

CANADIAN MENNONITE

October 6, 2023 Volume 27 Number 20



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are the
Meek

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to division pg. 7

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‘Midnight’ musings

BY AARON EPP
Associate Editor



At times, it’s shocking, violent and gory. It’s also one of the most compelling pop culture depictions of Christian faith and religion in recent memory.

Midnight Mass, a limited series released on Netflix in 2021, follows Riley Flynn, a former venture capitalist, who has returned to his isolated, dwindling hometown on Crockett Island. He’s just served four years in prison for killing someone in a drunk-driving incident. Coinciding with Riley’s return, a mysterious new priest, Father Paul Hill, arrives on the island to provide leadership at the community’s only church.

In the weeks that follow, the people on Crockett Island experience strange miracles and a Christian revival that ultimately threatens to divide the community between those who feel safe in the church and those who do not.

Over the course of the horror series’ seven episodes, viewers encounter characters that might seem familiar to people who have spent time in religious communities in North America.

We meet Ed Flynn, Riley’s father, a fisherman who is embarrassed by his son’s actions and reluctant to welcome him home from prison; and Annie, Riley’s devout, forgiving mother who tries to keep the peace.

We also get to know Erin Greene, a schoolteacher dealing with the trauma of an abusive upbringing; Joe Collie, a man who is ostracized from the community for his drunkenness and

past mistakes; Bev Keane, a zealous, judgmental and influential member of the church; and Sheriff Hassan, a Muslim lawman who has trouble fitting in with the town’s predominantly Catholic population.

While trying to understand the fantastic things happening around them, the residents of Crockett Island deal with questions of faith, doubt, forgiveness, the afterlife and reconciliation.

I recently watched *Midnight Mass* for the second time and was struck by something Father Paul says in the final episode. Fleeing a looming threat, the people of Crockett Island seek shelter at a recreation centre that was built using church funds.

Bev believes the space isn’t big enough to hold everyone and appoints herself the judge of who can enter the rec centre and who must stay outside to face certain death. She starts by turning away a man because he stopped attending the church long ago.

Distressed by Bev’s actions, Father Paul invites the man, and everyone else, into the church.

“All are welcome!” he shouts. “All have to be welcome or this isn’t really God’s house!”

I don’t recall giving that line a second thought the first time I watched *Midnight Mass* two years ago, but when I heard it the other night, it cut me to the core.

In the days since, as I’ve thought about a church conflict that is weighing on my mind, I’ve cast myself as Father Paul—opening the doors of the church

and insisting everyone has a place inside.

If I’m honest with myself, though, from time to time I also have Bev Keane-like tendencies toward passive aggression, judgment and urges to demarcate who belongs and who doesn’t.

This issue of *Canadian Mennonite* contains several articles about things people are doing to come together despite their disagreements. By doing so, I believe they are working toward a church where all are welcome.

In the feature (page 7), Will Braun uses the Beatitudes as a starting point to imagine ways people with opposing political views might work together. Amy Rinner Waddell reports on a recent Mennonite Church B.C. forum where participants explored healthy disagreement (page 18), and Arli Klassen’s latest column challenges us to live out a hope and faith that God’s gift of unity amidst diversity is possible in our congregations (page 11).

Elsewhere in this issue, in the first article in a six-part series, Kara Carter tells the story of how members of one Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregation are reaching out to their community (page 20).

As always, my hope is that these articles inform and inspire you as you live out your faith and love your neighbours.

All have to be welcome or it isn’t really God’s house. ☘



Funded by the
Government
of Canada

ISSN 1480-042X

Canada

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Protesters rally in Washington D.C. We altered the placard, which originally read, "Thoughts & prayers don't save lives / Gun reform will."

PHOTO BY LORIE SHAULL, USED AS PER CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/
LICENSES/BY/2.0. ADAPTED BY BETTY AVERY

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CANADIAN MENNONITE

490 Dutton Drive, Unit C5,
Waterloo, ON, N2L 6H7

Phone: 519-884-3810 | Toll-free: 1-800-378-2524

Publisher: **Tobi Thiessen**, publisher@canadianmennonite.org

Editor: **Will Braun**, editor@canadianmennonite.org

Associate Editor: **Aaron Epp**

Design: **Betty Avery**

Social Media: **Madalene Arias**

Editorial Assistant: **Barb Draper**

Circulation: **Lorna Aberdein**

Finance: **Graham Aberdein**

Advertising: **Ben Thiessen**

Regional Correspondents

B.C.: **Amy Rinner Waddell**

Alberta: **Emily Summach**

Saskatchewan: **Emily Summach**

Manitoba: **Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe**

Eastern Canada: **Madalene Arias**

Full contact info at canadianmennonite.org

Or email office@canadianmennonite.org

One-year Subscriptions

Canada: \$52+tax / U.S.: \$70 / International: \$93

Contact: office@canadianmennonite.org

Send general submissions to:

submit@canadianmennonite.org

Letters to: letters@canadianmennonite.org

Calendar items to: calendar@canadianmennonite.org

Milestones to: milestones@canadianmennonite.org

Published by **Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service**.

Chair: Kathryn Lymburner (board@canadianmennonite.org)

Vice-chair: Karen Heese

Secretary: Annika Krause

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Other members: Lois Epp, Arthur Koop, Donna Schulz, Brenda Suderman, Alex Tiessen

Mennonite Church Canada and Regional Churches appoint directors and provide about one third of *Canadian Mennonite's* budget.

Mission: To educate, inspire, inform and foster dialogue on issues facing Mennonites in Canada.

Publications mail agreement no. 40063104 Registration no. 09613

Return undeliverable items to: Canadian Mennonite, 490 Dutton Drive, Unit C5, Waterloo, ON, N2L 6H7

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CPAC VIDEO STILL

The University of Alberta has returned \$30,000 it received from the family of Yaroslav Hunka, the Ukrainian veteran who fought for the Nazis and received an infamous standing ovation in Parliament. The money was intended for research into two leaders of the underground Ukrainian Catholic church who were active during the Soviet era.

