering on July 31 were encouraged to come forward to tie a coloured ribbon, representing their own self-expression, onto a tree branch.

an interview before the Sunday evening service. “The worship will feature queer storytellers sharing their own stories, some funny, some hard. The songs we’ve chosen are from queer writers, like in *Hymns for the Holy Other*, or about diversity. It’s about celebratory worship, including those prophetic voices in this community, and really the wholeness of this community. It’s also an invitation to step out of what we’re

pronouns, shared about how their grandparents were trailblazers in the Anabaptist faith as allies for the queer community. Their grandparents’ open support helped to make their coming-out experience more positive. “My grandparents are the reason that I know God is love,” they said. “My grandparents loved me always.”

At the end of evening, worshippers were invited to come forward to select a



PHOTO BY JESSICA EVANS

Steph Chandler Burns offers their own coming-out experience as a challenge to the church to love well.

told—and into something more expansive.”

The gathering was filled with songs, scripture, prayers and a liturgy based around the Rainbow Christ Prayer, and personal stories by members of the LGBTQ+ community.

One of those storytellers was Steph Chandler Burns from Fraser Lake Mennonite Camp in Ontario. Chandler Burns, who identifies as bisexual and non-binary, and uses they/them/their

rainbow-coloured ribbon that represented their own self-expression and to tie it to a tree branch displayed near the front.

“Self-expression is not just about queerness, it’s about who we are inside, explained Leah Harder of Community Mennonite Church in Stouffville, Ont., and another ITT steering committee member. “It’s okay to not understand another’s self-expression.”

After the worship gathering, as hugs and thank-yous were shared, ITT celebrated the progress the network has made, even as it looks towards the future.

“Queer people need to have a thick skin,” said Niemeyer. “We’re cautious, and hopeful, that the tides have turned. In the future, we’d like to partner further with committees and congregations, and start working on when and how to revisit the *Confession of Faith [in a Mennonite Perspective]*.” ✎

For more information on ITT, visit www.inthistogethernetwork.ca.



Worship, friendship and service



PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY JESSICA EVANS

Members of Gathering 2022 receive a warm welcome from Edmonton's South Sudanese Mennonite Church during an organized tour.



Young Leaders Experience participants invited all young adults (under 30ish) to a campfire at First Mennonite Church on the evening of July 31.



Mariko Ogasawara, a participant from Baden, Ont., is excited to bring Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) school kit bags home to fill with her two grandchildren. The bags were crafted by women from First Mennonite Church in Edmonton and included a list of contents to fill and return to an MCC office or depot.



PHOTO BY BUTH BERGEN BRAUN

Attendees participate in the opening worship service of We Declare: Gathering 2022.

Mennonite Brethren leaders remove section of book

By Barb Draper
Books & Resources Editor

Controversy over a new book commissioned by the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Historical Commission has resulted in attention drawn to the very thing church leaders were probably hoping to keep out of sight. When *On Holy Ground: Stories By and About Women in Ministry Leadership in the Mennonite Brethren Church* was launched in June, it was not widely known that three pages had been ordered removed and hundreds of books had been destroyed.

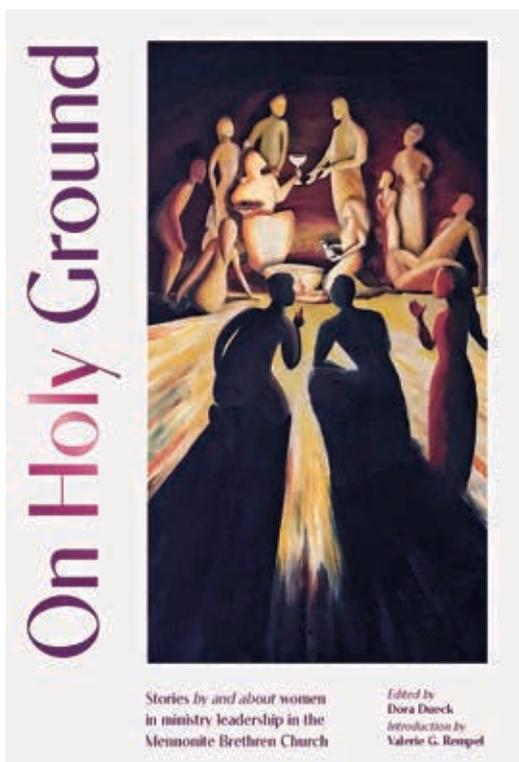
On Holy Ground contains the personal stories of 15 women who have served as pastors and leaders in the MB denomination.

The book had been approved by the Historical Commission for publication when the executive boards of the Canadian and U.S. MB churches discovered that they were not comfortable with a section of the personal reflection of Mary Anne Isaak, pastor of River East Church in Winnipeg. They decided that three pages needed to be removed.

“For many MB readers, these pages will overshadow the important contribution of the other writers, create confusion about what it means for MB credentialed leaders and local MB churches to ‘affirm’ the *Confession of Faith*, and unfortunately, it will reinforce the damaging stereotype that embracing women in leadership leads necessarily to an affirming stance on gay marriage for Christians,” stated the church leaders on the *MB Herald* website on July 6.

Dora Dueck, the editor of the book and former editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, was not happy with this explanation. “Somehow I can’t help feeling the book has been devalued and that the others will not be heard,” she responded.

Also on that web page, there were



other negative remarks in response to the statement by church leaders, including the comment: “So a woman’s voice was silenced in a book commissioned to feature women’s voices. Sadly, this seems to be indicative of the struggle women continue to face in this conference.”

Dueck also expressed her concern that so many copies were destroyed and that there had been no consultation with the author or editor. Apparently, the executive boards were mistaken about who was responsible to arrange the printing, and 300 copies were completed before the message to cut the pages was received.

In the section that was cut, Isaak describes her journey as a pastor: “Just as my response to women in church leadership evolved from a received tradition to my own understanding rooted in research, experience and community discernment,

so too my response to the LGBTQ+ community is developing.” She ends by recognizing that LGBTQ+ inclusion is an issue the MB family of faith is presently wrestling with. (Although the pages are not in the publication, they are available online at bit.ly/3P2cPWY.)

Meanwhile, the Mennonite Heritage Museum in Abbotsford, B.C., is offering to sell the book with the missing pages inserted. Richard Thiessen, the museum’s executive director, is a member of the MB Historical Commission, which had approved its publication before the executive board issued its ultimatum.

“[T]he book was intended to allow Mennonite Brethren women to tell their stories of ministry,” he said. “It is wrong for a group of conference leaders to unilaterally eliminate a portion of a person’s story, which is what MB conference leadership did by removing three pages from Mary Anne’s chapter.” His wife, Karen Heidebrecht Thiessen, is one of the other pastors who wrote a chapter.

In their statement, the MB executive boards also commented: “These three pages move beyond the recording of personal experience about being encouraged and/or discouraged in leadership, to more of a brief theology essay advocating for a type of LGBTQ+ inclusion in conflict with a straightforward reading of our *MB Confession of Faith*.”

A protest was organized on July 13 outside the Winnipeg offices of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, with about 70 people expressing their discontent with the executive boards’ decision. Smaller protests were also held in Waterloo, Ont., and Fresno, Calif., the same day. ❧

Bethel Mennonite leaves MC B.C.

Mixed feelings as congregation is replanted by MB church

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

Bethel Mennonite Church of Langley, one of the oldest congregations in Mennonite Church British Columbia, held its last service on June 26. However, its doors are not closed; the church will continue to function under a new identity and a new affiliation.

new campus of NLCC planted through the amazingly generous donation of the property and building!” says a statement from North Langley.

The history of Bethel Mennonite dates back to 1936, when Mennonites living in the Aldergrove area near Langley formed

wanting everyone to be fully informed as they discussed the pros and cons of either revitalization as Bethel, or a possible merger with North Langley. Earlier this year, the board tried to address all possible questions and developed a memo of understanding in preparation for a congregational vote.

The vote on April 24 resulted in 88 percent in favour of the merger. Alignment with the MBs necessitated severing ties with MC B.C. Some members have chosen to leave the church as a result; others, says Christie, are enthusiastic, calling it “really exciting,” and think “it’s going to be a great thing.” Current Bethel members will be invited to join North Langley after a brief informational membership session in the fall and individual meetings with pastoral staff.

In June, a series of Sunday sermons helped with the transition, as the congregation concluded its identity as Bethel. In the final message on June 26, Reesor talked about the “profoundly significant” change taking place, as he recognized conflicting feelings of “grief, thankfulness and hope.”

Throughout the process, all agreed that “God had to be in this,” says Christie. “We prayed and prayed and prayed.” Even as discussion was taking place, it was recognized that no matter what the vote result, not everyone would be happy. “We tried to be careful and considerate, and didn’t want to leave anybody behind,” he says, but they realized some would choose not to be part of the new venture.

Among those who opposed the merger, various concerns emerged:

- **A no-win** situation by even bringing the matter to a vote and splitting the church.
- **The feeling** that the new model is less of a merger and more of a takeover.
- **Change of leadership style:** the MB model has most decisions made by a board



INTERNET PHOTO

More than 80 years of ministry in B.C. as Bethel Mennonite Church came to a close this summer when the building was given to the MB conference to be replanted as a campus of North Langley Community Church.

As of July 1, the former Bethel church became the location for the Aldergrove campus of North Langley Community Church (NLCC), a multi-site Mennonite Brethren congregation. The property title has been transferred from MC B.C. to the B.C. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

Bethel members had voted in April to merge with North Langley following a lengthy discussion of how both congregations could best serve their community. North Langley already had two campuses in the Langley area and had been looking to expand in the Aldergrove area.

“We are so grateful to God that, after months of prayer and discussion, the congregation of Bethel Mennonite Church has approved a merger that will see a

Coghlan Mennonite Church. The congregation formally organized that year and eventually became Bethel Mennonite Church.

According to Terry Christie, the former Bethel church chair, declining membership over the last few years was one reason for the change, but not the sole one. One result of a visioning process in 2019 encouraged the congregation to “begin to think and act like a church plant.” Last fall, Bethel became aware of North Langley’s plans to start a church plant in the area, and Bethel’s pastor, Jon Reesor, initiated a conversation with the MB congregation about a possible joint ministry.

Over the next few months, Bethel’s board of elders sent out many notices to members, and held extensive meetings,

of elders, not the congregation.

- A sense of loss over giving away a valuable piece of property and losing historic ties to MC B.C.

While MC B.C. understood the decision was made for practical reasons of survival, rather than dissatisfaction with MC B.C., leadership still expressed some sadness over Bethel's decision.

Executive minister Garry Janzen says: "It was disappointing that Bethel chose to align with NLCC instead of coming to MC B.C. for help with revitalization. We understand that the Bethel people felt they had no option other than to be taken over as part of the core group of an NLCC church plant, with additional new people being brought in who are already at NLCC and live in the vicinity.

"The narrative that the Bethel people were believing is that they were tired and had no more ministry energy or resources. The narrative that MC B.C. would have encouraged them to accept is that God is at work, you have all that God needs, and we will help you to be the church God wants you to be. MC B.C. works with the people who are already there, building together with them according to their vision, and aligning with what God is already doing in the neighbourhood."

Gerry Grunau, MC B.C.'s chair, says: "MC B.C. mourns the withdrawal of Bethel Mennonite Church from MC B.C. Leaders from Bethel have nurtured their congregation and have contributed to the leadership of Mennonite organizations across Canada. We are grateful for the leadership that Bethel has provided, and thank God for those blessings."

While the building on 56th Avenue is closed for several months to accommodate renovations, congregants are encouraged to worship at one of North Langley's other campuses or visit other churches. Plans are for the new North Langley Aldergrove campus church to launch with its first official service in October. Kevin Schultz of North Langley will be lead pastor, with Reesor assuming the role of half-time associate pastor. ▮

▮ News brief

Goshen College receives \$1 million for summer camps program



GOSHEN COLLEGE PHOTO

A child participates in the EcoSistema Music Camp, one of Goshen College's summer camps.

GOSHEN, IND.—Goshen College has received a US\$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to be used toward developing and implementing summer camps for community youth to help build sustainable programming over the three-year grant period and beyond. "We are appreciative to have received the grant so that we can offer meaningful summer camp experiences for youth in the community for many years to come," says Erika Buhring, executive director of the college's Center for Community Engagement, which is giving leadership and oversight to the camps. The camps will provide children and youth of different ages expanded learning opportunities in the arts, sciences and communications that build social, emotional and academic skills, and nurture a college-going mindset. With the grant funding, camps will cost only US\$50 or less, making them more accessible to all students. The college is partnering with youth-serving organizations in the community to develop the camps and recruit campers. Lilly Endowment made the grant through Indiana Youth Programs on Campus, its statewide initiative designed to help Indiana colleges and universities in their efforts to create new, or expand and enhance, existing high-quality, on-campus programs for Hoosier youth, aged 5 to 18.

—GOSHEN COLLEGE

▮ News brief

Kindred Credit Union continues among 'Best for the World'

KITCHENER, ONT.—Kindred Credit Union has once again been named a 2022 "Best for the World™ B Corp™" in recognition of its exceptional positive impact on its customers. "Best for the World" is a distinction granted by B Lab to Certified B Corporations that, after evaluation in five impact areas, rank in the top five percent of their size group. Kindred continues to serve its members in a values-based way, with an emphasis on farmers, churches, not-for-profit organizations, and Ontarians who want to connect their values and faith with their finances. Every year, "Best for the World" recognizes the top-performing B Corps creating the greatest positive impact through their businesses. The full lists are available at bcorporation.net. B Corp certification is granted to businesses that meet high standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency.

—KINDRED CREDIT UNION

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Myanmar church growing, though half its members displaced

By Will Braun
Senior Writer

Roughly half the members of the Bible Missionary Church (BMC), a Mennonite denomination in Myanmar, are now displaced. An estimated 415 families, or 2,000 people, have fled to the jungle, or elsewhere in the vicinity of the border with India, to escape escalating civil unrest.

Amos Thang Chin, BMC's president, said via a video call from Yangon, Myanmar, that food shortages and lack of medical supplies are the most urgent

needs of displaced church members. With the rainy season has come an increase in malaria and other diseases. The area is largely cut off from the rest of the country, with access only via India.