Source: The Catholic Register



Cardinal directions

When Pope Francis took over the papacy, 29 percent of voting cardinals—the red robed, pope-appointed guys who choose the next pontiff—were from the Global South. Ten years into Francis's papacy, that number is up to 45 percent.

Voting cardinals are those under 80 years of age. Of the 242 cardinals, 105 are over 80. Francis is 86.

When Francis began, more cardinals came from Italy than Africa and Asia combined. Now three times more cardinals come from those two continents than Italy.



Flickr photo by Jeffrey Bruno

Dead Man Talking

Two-thirds of Catholics and Black Protestants in the U.S. say they have been visited by a dead loved one, often in a dream. Among Americans who identify as evangelical, the number is 42 percent.

Source: Pew Research Center



PIXABAY ILLUSTRATION BY
CLKER-FREE-VECTOR-IMAGES

50 YEARS AGO

In September 1973, several thousand Mennonites gathered in Niagara-on-the-Lake to celebrate 50 years since the 1923 wave of migration. One speaker, David B. Wiens of B.C., lauded Mennonites for the economic success they attained in Russia prior to their tumultuous departure. But he did not stop there.

Wiens: Don't blame it all on the Bolscheviks

But Wiens also warned that to blame all the troubles of the Russian Mennonites on the Bolscheviks and Makhnovsky is not right.

Mennonite Reporter,
October 1, 1973

“Let us look into ourselves,” he said. “There was much that was not right within us and our people. The sword that came to us has worked great blessing. It was a judgment on our materialism, a test of our faith, and a harbinger of evangelism both within our own people and among our Russian neighbors.”



City to Replace Surveillance Cameras with Mennonite Ladies

LANCASTER, PA—In an effort to increase security and reduce costs of surveillance, the city of Lancaster has voted to remove all security cameras and replace them with nosy Mennonite ladies.

“Basically they’ll just do what they already do,” said Lancaster spokesperson Susanna Yoder. “Peer out their windows, watch what’s happening, and tell all their friends at the quilting bee. Eventually it’ll get around to us.”

By Andrew Unger. Used with permission.



A moment from yesterday



David Klassen of Rosenfeld, Manitoba, age 83, poses for an informal portrait at a family reunion. The photo is from a 1955 article in *The Canadian Mennonite*, which frequently published articles about family reunions and wedding anniversaries as matters of wider interest to the Mennonite community. The articles contained such details as the family’s history and names of honoured guests and speakers.

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing
 Photo: The Canadian Mennonite/
 Mennonite Archives of Ontario



/// Readers write

✉ Online comments

Thank you for this excellent, nuanced article (“The gift of life, the question of death,” September 22). Clearly, patients have always made private, off-the-books decisions with the help and hindrance of doctors and loved ones alike. Those conversations must always have been deeply complex and difficult. Since medical assistance in dying (MAID) is now legal in Canada, it has to be considered alongside those provisions for people who are suffering.

After careful consideration—and after consulting with friends—I recently signed a petition against the expansion of MAID to situations where mental health/distress is the sole factor. I agree that MAID should not be contemplated without necessary expansion of full care for these conditions for which relief and treatment exist.

No one wants to suffer, and no one wants to permit or promote suffering that can be relieved. The alleviation of suffering alongside the protection of life should be a primary purpose for our institutions and social organizing. If conditions are treatable, the absence of that treatment is the problem that legislative efforts ought to be focused on amending.

In the meantime, in those situations without effective treatment, let us journey with, and support with prayer and

presence, those who struggle to live, including in their decisions about the end of life.

PETER HARESNAPE, TORONTO

Be in Touch

- Send letters to letters@canadianmennonite.org. Our mailing address is on page 3.
- Please keep it concise and respectful. Any substantial edits to letters will be done in consultation with the writer.
- If you have feedback not intended for publication, please contact editor@canadianmennonite.org or at 1-800-378-2524 ext 5.

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.

/// Milestones

Deaths

Metzger—Margaret (nee Good), 86, (b. Jan. 5, 1937; d. Aug. 26, 2023), St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, St. Jacobs, Ont.

Sauder—Vernon, 102, (b. Nov 23, 1920; d. Sept. 9, 2023), Elmira Mennonite Church, Elmira, Ont.

Schultz—Jean Lorraine, 91, (b. May 25, 1932; d. Aug. 24, 2023), Poole Mennonite Church, Poole, Ont.

Wall—Helen (nee Durksen), 92, (b. Nov. 6, 1930; d. Sept. 22, 2023), Niagara United Mennonite Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Correction

We incorrectly stated that Helga Dueck of Leamington, Ontario, died on August 25. The correct date of death is August 19, 2023. We apologize for the error.



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The Beatitudes: Testing a biblical antidote to division

By Will Braun

When conservative Christians in the southern U.S. were agitating to erect monuments with the 10 commandments on them in front of courthouses, I heard someone suggest that they put up the Beatitudes instead.

The idea stuck with me, as did the reaction of my Trump-loving, warm-hearted neighbour when I floated the idea by her. She loved it.

Are the Beatitudes not a potent biblical antidote to polarization?

Blessed are the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted.

It's hard to stoke anger with the Beatitudes. They would serve poorly as battle cries.

As a next step in my journey to address polarization, I wanted to test whether the Beatitudes could offer a transcendent approach to divisive issues, a way to rise above difference.

My desire to address polarization is solidified by two types of responses I, as editor, receive from readers of *Canadian Mennonite*. The most common feedback, by far, is appreciation for efforts in the magazine to deal with tensions in a constructive way and cross lines of division with an open heart, as we did in relation to COVID. Many people live with tension in their circles. The discussion is live.

The editorial that received the most positive feedback was one in which I discussed four items in that issue of the magazine that did not sit well with me and also

contained gems of value. Not everyone appreciates nuance and complexity, but for those of you who do, know that you are in good company.

I imagined doing much more depolarization work in the magazine, but it's tricky business. That leads to the second category of reader feedback I will mention.

We hear from people who have legitimate questions but are afraid to speak publicly. They do not want to be shot down by the vocal left. Good-hearted people feel stranded on the sidelines. (In other ways, the vocal left has brought healing and important change.)

It is difficult, for instance, to find two people of differing views to write side-by-side articles that all the nuance-loving readers would appreciate.

All of this motivates me to think more rigorously about de-polarization. That brings me back to the Beatitudes and my most recent experiment.

Landfill search

With my heart tuned to the blessed Beatitudes, I set out to explore a particularly complex and contentious issue: the tragic case of Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran, Indigenous women who were murdered, their bodies dumped in a landfill near Winnipeg, where they remain.

In addition to the reading I did on the topic, I spoke with numerous people, Indigenous and not.

In previous writings on polarized issues, I have tried to humanize enemies and humble myself. My latest effort went in a different direction.

Police believe Harris and Myran were killed in May 2022 and dumped in a particular block of the Prairie Green Landfill. Two solidarity camps have been set up to

honour the memory of the women and call for justice. The women are among thousands of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people who have been murdered or gone missing in Canada.

This particular case has drawn much media and public attention. The symbolism is stark: Indigenous women should not be treated like garbage.

The case of Myran and Harris has boiled down to a question of whether governments will fund a multimillion-dollar search for the bodies. At its worst, this became a point of malicious partisan manipulation in Manitoba's recent provincial election. A clear battle line emerged: to fund, or not.

This battle matters. The families have made this clear.

Holding that truth, there are also other starting points, other paths into the broader issue of violence against Indigenous women.

Mourning

Dorothy Fontaine spends a lot of time with Indigenous families who have lost loved ones. She speaks with tenderness of their unimaginable grief—in many cases, the ache of not knowing if a mother, sister, auntie, daughter is alive. She sometimes brings families to Camp Assiniboia, located near Winnipeg, where she serves as director of Camps with Meaning for Mennonite Church Manitoba. The camp setting offers refuge and solace.

Camp Assiniboia is planning to build a cabin dedicated to hosting families of those missing and murdered.

Dorothy talks about attending many vigils and memorial walks over the years. Sometimes a painfully small number of people show up—a handful or two. She says at times it feels like society really does not care about families and their loved ones.

Dorothy is passionate, in a gentle way, about Christians being present where people are suffering. "That's our bread and butter," she says. Can we show up at vigils and memorial walks? Can we show families and society that someone does care, that their loved ones do matter?

These are not political events, she stresses. They are times of spirit. They are points of potential connection. Showing care, by walking alongside families, is core.

Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who are treated like garbage. God holds them.



IMAGE ADAPTATION BY BETTY AVERY

Circles of support

As I pondered the complexity of addressing something as multi-faceted as missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, I thought of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA). This program, which has Mennonite roots, surrounds released sexual offenders with caring people who offer regular, in-person support and accountability. CoSA directly and effectively reduces sexual violence against women. In all likelihood it has prevented violence against Indigenous people.

If church folk feel compelled to action by the case of Harris and Myran, volunteering with one of the CoSA chapters, or prison visitation programs, across the country would make sense. This quiet, behind-the-scenes work would feel very different than standing at a rally. Or, perhaps standing at a rally might feel different if one had the CoSA experience as context.

Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are all those wounded by violence.

Like the work Dorothy Fontaine invites churches to, the CoSA possibility

offers a depolarized path in.

Zoom out

Most of the people I spoke with wanted to zoom out from the specific funding battle. Without diminishing the importance of the actual search, people were uncomfortable with the way in which the focus has landed on a politicized funding decision, something which happened, in part, because the provincial government—which has since been voted out—refused to fund the search.

The desire to refocus brought me back to a 2016 conversation I had with the late Bill Phipps, former moderator of the United Church of Canada and dedicated worker for reconciliation and environmental well-being.

We were discussing climate and proposed pipelines. He warned against getting drawn into one-off battles over individual projects. Those battles, he said, distract from the larger conversations about where we want to go as a society. They lean into division.

Phipps lived in Alberta and had friends in the oil sector. My first thought about his comment was that he was going soft. Every thought about it since then has made me more convinced of the wisdom of his caution.

Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who take an expansive view of justice struggles.

We must hold urgency and patience in tension. We must attend to the big picture, the long game, perhaps while also supplying muffins, or drafting press releases, for those in the heat of battle.

How to struggle

Of course, when people mourn with those on the margins and sit around fires on the fringes, often it will lead to requests to be directly involved in addressing abuses of power. It may lead to contentious, adversarial struggles.

Mennonites have a notable history of solidarity with Indigenous justice struggles. Historically, when we have officially participated in blockades or public inquiries that put us in the national media spotlight, the involvement has arisen from long-standing

relationships with a community. This lends credibility, depth, understanding and guidance. The Beatitudinal work has gone before.

In the case of the landfill search, Mennonite Church Canada—which can only take a public stand with approval of the regional churches—issued a brief statement “urging governments to #searchthelandfill,” as the press release put it.

While the statement lacks the relational backing of past public stands, I was glad to learn of one significant personal connection. As leaders of other denominations were preparing to gather in Winnipeg to support of the families of Harris and Myran, the grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Cathy Merrick, reached out to Mennonites. This was not out of the blue.

As a young child, Merrick spent some time living as a foster child in the home of Otto and Margaret Hamm, who served with Mennonite Pioneer Mission in Merrick’s northern home community of Pimicikamak (Cross Lake). She has maintained contact with Hamm family members in Manitoba.

With other church leaders supporting the families, Merrick, via her foster brother, asked where the Mennonites were. We responded with the statement and participation in an ecumenical event.

This connection with Grand Chief Merrick provides another path in. It’s an opportunity to nurture connection and explore options. Merrick is a person of uncommon warmth and resolve. We would benefit from voices like hers in our sanctuaries and church basements.

Learnings

When I listen to my staunchly progressive friends and ardently conservative friends talk about those in the other camp, I hear the same thing. I hear incredulity and disdain. I sense agitation, a searching for solid ground. I know those feelings.

When I tune in to the Beatitudes, I feel something different. I feel something more difficult and much more compelling.



FLICKR PHOTO BY TONY WEBSTER, ADAPTED BY BETTY AVERY
(CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/2.0/)

It was not difficult to find non-divisive avenues of engagement related to the case of the two murdered women. That may not be the case for every issue, but it may be, if we can rise above, step back, lead with the heart and attend to the blessedness.