"They are the forgotten people," Chin said, noting the inadequacy of international aid efforts.

The BMC families are among about a million displaced people, according to Chin. The country of 55 million has barely had a break from civil war in 70

years. A violent military coup on Feb. 1, 2021, started the last round of conflict between the military and various regional and ethnic armed groups.

While most of the displaced BMC members are in western Myanmar, Chin said there was "killing and bombing" in the southern capital, where he lives, the night before we spoke.

Partnership solidified

Chin and BMC are actively reaching out to



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMOS CHIN

Amos Chin, left, and two Mennonite colleagues baptize young people in rural Myanmar.

the world. BMC, which joined Mennonite World Conference (MWC) in 2009, recently signed a joint ministry agreement with Mennonite Church Canada, establishing a formal relationship. Building on past connections with MC Canada and MC Eastern Canada, Chin met with MC Canada executive minister Doug Klassen at the recent MWC assembly in Indonesia.

Both men were chosen to be part of the MWC executive, which is scheduled to meet in British Columbia next year.

Chin emphasized the importance of the partnership, which is the sort of relationship they have been praying about for years. Despite being a member of MWC, Chin said BMC has had limited direct contact with Mennonites elsewhere. For him, that broader foundation is essential to the ambitious vision of BMC.

In addition to caring for its displaced members as best it can, the other focus of BMC is “evangelism, discipleship and church planting,” largely focused in areas nearer to Yangon.

An apostle

Doug Klassen said Chin’s “energy for the church is infectious.”

“He’s an apostle,” Klassen said exuberantly, noting how Chin is the sort of person who says of the church: “What can we do, where can we go, how can the witness be extended?” And he does so from a deep connection to a prayer life and community, Klassen added.

Chin’s Facebook postings show videos of village churches, river baptisms and boat travel on jungle waterways.

He said the turmoil in his country has people hungry for hope: “People feel they have no future. Now is the time to evangelize. . . . We preach that there is hope: Jesus.” He reported 182 converts in the past two years because of BMC’s work.

While energized by “mission trips” to various regions of Myanmar, Chin is deeply concerned with the worsening upheaval and suffering in his country. He worries the country is deteriorating into a failed state.

Mennonites enlisting

Amid the violence and chaos, a particular challenge Chin mentioned is that



PHOTO COURTESY OF NORM DYCK

Amos Chin, a Mennonite leader in Myanmar, second from left, is pictured from left to right with Jeanette Hanson, Norm Dyck, David Martin and Jehu Lian in Myanmar in 2019.

some church members are joining armed resistance groups. While church leaders urge members not to enlist, Chin said that people whose homes and property have been destroyed, and whose family members have been killed, are obviously going to feel deep “tension” and may well give in to a desire for revenge. “This is the great challenge,” he said.

“We are Anabaptist Mennonite people,” he said insistently. “We don’t support armed groups. . . . This is not the will of God.”

BMC’s Mennonite roots go back to 1989, when Chin began two years of study at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Shamshabad, India. He founded the first BMC church in 2002. His vision now is that Mennonites would have a “strong presence” in the country. “We would like to show we are Mennonites in Myanmar,” he said.

Over time, Chin has met various Mennonites from abroad. At the 2015 MWC gathering, he met staff from MC Eastern Canada. In 2019, he met Norm Dyck, who works for both MC Canada and MC Eastern Canada. Dyck has travelled to Myanmar twice and helped build the growing relationship.

While there are five MC Canada congregations with close ties to Myanmar—in

Calgary; Ottawa; Surrey, B.C.; and two in Kitchener, Ont.—Chin said that BMC has yet to establish close ties to these congregations.

Much to teach us

Dyck said that BMC, as well as Myanmar Missions International—another MC Canada partner—are deeply committed to a discipleship and church-planting vision to impact Myanmar with the Gospel of peace rooted in Jesus.” He added that both “have much to teach us about being authentic followers of Jesus cross-culturally and interculturally.”

Klassen echoed this, quoting John Roth of MWC, who said, “Renewal and new life in the church . . . will only happen to the extent that we are attentive to what is happening in the global church.”

Chin is eager to see the partnership develop. “Alone we cannot do this,” he said of attaining the BMC vision.

At this point on that path of partnership he pleads for prayer for those forced to scatter from their homes. “Prayer can make a difference,” he said. ☿

To support BMC, or MMI, financially, send a donation to your regional church with the appropriate designation.

What's new at Westview Centre4Women?

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

Jane LaVacca, the executive director of Westview Centre4Women, credits her listening ear for the latest project being built at the centre. In listening to the women who gather there, she heard that one of the biggest concerns these mothers had was the lack of a licensed daycare close by.

A child-minding program was already

operating at the centre, but these women had to take a bus, or two, to take their younger children to a daycare. Older children attended the local public school. A licensed daycare was not available in their Queenston Street neighbourhood. It would be an easy transition to go from the child-minding program to a daycare, if there was one available in the same

building.

In a conversation with a potential donor, LaVacca was asked what dream she had for the centre. "We need a licensed daycare centre in the area, so that mothers can go to work, knowing their children are safe, and well looked after," she replied. "They will pay an affordable amount, whatever they can, for this service."

At the end of that conversation, a hefty donation was given for the start of the project. With additional donations, the dream materialized, and the daycare is being built in the sanctuary of Westview Christian Fellowship.

The balcony is being renovated for church offices, and the sanctuary space will be used for the daycare. Since the church uses chairs instead of pews, the chairs can be set out on Sunday mornings for the service. A grand opening is planned for September, which coincides with the centre's 15th anniversary.

In the 14 years that LaVacca has been at the centre, a number of other dreams have been realized. Shower stalls were constructed, a laundry service was set up with a washer/dryer that has a feature that kills bed bugs. A new kitchen was built, a pantry was added and new windows were installed.

The showers are being used by those who only have a room to live in, and not their own apartment. Many don't have the money to use the washers and dryers in their buildings, if there are any.

The kitchen now serves breakfast and lunch. Breakfast consists of an egg; an English muffin; yogurt; a piece of fruit; and coffee, tea or juice. Lunch can be hamburgers, quiche or sandwiches served with a salad. The cook works closely with the public-health department to set up the menus.

The pantry is much larger now, able



The staff of Westview Centre4Women prepares a meal in the Centre's kitchen.



PHOTOS BY JANE LAVACCA

The balcony in the church's sanctuary is being renovated into offices.

to store the basics as well as refrigerate meat, eggs and milk. Local farmers donate eggs, meat and vegetables, and women can acquire food items for a suggested donation. The women often support each other when one of them doesn't have enough money.

At Westview Centre4Women, most of the hired staff work part-time. The janitor was hired by the church to clean three times a week. The centre has hired an extra cleaner, who comes in every morning to disinfect everything. The cook works from recipes that feed 100 people. With so many meals prepared daily, a person was hired to operate the dishwasher.

A pandemic support worker monitors the outside distancing, and makes sure COVID-19 protocols are followed, even now with the restraints easing up. Part of this person's job includes talking to people while they are waiting in line, and having a listening ear.