I cannot imagine my progressive and conservative friends having a useful discussion about funding for a landfill search, but I can imagine them working side-by-side on a cabin build or sitting together around a CoSA circle or calmly discussing the Beatitudes. ☸

/// For discussion

1. In what settings have you found yourself not expressing your opinion because you feared a hostile reaction?
2. Why is it so difficult to facilitate a constructive exchange between people who care but have opposing views?
3. When it comes to the public debate on whether to spend money to search the landfill, what might it mean to be guided by the Beatitudes?
4. Bill Phipps warned that getting drawn into one-off battles on single issues can distract from a larger conversation. What is your view?
5. How might Mennonite churches show support to the families of vulnerable Indigenous people without getting drawn into a polarized political conversation?

—By Barb Draper

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OPINION

FROM OUR LEADERS

A Saskatchewan pilgrimage

Ben Cassels

As a child, I was vaguely envious of others who had deep connections in Canada. In my family, that was not the case. My parents are from the UK and we spent our vacations going back to visit family. Although born in Canada, I longed for a deeper sense of belonging.

So it came as a shock when in 2010, on my last visit with my maternal grandfather, I discovered that his father, my great-grandfather, had lived in Canada around 1906. He'd been granted a plot of land near Middle Lake, Saskatchewan, with the agreement that he'd "improve" it. Apparently it didn't go well for him and he returned to England about a year later. Suddenly I had that longed-for connection and "Visit Middle Lake" was on my bucket list.

By virtue of becoming moderator of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada last April, I also sit on Mennonite Church Canada's Joint Council. This past spring, our meetings were in Saskatoon. Finally, I'd be in Saskatchewan. Would this be

my chance? Sadly, it seemed the schedule just wouldn't work out.

But a week before the meetings, Jeanette Hanson, Mennonite Church Canada director of International Witness, was the guest preacher in my then congregation. Upon learning that Jeanette lives in Saskatchewan, as a piece of chit-chat I mentioned my own distant familial link to her province.

Surprisingly, a few days later, I received an email from Jeanette and her husband Todd, offering to pick me up at the airport and go hunting for my great grandfather's plot of land in the brief window of time before my meetings started. I jumped at the chance. We had a lovely time together, and after about 90 minutes on the oh-so-dusty roads of rural Saskatchewan we arrived at a cross-roads with a sign that read, "Welcome to Middle Lake." We took a quick picture, then sped off back to the meetings.

It was so meaningful to get to stand next to that sign and even more

meaningful sending the picture along with the message: "Mum, look what I found! This is where your grandfather lived." I felt connected to place in a way that as a child and even young adult I'd wished for.

But there is a reason I say I'd longed for this connection as a *young* adult (a moniker I can no longer claim). That's because, in recent years, this longing for connection and belonging in Canada that I'd felt strongly earlier in life has faded in importance, or more accurately, has been fulfilled.

Around the same time I discovered this long-distant connection to Canada, I also joined my first MCEC congregation. Almost immediately, I felt welcomed, not just in that one church but in the denomination as a whole. I felt included; I'd found my place of belonging.

All of a sudden I had that sense of connection that I'd yearned for as a child: that because of this wide community of faith that I'd joined, I could now show up in all kinds of places and not be a stranger but instead have some point of welcome and connection. Jeanette and Todd's generosity to me encapsulates this so well. Although I've often reflected on this profound sense of settledness, joy and contentment that I've found in being Mennonite, it wasn't until this journey to Middle Lake that I realized how profoundly this has also met the need for belonging and connection that I'd previously carried with me.

I am grateful to Jeanette and Todd for taking me to Middle Lake. I am grateful for the place of belonging I have found as a Mennonite. And I am grateful to be both a pastor and MCEC moderator, so that I can contribute to many others finding the same place of belonging that I have found. My prayer for us, God's Church, is that we will always be just such a place of belonging for all.

Ben Cassels serves as a pastor of Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden, Ontario, and as moderator of MCEC. He can be reached at ben@smchurch.ca.



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Ben Cassels in Middle Lake, Saskatchewan.

THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

Polarization and unity

Arli Klassen

My 88-year-old father often asks why churches push out people who don't 100 percent agree with their theology. "Why can't they all just get along?" He is worried about the increasing polarization in Western society and within the church.

In 1929, Richard Niebuhr published *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. In the book, he stated that differences in theology mattered less in church divisions than economic class, immigration status, race and geographic location—all of which shape one's theology. This book remains a widely available classic today.

Nearly 100 years ago, Mennonite churches in Europe were struggling to relate to each other after the First World War. It was not easy for Mennonites in Germany, the Netherlands, France and Russia to trust each other. In this tense context, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) was formed in 1925 to create space for Anabaptist churches to connect with each other as sisters and brothers.

This month, the Vatican is hosting an unprecedented synod of Catholic clergy and lay leaders from around the world. They are discussing "Communion, Participation, and Mission," including social issues such as the role of women in the church, the inclusion of Catholic LGBTQ+ people and the authority of clergy. They do not intend to reach conclusions this year, but to meet again in another year to make decisions. The polarization of perspectives among different Catholic leaders is visible already.

Earlier this year, a group of Anglican archbishops from the Global South declared that they would no longer recognize Archbishop Justin Welby as the spiritual leader of the global Anglican Communion. They constitute about 25 percent of the total archbishops but represent about 75 percent of the



UNSPLASH PHOTO BY JOSUE MICHEL

general membership. Terry Mattingly of ReligionUnplugged.com observed that, "While clashes over LGBTQ+ issues have made headlines, Anglicans have increasingly become divided by colonial history, economics, culture, demographics and radically different approaches to doctrine."

There are similar rumblings in MWC. MWC has not taken a position on these "social issues" because they are not part of the core commitments in the Shared Convictions statement. The theology and practices among MWC member churches are diverse.

All these same rumblings take place within our churches, too. Some congregations across Mennonite Church Canada fully welcome LGBTQ+ folks. Others do not. Many congregations hold together differing perspectives, with a focus on Jesus at the centre and no strong boundaries. My own congregation is in that category, as an intercultural faith community seeking to foster reconciliation across the boundaries that often divide.

Richard Niebuhr ended *The Social*

Sources of Denominationalism with a call for unity in the church. He developed his ideas more in later books, calling for unity based on God's faithfulness throughout a diverse world, along with a call for the church to transform culture.

César García, MWC's general secretary, says, "MWC is people like you and me who think it is possible to be a worldwide community of faith where theological and cultural differences are respected and celebrated, where divisions, polarization and fragmentation do not have to be the only possible reality."

My father asks, "What can we do about polarization?" I believe we each are called to live out our hope and faith that God's gift of unity amidst diversity is possible in our local congregations, and in our global family of faith. ☿



Arli Klassen is a member of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, and can be reached at klassenarli@gmail.com.

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

The narcissism epidemic

Troy Watson

Popular author, speaker and shame researcher Brené Brown once quipped, “You can’t swing a cat without hitting a narcissist.” She later apologized for the inhumane image conjured by the idiom, but she stood behind the underlying message. Many psychologists and social scientists agree: Narcissism is everywhere. Some are calling it an epidemic.

Narcissism is a complex subject and not altogether negative. Simply put, it refers to a personality trait. Everyone is on the narcissism scale, and most of us fluctuate where we are on the spectrum at different life stages. The narcissism personality trait is not to be confused with the clinical diagnosis “narcissistic personality disorder.” The narcissism I’m referring to in this article is the personality trait we all possess and can manage (to some degree).

A rise in narcissism was first observed in the 1950s, but it seems to be increasing exponentially. Two American academics, Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell, reported that narcissism increased by 30 percent in college students between 1980 and 2006. Narcissism scores have risen even faster since then, presumably with the advance of social media. People high in narcissism tend to have more friends and followers on social media platforms.

The narcissism epidemic means more people have a greater sense of entitled self-importance and believe they deserve special treatment. More people are convinced their beliefs and opinions are correct or superior, regardless of their knowledge, training or credentials in the subject, and they are less open to the perspectives of others. More people are hypersensitive, controlling and manipulative, and obsessed with image, status and popularity. More people overestimate their talents, abilities and likability, and expect others to recognize, affirm

and praise them.

Narcissism is rooted in the belief that you are extraordinary. The problem is most of us cannot be extraordinary. By definition, most of us are ordinary. One factor in the rise of narcissism has been the over-use of praise in modern parenting. Studies have shown overpraising and overestimating our children doesn’t result in higher self-esteem. Rather, telling our children they are special and can do anything sets unrealistic expectations. It often results in increased anxiety and depression in young adults, as they wrestle with the possibility that they are not special. There is an acronym for this: FOBO (fear of being ordinary).



UNSPASH PHOTO BY CAROLINE VERONEZ

The rise of narcissism is as prevalent in the church as it is elsewhere. The antidote to elevated narcissism is humility, grace, connection and purpose. I believe the church has a significant role to play in teaching people how to cultivate these healing properties in our lives.

Humility is not thinking less of ourselves; it’s thinking of ourselves less by focusing on how we can contribute to God’s work of love, peace, justice and reconciliation in the world. Grace is found in being honest about our complicated lives, and accepting and loving ourselves and others as we are, in light of God’s unconditional love.

Connection is the result of experiencing a sense of belonging and togetherness with a group of people who genuinely love, support, encourage and challenge us, speaking truth in love—as tricky as this is. Purpose is found in discovering and manifesting our authentic self, as we honestly and humbly recognize and utilize our unique personalities, gifts, talents, interests, limitations and struggles to serve the greater good.

I don’t believe the church needs to beat people down and put them in their place by preaching a version of “worm theology”—the idea that in light of God’s holiness and power an appropriate response is a low view of self. People don’t need the church to grind them down. People high in narcissism can be difficult, annoying and even destructive, but it’s important to recognize that narcissism is rooted in fear and shame. Brené Brown defines narcissism as, “the shame-based fear of being ordinary.”

The liberating message of Christ is that everyone has value and a part to play in something bigger, a grand narrative that is divine and truly extraordinary. None of us has more intrinsic worth than others, but we are unique and have unique contributions to make to the greater good.

Our contributions may not be noticed, praised or affirmed by others. However, as we follow the way of Jesus and tune in to the Divine Spirit within us, we no longer depend on the praise and affirmation of others to find value, significance and meaning. It comes from within.

This is the freedom, joy, maturity and peace Christ offers. ☞



Troy Watson is a pastor at Avon Church in Stratford, Ontario, and can be reached at troy@avonchurch.ca.

RIDING THE WAVES OF INTERCULTURAL CHURCH

Beyond cosmetic diversity

Joon Park

In early 2000, when I first stepped into the sanctuary of Willingdon Church in Burnaby, B.C., I was astounded to see the music team's diversity. A variety of races and ethnicities was represented, singing a chorus praising God.

This Mennonite Brethren church would become one of the biggest megachurches in the Greater Vancouver area, known for welcoming people from all walks of life, in contrast to a leadership team made up entirely of white people (though that has since changed).

According to Chanequa Walker Barnes, a scholar, theologian and clinical psychologist whose work focuses on healing the legacies of racial and gender oppression, "A congregation does not become multicultural through a recipe that says, 'add diversity and stir.'"

In an article for the Collegeville Institute, titled "How multicultural churches can succeed," she prioritizes the transformation of leadership as a precursor for the success of multicultural churches beyond the level of cosmetic diversity. The true intercultural church pursues a balanced representation both in the pew and in positions of power.

The intercultural church begins with an unswerving initiative to form an interracial leadership team, deconstructing and dismantling power and privilege imbalances in the group. There is no way to build an intercultural church but on the rock of diversity behind the pulpit, rather than on the sands of homogenous leadership (which can lead to the false assumption that "the best person always looks like us"). This means that an intercultural church does not happen out of random prayer and wishful thinking.

I, a first-generation Korean immigrant man, co-pastor Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton with Suzanne

Gross, a white, Swiss Mennonite woman born in the United States. Our congregation has 40 or so active members (plus many kids) representing nine distinct ethnicities: Swiss, German, Polish, Hungarian, Liberian, Ghanaian, Sierra Leonean, Congolese, and Korean.