The program director works with individual job coaching, and teaches some classes, including crafts, which are sold at local venues. A hairdresser and manicurist are on staff. A licensed daycare worker will be hired.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the centre was the only agency that stayed open in the area. When no one was allowed to come into the building for a meal, it was allowed to serve sandwich lunches through a window. At one time, 500 sandwiches were served weekly.

When vaccines for COVID-19 became available, the church sanctuary was used by public health to administer the shots.

Most pre-pandemic clients have

News brief

MCC B.C. director awarded Jubilee Medallion

Wayne Bremner, right, executive director of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) B.C., was among the 46 recipients of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medallion in Abbotsford on June 21. Presented by Abbotsford MP Ed Fast, left, the recipients were honoured for their contributions and achievements to the community and country. "I feel a bit awkward with this, knowing so many people in our community give of themselves to serve others here at home and around the world," Bremner said. "It's my privilege to share this with thousands who serve as volunteers, supporters and staff of MCC where I also serve."

—BY AMY RINNER WADDELL



FACEBOOK PHOTO

Staff changes

Pastoral transitions in Manitoba



since 1983.

John Klassen's time as intentional interim pastor at Arnaud Mennonite Church finished on June 1. Klassen served in this position for just over a year, after retiring from his role as senior pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Winkler in March 2021. He earned a master of divinity degree from AMBS, training in transitional ministry, and has worked as a pastor



He earned a master of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind.

— BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

Adam Robinson began as pastor of Arnaud Mennonite Church on June 1. He previously pastored at Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite Church in Winnipeg and Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary, and he worked with the Inter-Mennonite Chaplaincy Association and Mennonite Church Canada. Most recently, he served as associate pastor of Douglas Mennonite Church in Winnipeg for 11-and-a-half years, before resigning at the end of April 2021.

returned to the centre, although a few did not make it through the harsh winter. New clients now include people who have lost jobs or housing during the pandemic. They come a few times until they can get on their feet again.

Some funding has been lost over the past couple of years, and material donations are not coming in at the same rate as they did pre-pandemic. But a greater challenge is the spiralling increase in prices for

groceries and other amenities.

One well-known charity regularly donates boxes of supplies to help people set up an apartment; but towels, sheets and other linens are in short supply; and hygiene supplies and cleaning kits are always needed, along with dishes, household items, and women's and children's clothing. And, of course, financial support is always welcomed by the Westview Centre4Women. ☸

'We actually achieved reconciliation'

New interpretive path tells story of reconciliation efforts in rural Saskatchewan

Story and Photos by Emily Summach
Saskatchewan Correspondent
NEAR LAIRD, SASK.

An area of disputed land in Saskatchewan has become a seedbed of reconciliation with the launch of an interpretive path to make the story of that journey come alive for visitors.

An official opening ceremony for the Stoney Knoll Interpretive Site, located between Waldheim and Rosthern roughly 45 minutes north of Saskatoon, was held on June 22. More than 150 adult guests, plus several classes of students from area schools, attended the event that was put on by the Stoney Knoll Historical Committee, a group of Mennonite, Lutheran and Indigenous representatives who are dedicated to sharing this reconciliation story.

In 1876, Stoney Knoll was part of an area of land that was given to the Young Chippewayan Cree band as part of the Treaty Six agreement. In 1897, the land was illegally reappropriated and sold to Mennonite and Lutheran settlers. The sale was a violation of the treaty and rendered the Young Chippewayan Cree landless.

Over time, the settlers established themselves on the land, and St. John's Lutheran Church, now located in Laird, Sask., was built on Stoney Knoll.

Beginning in the late 1970s, descendants of the First Nation returned to the area and began having conversations with local landowners about the true history of the land sale. People from the area recall those days as "tense," with "lots of fear, and heightened anxiety."

Now, 40 years on, a friendship has grown and deepened between the local Lutheran and Mennonite communities and the Young Chippewayan Cree band, brought together on that land.

There were smiles and hugs, and jokes shared between friends over plates of hamburgers and potato salad at the opening of the interpretive path.



Wilmer and Barb Froese serve as masters of ceremony during the program.



Leonard Doell shares a few words at the event.



George Kingfisher, Young Chippewayan ancestral chief, and Ray Funk describe each other as 'like a brother.'

Wilmer Froese, a member of the Historical Committee, and whose farmyard is

visible from the knoll, joyfully told the crowd, "Instead of walls, we built bridges."



Students from Rosthern Community School in Rosthern, Sask. hold up a collaborative art “quilt” they made for the event.



Members of the Stoney Knoll Historical Committee and special guests cut the ribbon to open the new interpretive path.

Leonard Doell, another committee member, described Stoney Knoll as, “A thin place, where all of us are closer to the Creator. This place jolted many of us out of our old ways of seeing the world, and the storyboards unveiled today amplify that message.”

The landscaped path features an archway entrance that depicts two eagles,

carved by local chainsaw artist Michelle Thevenot. Along the path are signs that tell the history of the land, the conflict and the peaceful relationship that was forged between the groups. There is also a stone gathering circle next to the path to invite people to pray and reflect.

Students from schools in both Laird and Rosthern attended the event, and shared



Theresa Driedeger examines a storyboard and the views of the land from the top of Stoney Knoll.

songs, poetry and artwork inspired by the reconciliation efforts centred at Stoney Knoll.

Both Indigenous and settler leaders spoke about how encouraging it was to them personally to have the students present, because it meant that things were changing and the next generation would have a better understanding of the history and impacts of colonization.

“It won’t happen again, because you’re learning,” Mary Culbertson, Saskatchewan’s treaty commissioner, told the students.

“This is a little start,” said George Kingfisher, ancestral chief of the Young Chippewyan band. “The government wanted us to be enemies, but we’re living peacefully.”

The Young Chippewyan Cree band submitted its land claim to the federal government in February. The review process typically takes six months, at which point the land claim can be accepted or rejected by the government. The Stoney Knoll Historical Committee intends to seek recognition for Stoney Knoll as a provincial or national historic site in the future.

For those closely involved with the project, the path speaks not only to the past, but also towards a hopeful future together.

Gary LaPlante, a Young Chippewyan descendent, said: “We [the Young Chippewyan people] took a big chance coming back here. We have no regrets. What we did here, it gives me hope. We actually achieved reconciliation.” ❧

PEOPLE

‘Walking together, doing things together’

Accept the Pope’s apology and move on, says former director of MCC Manitoba’s Aboriginal Neighbours program

Story and Photo by John Longhurst
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
MACKWACIS, ALTA.

Although the focus was on the Roman Catholic Church when the Pope visited Canada in late July, Mennonites also have a role to play in promoting reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in this country.

That’s the view of Norman Meade, 78, an Anglican minister and Métis elder-in-residence at the University of Manitoba, who directed the Aboriginal Neighbours program for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Manitoba from 2007 to 2012.

“Mennonites can reach out to Indigenous people, ask them to explain their ways, exchange stories,” said Meade.

His interactions with Mennonites go back to the 1960s.

“Menno Wiebe was one of the first Mennonites I met,” he said, noting Wiebe’s involvement with, and advocacy on behalf of, Indigenous Peoples in Canada through his work at MCC Canada. “We became good friends.”

Mennonite congregations can be involved in reconciliation by inviting elders to come and talk, Meade said. “That can help them understand how colonialization affected our people, how we lost our customs, practices, beliefs and ceremonies.”

These kinds of exchanges are a way to do peacebuilding, he said, adding “a lot of good work has already been done in that area. It’s a big part of the reconciliation journey.”

Another way Mennonites and other denominations can engage in reconciliation is by not planting churches among Indigenous people.

Support is always welcome, Meade said, but “don’t be out there to save souls. Help people on their own spiritual walks, however they do it with Creator. Respect the spirituality that is already there. We all pray to one God, Creator. We just have



Norman Meade, the former director of MCC Manitoba’s Aboriginal Neighbours program, took his granddaughter Everlee to hear the Pope speak in Alberta last month.

different ways of doing that.”

Meade was among the thousands in Mackwacis, Alta., in late July to hear the Pope deliver his apology. “It was a good and sincere message,” he said. “I felt it in my heart.”

For him, the part that stood out was

“walking together, doing things together. That’s how we will achieve reconciliation, by working together, praying together. There is no other way,” he said.

Of great importance to Meade is passing hope to younger Indigenous people. That’s why he brought his eight-year-old granddaughter, Everlee, with him to Alberta. “We need to create a better future for our children,” he said. One way to do that, he said, was by accepting the Pope’s apology and moving on.

His message to young Indigenous people is, “Don’t give up, and don’t live in the past. It’s too painful to live there. Go forward.”

For him, this means “breaking the cycle of anger” over Indian Residential Schools.

“We need to move forward for our children’s sake, to prepare them for the future. The past is not something to stay caught up in.”

Meade didn’t attend a residential school. But his wife Thelma, who died two years ago, did. “Everlee is a second-generation survivor,” he said of his granddaughter.

It will take time, but Indigenous people need to use the apology as a way to start the work of making the world “a better place for our young ones than it was for us,” he said.

He acknowledged the path ahead will not be easy. “It will take time,” he said.

Doug Klassen, executive minister of Mennonite Church Canada, also felt positive about the Pope’s apology. “I was thankful to hear of individual abusive actions of those within the Catholic Church, and for his apology for the church’s collaboration with government on the concepts at the core of residential schools, and for the catastrophic effects that they had on Indigenous culture, heritage and lives,” he said. ☞

Church connects with Witness workers in Thailand

By Jessica Evans
Alberta Correspondent

“There is a great deal of love for the work Tom and Christine do, and for them as a family. Their stories and visits are always warmly received,” says William Loewen, pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Calgary.

Tom and Christine Poovong are Mennonite Church Canada International Witness workers in northeastern Thailand, providing pastoral leadership to Christian communities there. The couple and their two children, Joseph, 9, and Phimchanok, 11, have been members of Trinity for more than 15 years, and, previous to that, members of First Mennonite Church in Calgary.

“Tom and Christine have been a part of our church life since before I started at Trinity in 2010,” says Loewen. “They were a big part of the larger Lao-Thai Christian community, giving formal and informal leadership, and serving as the bridge between that community and our congregation, continuing the work of Tom’s extended family since their arrival in Canada.”

Not only did the Poovongs serve as a bridge between the church community and immigrant communities in the city around them, they also gave leadership in the life of the church, including as deacons. They both worked at the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) thrift store, where they organized and oversaw a very profitable outlet, raising funds for the work of MCC. During their time there, they built relationships with volunteers that gathered to sort clothes, staff who worked alongside them, and customers who entered the store.

“Even before they left for Thailand, their heart for missions was encouraging us to as a congregation,” says Loewen.

“Trinity is like a family to us,” says Tom. “The Lord used my mom to bring us to First Mennonite and then Trinity, until presently, as we were sent out to be Witness workers

... representing our home church”

Trinity Mennonite has been following the Poovong family on their journey to Thailand through regular updates on church planting, entrepreneurship training and community building work that they do. In 2016, a group of 10 from Trinity, led by Hugo and Doreen Neufeld, were able to travel to Thailand for three weeks. There, they were able to put faces to the stories they had been hearing. With a large part of the Poovongs’ work being entrepreneurship and small business support, they were also able to see the financial and social need for that work, and also the fruit of it.

Along with building self-sufficient congregations in Thailand, they have developed income-generation ministries, including MennoShoes and an Issaan food restaurant, businesses where Christian disciples make a steady income and are able to give back to their local congregations. These churches have become part of a church-planting organization started by the Poovongs in 2016 called Friends of Grace Church, which became recognized by the Thai government and ministers in Thailand and Laos. The Poovongs’ goal is to establish self-sustainable, locally run peace churches.

They also connect with leaders of other Thai Mennonite congregations to encourage relationships and fellowship among emerging Mennonite communities across Thailand and Laos. They were also approved and registered with the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand in October 2018.

Most recently, the Poovongs have invited Trinity members Paul and Vila Phomasavanh to travel to Thailand and Laos to help in the training of pastors and leaders in the network of churches the Poovongs give support to. The Phomasavanh’s work has been supported by the congregation.

There have also been some informal conversations within the Calgary



PHOTO BY CHRISTINE POOVONG

Tom Poovong, right, leads a baptism ceremony in Roi Et City at the Friends of Grace Church.

congregation about sending young people to Thailand to be a part of the English language-training work that happens through the educational projects the Poovongs have started.

COVID-19 has also impacted the Poovongs’ work and encouraged them to grow in income-generation areas to help provide jobs for those who returned to rural areas from the cities. This, in turn, has created more opportunities for their ministry.

“Since COVID-19, we turned our house to become a house church, and one of our local disciples also did the same at their home in another community,” says Tom. “So we now have two house churches in Khon Kaen City where we are living now.”

Not only does Trinity Mennonite support the Poovongs financially and learn about their work, they also lift them in their prayers. “Our home church and other Mennonite churches were our main partners and prayer supporters from the beginning,” say Tom.

As the Poovong family and Trinity Mennonite Church continue life on opposite sides of the globe, their connection is strong and hope for their future together is evident. ☸

Humble confessions, compelling stories

Edith and Neill von Gunten release memoir

By Will Braun
Senior Writer

As Neill von Gunten and his Black companions departed an increasingly volatile Chicago rally, at which Martin Luther King Jr. had taken a brick to the head, KKK members and other whites attacked their bus at a red light. Bricks flew through windows. Rioters rocked the bus.

Amid panic, the driver ran the red light, eventually returning to the ghetto where Neill and his wife Edith lived. Chicago was the newlyweds' introduction to life outside their "sheltered" Mennonite upbringings in rural Indiana.

A year-and-a-half later, during a stint at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC, a founding college of Canadian Mennonite University) in Winnipeg, Neill and fellow student Ron Boese spent a February night on the streets of Winnipeg

begging, inadvertently getting kicked out of a "mission," and spending the night in a smelly "flop house." The next morning, Neill, in his dishevelled attire, attended a nearby Mennonite church, receiving a cool reception.

These are two of the more dramatic episodes recounted in *Walking Together: Intercultural Stories of Love and Acceptance*, the new memoir by the von Guntens.

After two years in Chicago and another two at CMBC, the couple spent the rest of their working lives—38 years—in several Indigenous and Métis communities around Lake Winnipeg, working for the conference in its evolving forms.