Yes, having an interracial pastoral leadership team sometimes leads to complexities and challenges in helping the diverse and flexible congregation stabilize. But it also grants us perfect soil to pursue an intercultural church because no one sticks to their comfort zone (we are receptive to new ideas), no one monopolizes power (we practice humility), and no one resists a venture-some spirit (we cultivate curiosity).

Interracial pastoral leadership teams are not new to the North American Mennonite church. It humbles me to know that the first interracial pastoral leadership team was in ministry at Woodlawn Mennonite Church in Chicago in the late 1950s. The co-pastors were Vincent Harding, a Black man, and Delton Franz, a white man.

Unfortunately, this wonderfully interracialized leadership did not last. Feeling at times like he was an "exhibit" on display in the Mennonite church—"our Negro Mennonite pastor"—Harding left this community in 1961. To a few Mennonite leaders, Harding was regarded as a modern prophet sent to awaken the "quiet" Mennonite church in dealing with societal racism. Joanna Lawrence Shenk, a Mennonite pastor in San Francisco, interviewed Harding and noted in an *Anabaptist World* article that he "was allowed to be present but not allowed to set the agenda, since his perspective was 'too radical.'"

More than 65 years have passed since Harding was installed at Woodlawn.

The Mennonite churches in both Canada and the United States, dominated by white people, still

struggle with the need to form true interracial leadership while wishfully dreaming of diversity.

Chanequa Walker Barnes' fivefold advice for the success of interracial leadership is pertinent here:

1. **Every member of the core leadership team** must believe that diversity is God's desire for the Church universal, and the guiding principle for the local congregation.
2. **Members of the core leadership team** must continuously learn from people of colour and other marginalized cultural groups, both within and outside the congregation.
3. **Concepts connected to race, culture, privilege and oppression** must be part of the core leadership team's everyday vocabulary. They should be always asking the question, "How does culture play into this?"
4. **The leadership team** must attend to its unity and health on a regular basis. This includes developing healthy attitudes and coping mechanisms for addressing conflict.
5. **Do not be afraid of failure.** Embrace conflicts as learning opportunities.

Our job is to plant the seed of intercultural ministry humbly, transparently, and ceaselessly. The rest is God's business. ☿



Joon Park serves as intentional interim co-pastor at Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton. He can be reached at cwcfounder@gmail.com.

Grassy Narrows

Decades of effective struggle in northwestern Ontario

By Madalene Arias
Eastern Canada Correspondent

Through the weight of ongoing struggles over logging, mercury poisoning and, most recently, mining, the people of Grassy Narrows First Nation in northwestern Ontario continue to defend their interests and make their voices heard.

Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT) has maintained connections with the community, also called Asubpeeschoseewagong Anishinabek, since 2002. CPT members visited Grassy Narrows in May and August, and they were among as many as 6,000 people from Grassy Narrows, four other First Nations and supporters who gathered for a rally in Toronto on September 27.

The five First Nations are concerned about encroachment of outside mining companies in their traditional territories. Leaders from Grassy Narrows say there may be up to 5,000 mining claims on their lands. They currently have no say in the process. The group demanded a meeting with Premier Doug Ford. Ford refused.

Chief Rudy Turtle of Grassy Narrows told CTV News that while he would rather sit down at the table, his people will blockade if necessary. That would not be new for them. In 2002, Grassy Narrows started blocking logging trucks in their territory. The blockade has essentially remained in effect ever since.

That was also the year CPT was invited to join the Grassy Narrows blockade, located roughly an hour northeast of Kenora, not far from the Manitoba border. That blockade, which stopped logging in part of the First Nation's traditional and use area, remains in effect today.

Amy Peters from Hanley, Saskatchewan, was among the CPT personnel who accepted the invitation and travelled to Grassy Narrows in 2002. She was also among the CPT delegation that returned to the territory this past May.

"We're all aging, and can you believe

that 20 years later, there's still a lot of the same struggles," said Peters. She was happy for the opportunity to connect with Grassy Narrows leader Judy Da Silva on her May visit.

Peters said she sees a desire for social change in the world, and that this change is dependent on the actions of people who think beyond their own basic survival.

Esther Abhainn, who serves as a volunteer with CPT, joined the August 2023 delegation to Kenora, Winnipeg and Grassy Narrows. This delegation was open to members of the public.

"One thing that I've really admired about leaders from Grassy Narrows is the way in which they've . . . cultivated relationships with a very broad support coalition," she said.

Abhainn has been a member of the Toronto Grassy Narrows Solidarity Group since 2019. The group takes direction from Da Silva and the Grassy Narrows Women's Drum Group.

Within the solidarity group, Abhainn has served as the main liaison to get other CPT personnel involved in solidarity

campaigns and events.

During their visit to Grassy Narrows, Abhainn and other participants heard from Lauri-Ann Marshall, the director of the Mercury Care Home that is being



PHOTO COURTESY OF CPT

Supporters of Grassy Narrows in Toronto on Sept. 27.

planned for the community. In addition to logging and mining, the people of Grassy Narrows have had to deal with mercury poisoning their water.

Between 1962 and 1970, the pulp-and-paper industry in Dryden dumped untreated mercury waste into the English-Wabigoon river system, effectively poisoning the local ecosystem and the people of Grassy Narrows for generations. Some reports indicate dumping of mercury began as far back as 1913.

Among its many lasting health effects, mercury poisoning is known to have severe neurological impacts that have been linked to depression, anxiety and, in some cases, suicide. After many years of pressure, the federal government agreed to build a care home for people suffering the effects of mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows.

Abhainn was impressed with the blueprints for the new facility that Marshall showed the group. “That was a really beautiful thing, just to hear about all of the very meticulous planning that’s gone into designing a care home that will

really feel like a home for the people who live there,” she said.

In an email to *Canadian Mennonite*, Marshall said, “The Grassy Narrows Mercury Care Home, currently in the implementation phase, will provide specialized care and services for community members poisoned by mercury. The specialized services and care will be delivered across the life span, and include resident, palliative, respite and ambulatory care.”