The book, published by Mennonite Church Canada and available from CommonWord.ca, is a highly readable, regularly captivating, and often touching

account. Reading it almost feels like sitting in the von Guntens' very homey—I'm sure—living room with a cup of hot tea.

It is a missionary book like few others, depicting an approach that is overtly Christian and relentlessly non-impositional.

Racism and injustice are discussed head-on, but the focus is on day-to-day interpersonal relationship and ministry. Stories are framed around the seven sacred teachings, with Edith providing additional spiritual reflections.

Near the end of the book, Neill tells the striking story of a pointed question posed to him by Norman Meade. Meade now serves as an elder-in-residence at the University of Manitoba.

Neill's account

For as far back as we can remember, life for Edith and me has been entirely constructed around faith, hope, love and relationships. We always kept our door open for anyone at anytime, just as so many homes in Indigenous communities were open to us. Countless people went through our kitchen and living room!

Two life-impacting incidents happened right in the middle of our Manigotagan living room during our early years of ministry. . . .

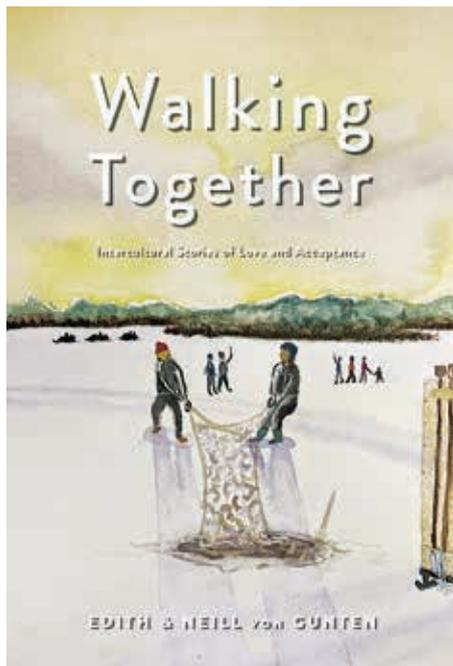
The first incident occurred when we'd been living in Manigotagan for almost a year and felt at home with our new friends, especially our neighbours, Norman and Thelma. As usual, we put our children to bed early on Bible study night, before the group met in our living room. Seven or eight of us gathered on the sofa and chairs.

After a lively discussion about our study, Edith served coffee, tea and dessert—her chocolate cake, which was always a big hit. Norman seemed particularly quiet and thoughtful as the rest of us continued



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE VON GUNTENS

Norman Meade and his late wife Thelma, left, are pictured with Neill and Edith von Gunten along the Manigotagan River in 2010.



chatting. This was unusual, and he'd been quite involved during the Bible study discussion, so I figured he was pondering something important.

When the conversation lulled and there was nothing but the clink of coffee cups and forks in our ears, Norman spoke in his firm yet gentle way. "Neill, did you think you were better than the rest of us in Manigotagan when you moved here?"

The question stopped me in my tracks. My heart leaped into my throat. Heads bobbed up and the conversation in the living room stopped. I guess everyone was as surprised as I was by his question. Everyone turned my way, waiting for my response. I had to take an honest look at myself before I could answer him truthfully. Despite my surprise that Norman would ask such a loaded question, I was glad that he felt free enough to do so, even in front of others. He deserved an honest answer, and it was right there, in my heart, but it wasn't easy to admit.

"Yes, I did, Norman," I finally replied. "I came here after two years of studying at Bible college and I thought that I had a lot of answers." With everyone's eyes fixed on me, I continued. "I don't feel that way now, though. I've learned so much from the people here—including you—and I know I have much more to learn."

"For example, you taught me that

God the creator was here long before us settlers arrived, and that Creator speaks to us through all of nature, if we're willing to listen." I looked from Norman to each person in the room by turn. "You've all taught me so much about God and about his creation. The Spirit is very alive in this community. Over the past year, I've gained deep appreciation for the respectful way you make your living off the land and water, and how your families have struggled to survive as a people all these years."

Norman responded with a smile. "I can tell. You're different," he said. "You seem to understand us better, and your family has become an important part of our families and community."

My relationship with Norman continued to grow over the years. Both of us like to look at situations from different perspectives. Sometimes we even take sides to debate an issue—and then switch sides so we can understand both perspectives better. A big part of our relationship is our ability to be truthful and honest with one another, and to stay open to new ways of thinking.

In closing

The afterword to the book is written by Loretta Meade Ross, the daughter of Norman and his late wife, Thelma. Meade Ross is the treaty commissioner of Manitoba. She leads off the afterword as follows:

"Do you think that you are better than us?"

Tears came to my eyes when I read that my dad . . . had asked Neill this question. It was a difficult question to pose to a friend, yet it is one that every Indigenous person wants to ask at some point. . . .

That question, Neill's response and the journey toward relationship is at the heart of this book. ❧

The von Guntzens' book is available online from CommonWord at <https://bit.ly/3y3NdCL>.



Staff changes

AMBS sees retirement and new hire



Daniel Grimes, who has worked for Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) for the last seven years, retired on June 30 from

his position as vice president for advancement and enrolment. Grimes joined AMBS in 2015, and was promoted to his current role in 2019. He is the first BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) individual to serve as vice-president of AMBS. Under his leadership, AMBS has seen enrolment in graduate programs grow to the highest level since 2010. The number of international graduate students has increased as well, constituting almost 43 percent of the graduate student body in 2021-22.



Henok T. Mekonin of Ethiopia joined the AMBS staff as the global leadership collaborative specialist, on May 1, with part of his

funding coming from Mennonite Mission Network. He assists AMBS with intercultural consultation and communication with Ethiopian seminary students and will also work with mission education. Through a partnership between AMBS and Meserete Kristos Seminary (MKS) in Ethiopia, graduate students can take a customized version of the master's-level theology and global Anabaptism program in Ethiopia. Before coming to AMBS, Mekonin earned a bachelor's degree in Bible and Christian ministry from MKS and a master's degree in theology and peace studies at AMBS in 2021.

—ANABAPTIST MENNONITE BIBLICAL SEMINARY

Emmaus House concludes decade of intentional community living

Story and Photos by Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

Rod and Susan Reynar made a huge life change in 2014 when they moved from Alberta to Manitoba and started Emmaus House, an intentional community for university students in Winnipeg. This spring, they said goodbye to their last group of students and closed their doors.

Emmaus House brought 10 university students together each year from across the country and around the world. It was a place of rich conversations, shared meals and study parties. Over its eight years of operation, 56 different people lived there.

The Reynars, members of Home

Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, developed the idea for Emmaus House when a medical procedure gave a new lease on life to Rod, who lives with a tethered spinal cord, which he was born with, and arachnoiditis, which he developed when he was injected with toxic diagnostic dye to X-ray his spine. His arachnoiditis, severe scarring of the nerves, subjects him to high pain levels.

He's had more than a dozen major back surgeries, but it was a device he got implanted that began to manage the pain. He and Susan dreamed of what they could

do with this newfound ability. Opening their home to university students seemed like a meaningful combination of Susan's gift for hospitality and Rod's passion for mentoring students. It worked well, offering him the opportunity to teach at CMU as a volunteer while maintaining his long-term-disability support.

"We wanted this community to be a reflection of our own faith," Susan says. "It's important for people to know . . . we're coming to living together in community as people who have an Anabaptist faith perspective." But the Reynars didn't want to be exclusionary or expect anyone to adhere to a certain list of beliefs. Their diverse community included people of other religions and atheists, people with deep faith and those with no faith background, and they welcomed conservative and progressive perspectives. "We wanted people to know that this is a safe place to express your thoughts and your experiences with spirituality," she says.

Emmaus House members cooked dinner in pairs and took turns cleaning the bathrooms and sweeping the floors. They walked their two dogs, biked to class, watched movies and canned salsa together.

"We wanted this to be a place where life can be experienced in an integrated way," says Susan. "That people could establish patterns that are healthy academically, spiritually, in their lives of service to each other and the communities in which we live, in relationship and also just in fun. How can we find quality of life in ways together that's harder to find if we're all navigating on our own?"

Living well with others depends on sharing more than just the high points, Susan says. Most of life is learning to live together in the mundane. It's these ordinary moments they cherish the most.

"The highlight of the day for me was



Susan and Rod Reynar founded Emmaus House, an intentional community for university students in Winnipeg.



Fifty-six different people lived at Emmaus House over its eight years of operation.

always around the table, as people blessed us with the work of their hands and took delight in sharing food,” Rod says. He misses sitting in the kitchen and always being able to count on someone coming through and stopping to talk for a while.

Living in a house with a dozen people was not always wonderful, though. “The last thing we want to do is romanticize community,” he says. “Living together with our own families is challenging, not to speak of living together with strangers. But in a world that is increasingly polarized, somehow, I think we need to push beyond that and find ways of being able to listen.”

Home is a safe place that many retreat to after tough days—which means people are not always their best selves at home. Throw in some fundamentally different perspectives, and maintaining relationships can be tense. For some people, Emmaus House wasn’t the right fit and for others it was a time of incredible growth. Drafting a covenant, holding space for each other, listening with openness and committing to work through conflict—these can be hard work, but they’re all part of “developing a healthy respect for the other, even if we disagree,” Rod says.

Concluding Emmaus House was an extremely difficult decision for the two. “There were far more joys and rewards than there were ever challenges, by far,”

he says. But there was one problem that persisted. As Rod’s health declined, it became increasingly difficult for him to sustain the level of engagement needed to help run Emmaus House.

“This house works with both of our giftedness,” Susan says. “And when Rod’s giftedness was not able to be present because of his pain, I couldn’t make up for the things he couldn’t bring to the experience. We both have this deep desire to honour the potential in a place like this, so when we felt like we couldn’t honour that potential . . . that was hard for us to reconcile.”

The Reynars aren’t packing up and moving to a quiet bungalow for two, as many people might do after almost a decade of intense relationships and alternative living.

In a way, Emmaus House isn’t really ending, but transforming. Rod’s mother, Phyllis Reynar, and Susan’s sister and brother-in-law, Tobia and George Veith, have moved into the house, creating a new intentional living arrangement for the next decade of their lives. “We learned a lot with the students . . . and we’ve benefited richly from that,” Susan says.

Rod and Susan needed more long-term stability, and it was important to them to consider family and the future in the equation. Rod’s aging mother was living on her own and feeling isolated, and they wanted to enrich her last decades. The Veiths recently returned from 30 years of ministry in China, opening the opportunity to spend time together as a family.

The couple is mindful of their children’s insecurity about the future, in the shadow of ecological crisis and economic insecurity that could mean working multiple jobs for the rest of their lives and never owning property. So they are laying the foundation for the option of a co-living experience for their children.

“There’s all these stresses, questions that generation is asking,” Rod says. “We could just protect ourselves and set ourselves up where we’re not participating in those questions, . . . but, instead, wanting to walk alongside our kids and making the decision to continue in community. . . . We don’t want to abandon our kids or [their] generation.”

In Emmaus House’s early days, the couple had roughly 40 guests around the dinner table in a month, undoubtedly touching the lives of a multitude of people. Susan says, “Hospitality is something that is still important to this house, and we look forward to what forms that can take in the future.” ❧

/// Staff change

Kenyan immigrant is MCC Alberta’s new settlement associate



Jackie Karau, the new migration and settlement program associate for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Alberta, says: “I have learned that

there is an overwhelming amount of need and suffering in this world. It is not up to us to solve every problem out there, but we can start by helping one person.” Karau has experience in settlement work with Calgary agencies serving immigrants and has expansive knowledge in this area. Karau promotes refugee sponsorship to churches under either the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program (BVOR) or the Joint Assistance Program (JAS). The BVOR program gives Canadian citizens and permanent residents a chance to help refugees in need of resettlement by partnering with the government. Refugee candidates through this are in a pool; therefore, if churches are willing and able to commit, MCC will select a profile to match a family with a congregation. In the JAS program, the Government of Canada sometimes partners with organizations to resettle refugees with special needs, who need more support. Under the JAS program, the government and the private sponsor support refugees for up to 36 months, depending on the case. Churches interested in sponsoring a refugee individual or family can email Karau at jackiekarau@mccab.ca for more information.

—BY JESSICA EVANS

Music builds bridges to Africa

B.C. music teacher takes instruments, instruction to Congolese school

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

A chance connection on social media led Heidi Epp, a music teacher from British Columbia, to travel to the Democratic Republic of the Congo this summer to teach music, and peace and conflict transformation.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HEIDI EPP

Heidi Epp leads a workshop in the Democratic Republic of the Congo about peace and conflict transformation.

Kendri Mastaki Mushagalusa, founder and director of the Peace Foundation and Peace Music Academy in Bukavu, had invited Epp, a member of Yarrow United Mennonite Church in B.C., to come to the Congo to help with music education at the school he founded. Mushagalusa is a former YAMEN (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network) participant through Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), who wanted to do something proactive to help his community.

Life in Bukavu, a city of over a million people, is difficult, with a 90-percent unemployment rate, and education not accessible to all. Mushagalusa started the Peace Foundation, a non-governmental organization whose aim is “to promote individual and institutional change through respect for democratic values, the promotion of peace, and respect for human rights.”

A key part of the Peace Foundation is

the music academy, whose teachers are volunteers. Their offices are in the local Mennonite Brethren church, where many of the teachers attend, although the school is not officially affiliated with any church group. Approximately 40 young people, aged 7 to 18, attend the academy.

A continent away in Canada, Epp was pursuing her lifelong passion for music. She teaches piano privately and directs the Richmond Youth Honour Choir. Additionally, she is president of the Chilliwack Youth Orchestra and program director for Bakerview Music Academy in Abbotsford. She is also founder of the Fraser Valley Children’s Chorus.

When Mushagalusa reached out to Epp on Facebook because he read about her music work, the connection was underway. A conversation ensued about music and music education. Epp learned that many of the students attending the academy were orphans or impoverished children who lived with only one parent. Even public school costs money, so the education at the music academy is the only education they receive.

Questions about music education and leadership began flying across the internet.

“Kendri asked me, ‘Would you be willing to meet our choir online?’” recalls Epp. When she did so—after being awakened by an unexpected call at 5:30 a.m. with the choir ready to sing for her—Mushagalusa told her, “We really need you to come here!”