In 2020, the First Nation and the federal government agreed to a funding agreement for \$19.5 million for the construction of the facility. The next year they signed a \$68.9-million agreement for operation and maintenance costs.

This past June, Chief Rudy Turtle expressed frustration with delays in construction and said construction costs had increased significantly.

A representative of Grassy Narrows told *Canadian Mennonite* that community leaders were not available for interviews, as they were mourning the death of a young community member.

That young person was Nora Swain. Swain was an activist and budding journalist who twice attended the annual Grassy Narrows march at the Ontario legislature. In a blog post for the Amnesty International Write for Rights Campaign, she described the effects of mercury poisoning on her mind and body, stating that she suffered from migraines, anxiety and depression.

She discussed her fears about one day having children, since mercury is passed on from pregnant mother to child. “I know what it feels like to be from a small place and how it feels like to have a problem that seems like it’s never going to be fixed,” she wrote. “I know what it’s like to feel that darkness.”

Despite ongoing darkness and challenges, the people of Grassy Narrows continue to stand firm, as they also deal with loss and grief. CPT, for its part, remains committed in solidarity, looking forward to planning more delegations in the future. ☸

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A question of inclusion

And a somewhat chaotic heavenly multitude

By Jason Greig
KITCHENER, ONTARIO

With great hesitation, I pulled my car into the church parking lot. The winter morning was clear and brisk. After a short stop at a local coffee shop, Aaron and I had arrived at our destination: a local Mennonite church that was hosting a choir for “all abilities.” I had been warned about this event by the organization I work for.

The organization—let’s call it Inclusion Inc.—provides support workers for people with intellectual disabilities so they can participate in the community. “Not thrilled about it,” were my colleague’s exact words about the all-abilities choir.

As I walked into the church with Aaron, my companion, my reluctance grew.

A friendly man greeted us with fist-bumps as we entered. We hung our coats, went to the restroom and followed others into the gym. When I saw four long rows of chairs lined up in a semi-circle in front of a stage, I understood the “choir” designation was questionable; “sing-along” was closer. The cavernous gym contained tasteful Advent decorations and cheap chairs.

I began to understand why Inclusion, Inc. discourages attendance at events such as these. “Segregated programming” is the word for it in developmental services lingo. These events are focused primarily on people with cognitive disabilities rather than having them “out in the community.” Programs such as these risk creating “ghettos” where people with cognitive impairments have their own “special” events, safely separated from the “normal.”

The “choir” began with everyone standing to sing the national anthem. A Christmas theme soon emerged, though no coherent order was evident as we moved from “Silent Night” to “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” At one point, the event bordered on the absurd as a gym full of people from group homes and day

programs sang, and attempted to sign, “I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus.”

Are we really doing this, I asked myself. What is the point? Don’t we have better things to do?

Not only did it feel “segregated,” but also potentially infantilizing, and I hate it when people with cognitive impairments are infantilized. People like Aaron have endured the indignity of labels like “perpetual child” for so long.

I felt itchy; every bit of me wanted to leave.

Beside me, Aaron seemed to be doing okay. Aaron is a man in his mid-20s. He recently moved to our city with the family that shares life with him. He loves hamburgers, fedoras, his iPad and teaching people how to slow down and be present.

Aaron must deal with the various labels placed on him by others: intellectually disabled, cognitively impaired, a person with special needs, and, most popularly, someone who has Down syndrome. Aaron spends many days being called one of these names as he navigates through society. However, I just call him Aaron.

As the person who spends days with Aaron, I also have labels, even if they are more functional. Officially I’m a “direct support person,” though sometimes I am referred to as Aaron’s “worker.” In social provision parlance, I am there to “support” Adam and help “facilitate” his daytime activities, with the goal of helping him “participate” in “community life.” In a way, these are all good goals. We can all give thanks that persons like Aaron are no longer sheltered away in institutions out in the woods for the “good” of themselves, their families and society at large. That approach is now recognized as an affront to the lives of persons labelled as disabled, and a profound loss to the broader society.

Certainly the “inclusion” my colleagues

talk about is much preferable to the segregation of previous eras. Yet I find something amiss in all the high talk around “inclusion” and “diversity” that now pervades much Canadian political and social service—and strangely, ecclesial—rhetoric. In Canada, these terms—along with the trendy language of “equity”—tend to get thoughtlessly floated around, making us all feel good that by doing so we are on the “right side of history.” And this is particularly the case when it comes to Aaron.

Somehow, for many people, verbal attestations of “inclusion” illustrate how far we as a society have come in regards to those like Aaron. We are the good guys now, ushering in a society where “everyone belongs” and “everyone is welcome.”

But what does all this talk really mean? Consider “inclusion,” a favourite point of pride in several liberal and progressive Mennonite churches I have attended. Who exactly is being “included”? Who is doing the “including”? And what are the “included” being included in? I have never seen a church ask these questions.

And those churches wouldn’t be alone. Scholars have remarked how inclusion has been profoundly undertheorized, mostly being understood in the negative, as not excluding certain persons or groups. In my experience of sharing life with people with cognitive impairments, this attitude usually gets expressed as feeling sorry for “those people,” or guilt that they are not “one of us.” The solution then consists in making a space for them somewhere, assuming that they will just “fit in” and “participate” in this great new “inclusive” community we have created. This results in the persons “included” often sitting at the back, or at the front or the designated disabled seats, seemingly “included” but often—though not always—profoundly alone.

While Aaron may not understand all



ART BY NICK SCHUURMAN

the subtle social dynamics going on, he can tell when sincere progressives—or liberals or conservatives or whatever you want to name yourself—“welcome” him in name only. Like many other people with impairments—or other groups targeted for “inclusion”—he simply chooses not to attend if the welcome is shallow. Aaron may implicitly know that he can never live up to the “participant” image assumed

by the church. For Aaron and me, being “participants” generally means appearing and acting “Canadian.” Don’t stick out; tolerate all the current socially acceptable differences; be hygienic; don’t act like those crazies in the U.S.; be “nice” (at least to those other people acting “Canadian” enough). While I can meet the standard, many people with cognitive impairments cannot, and thus find themselves

“welcomed” into spaces in which most people want to have nothing to do with them. Why would Aaron want to be a part of this? How would he ever feel at home?