Excited about the possibility, Epp said to herself, “If ever there is a time I could go, this is it.” She funded the trip herself, with help from friends, and she put on a fundraising concert at her church to raise money for the costs of the workshops she would lead.

Epp travelled to the the Congo from June 15 to July 2, taking with her teaching supplies, rhythm and melody cards, and recorders.

“They’re durable, transportable, and the fingering from the recorder translates to woodwind instruments,” she says.

“The first week I worked with kids, and the choir gave a concert,” she says. “The second week I gave workshops to the teachers on peace and conflict transformation, using Jesus as a model for relationships.”

The choir concert proved to be a highlight of her time in the Congo, as members of various ethnic groups joined together to sing and dance spontaneously.

“The entire room was hopping with dancing and music and joy,” says Epp. “There was no border, no divide between tribes, gender or age.”

Part of Epp’s mission was also giving musical instruction to the academy teachers, many of whom are highly educated in fields such as law, computer science and agriculture, but don’t have extensive musical training themselves. Also attending the leadership workshops were representatives from various Christian denominations who wanted to start musical programs in their own churches.

“She is grateful to Facebook friends who donated funds to buy the recorders, and to Long and McQuade music stores and the Canadian publishing company Theme and Variations for donating musical supplies.

Now she is pondering, “Where do we go from here? The [Peace Music Academy] program is growing. How does the foundation become self-sustaining? How do we help make it happen?”

Following her time in the Congo, Epp travelled to Rwanda to visit the MCC offices and learn more about MCC programs in the area.

Reflecting on her time in Africa, she says, “I would go back in a heartbeat. I have become very attached to those people and very invested in their ability to progress and develop and invest in their community.” ❧



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“An inspiring Mennonite memoir”

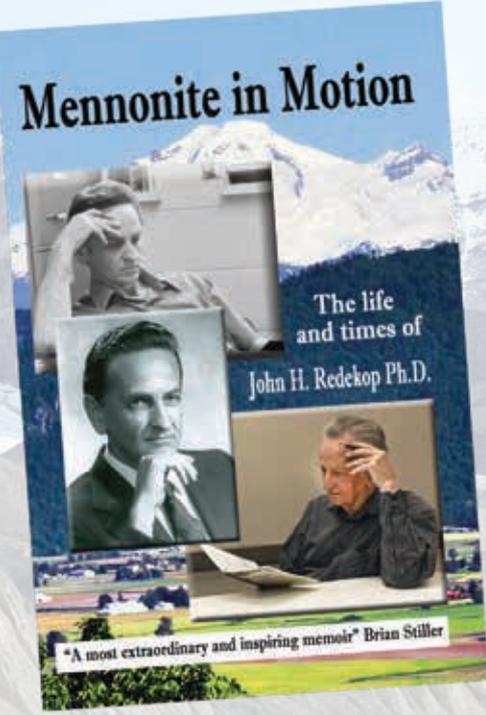
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Also available from Amazon and as an ebook from Kindle.

Calendar

Nationwide

Until Sept. 4: MC Canada is again offering virtual worship services this summer, led by congregations from across the country. They can be watched at MC Canada's website at mennonitechurch.ca/worshipservices. For more information, contact Darryl Neustaedter Barg, MC Manitoba's director of communications, at dnbarg@mennochurch.mb.ca.

British Columbia

Sept. 16-17: MCC B.C. "Festival of World Relief, at the Tradex, Abbotsford.
Sept. 24: Camp Squeah paddle-athon fundraiser, to help summer volunteers with their tuition costs. To participate, or get more information, email rob@squeah.com.
Oct. 1, 29: Fundraisers for MC B.C.'s Indigenous relations ministry; at (1) Cedar Valley Mennonite Church, Mission, hosts a coffeehouse featuring MC B.C. musicians and a silent auction, at 7 p.m. (29) Arts

festival fundraiser featuring MC B.C. and Emily Carr student artist, in Vancouver, at 2 p.m., location TBA.

Saskatchewan

Sept. 17: Shekinah move-a-thon, a day of fundraising and fun to support the work and mission of Shekinah Retreat Centre. Updates coming soon.

Manitoba

To Sept. 10: "Views from Manitoba, 1890-1940" photo exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery at CMU, Winnipeg, featuring photos by four Manitoba Mennonite photographers.
Sept. 18: Camps with Meaning fundraiser. Pedal Dash Paddle adventure race will help with COVID-19 recovery. More information at ringupthecash.causevox.com.
Sept. 28: CMU hosts a virtual open house, at 6 p.m. For more information, visit cmu.ca/virtual-open-house.
Sept. 29: Book launch for "Walking Together: Intercultural Stories of Love and Acceptance," by Edith and Neill von Gunten. Event will be

held in person at CommonWord and by livestream at 7 p.m. (CDT).
Oct. 21: CMU open house, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Ontario

Sept. 6-Dec. 16: "Unmasking, breathing, moving forward" exhibition at the Grebel Gallery, Waterloo, by 17 Black, Indigenous and racialized artists who respond to their COVID-19 experiences and offer insights into a way forward that is attentive to marginalized voices. Launch event at 7 p.m. on Sept. 6.
Sept. 11: Detweiler Meetinghouse hosts the MacTalla Road Duo with instrumental music of the British Isles and Canada's East Coast, near Roseville, at 2:30 p.m.
Sept. 11: A cappella hymn sing at Maple View Mennonite Church, 7:30 p.m., part of the Amish bicentennial celebrations.
Sept. 17: Toronto Mennonite Festival, at Willowgrove Farm, Whitchurch-Stouffville, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Sept. 25: A cappella hymn sing at East Zorra Mennonite Church, 7:30 p.m., part of the Amish

bicentennial celebrations.

Sept. 30: Truth and Reconciliation and the Amish Bicentennial at Steinmann Mennonite Church, 7:30 p.m., with Rebecca Seiling and David G. Neufeld, reflecting on connections between land, Indigenous people and settlers.
Oct. 2: Amish Mennonite heritage thanksgiving worship service at Steinmann Mennonite Church 7 p.m. Display of Amish Mennonite artifacts and memorabilia on display from 4 p.m.
Oct. 14: "Diverse Paths," A Low German networking conference to learn and explore cultural nuances of Low German-speaking community, at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo.

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.



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Announcements

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The College is committed to employment equity and welcomes applications from all qualified persons. Canadian citizens and permanent residents will be given priority. For further information about the College, department, position description, and application procedures, see www.grebel.ca/positions



CONRAD GREBEL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE



PHOTO BY EMILY SUMMACH

A game for all ages: Donald Baergen of Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton and Ayub Regehr of Glenlea Mennonite Church in Manitoba face off in a crokinole game during MC Canada's Gathering 2022 at the end of July. Organizers of the event joked that people could participate in what might become a semi-annual national competition.

Photo finish



PHOTO CREDIT: JANE GRUNAU

Members of Al Rashid Mosque, a key partner in Mennonite Church Alberta's North Edmonton Ministries, host Mennonite visitors during an afternoon tour which included making interfaith connections and enjoying tasty food. The tour also included a visit to Westmount Presbyterian Church, to learn about the congregation's efforts to construct a new building for less ecological impact and to serve the housing needs of its community.