Back at the “choir” session in the church gym, I actually find myself beginning to relax, perhaps with the help of Aaron, who sits calmly amidst the proceedings. As I settle into the event, I feel my sight changing, as if my eyes are adjusting to a darkened room. For amid the absurdity of the songs we sing, I notice things for the first time: obvious excitement, immense joy, raucous laughter, wild bodies. Yes, I have questions about how “appropriate” all this is, but I have to admit one thing: the vast majority of people are having a really good time! While it is not a “choir,” it certainly has a distinct feel of celebration about it.

As the excitement and chaos continue, I find myself thinking of the book of Revelation, and the “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (7:9). Was I not only seeing, but also participating in, the heavenly throne room where the “mixed” multitude bowed in praise to Christ? In this assembly, no one is pitied for rocking back and forth in the corner; no one is considered a freak for chewing on a black telephone cord; no one is being looked at for periodic bursts of joyous (or distressing) screams.

There is no “inclusion” here, only being.

What would happen if all those who talk endlessly about “diversity” entered this space, and simply sat in attention and contemplation? For in this very unCanadian event, I think I witnessed a taste of heaven.

What a wondrous and strange kingdom this is. Are we who call ourselves Christians ready for it? ☿

jason greig and his family live in Kitchener, Ontario. He can be reached at jfjgreig@protonmail.com. Since writing this, greig has moved from supporting people with impairments to a position in campus ministry.

Abbotsford forum explores disagreement in the church

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

How to disagree well with fellow Christians was the topic of a forum held at Columbia Bible College (CBC) in Abbotsford, B.C., last month.

The Sept. 21 event, titled “Polarization and Disagreement in the Church,” was sponsored by the Faith in Today’s Church task group of Mennonite Church B.C.

The first presenter was Jesse Nickel, a biblical studies professor at CBC and member of Level Ground Mennonite Church. “The major point I hope you take from this presentation is that one of God’s most important works is the creation of community,” he said.

Referring to Ephesians 2:14-18, Nickel noted that the word “peace” is used four times, and that peace was at the heart

of Jesus’ ministry. “The gospel is not just about being reconciled to God, but reconciled to each other,” he said. “God has made peace, and Jesus is its very embodiment.”

Darnell Barkman, pastor of Yarrow United Mennonite Church, talked about the practical side of peacemaking as he posed the question, “How do we do conflict practically?”

Barkman related his experience working in the Philippines with Mennonite Church Canada Witness. In gathering with Muslim leaders there, Barkman said, “We’re witnesses of Christ. We come as Christians with a message of peace,” even while being met with suspicion and mistrust.

“Our work that bore fruit was the result of many cups of coffee and listening,” he

concluded.

The third presentation, given by Lydia Fawcett of Mennonite Central Committee B.C.’s End Abuse program, focused on power. “How ought we to think about the use of power when disagreement arises in the church?” she asked.

Fawcett described three kinds of power. Personal power is the inherent right to be treated with respect and dignity; role power is earned or assigned and carries an increased amount of influence and responsibility, depending on one’s station in life; and status power is enhanced personal power that is culturally conferred and comes with unearned privileges.

“Most folks haven’t considered [power] as something we have,” she said. “Give someone a lot of power and it goes to their head—it just does.” She urged people to ask, “If I am in power, what do I do with it? We need to balance power with heart.”

Following the presentations, participants gathered in small groups to discuss reconciliation, humility and using power to do good rather than harm.

Organizers were encouraged by the number of people who participated in the forum and hope to sponsor more events in the future, according to Gerry Binnema, a member of the Faith in Today’s Church task group.

“The choice of this topic was simply borne out of our current lived experience of having people with starkly different opinions on a variety of topics in our congregations,” Binnema said in an email. “The challenge for the pastor is to be authentic, but also kind, and not create divisions that have nothing to do with the gospel.” ☺

Visit www.bit.ly/paditc to watch a recording of the event.



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CANADIAN MENNONITE

MDS to start work in Lytton, B.C.

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent



PHOTO BY MARK REMPEL

Gerald Dyck (left) of MDS meets with residents of the burned-out town of Lytton, B.C.

While Lytton, B.C., struggles to recover from a devastating fire that destroyed most of the small, remote village in June 2021, Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) stands ready to help.

Lytton has faced an array of challenges to rebuilding its town, including lack of local workers and government red tape. Two years after the disaster, Lytton remains uninhabited, waiting for homes and other structures to be rebuilt. When that happens, MDS is poised to be one of the first groups on the scene, though it may not happen until next spring.

John Longhurst of MDS told the *Fraser Valley Current* that the organization's plan for Lytton is to "do one house and to see how it goes." First, it needs approvals to proceed.

According to Gerald Dyck, chair of the MDS B.C. unit, now that soil remediation and an archaeological dig have been completed, MDS can proceed with building permits. Five members of the MDS committee were in Lytton on September 10 for an appreciation barbecue sponsored by the town. Potential clients for a home rebuild were in attendance.

"We made some wonderful connections there," said Dyck. "Our goal is to do what we do: help uninsured and underinsured folks get back into their homes." He estimated the best-case scenario would be to begin work next March, adding, "This is one of the longest delays MDS has ever had in responding to a disaster."

MDS workers have volunteered in B.C. communities in recent years, including in Princeton and the Fraser Valley following the 2021 floods, and in Monte Lake following the wildfire there. ❧

God's story, our story

Part I

By Kara Carter

Editor's note: In this six-part series for *Canadian Mennonite*, Kara Carter, lead pastor at Wellesley Mennonite Church in southern Ontario, will explore some of the things she learned while earning her PhD in pastoral leadership.

Through examinations of the lives of pastors in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, she identified barriers that risk keeping a missional church “stuck” as well as “burning bush” places that reveal the presence of God.



UNSPLASH PHOTO BY JK SLOAN

In the mid-1990s I served on the building committee in my congregation. Our mandate was to oversee the design and construction of a new sanctuary and office.

During one meeting, we wrestled late

into the night. We were at a critical stage of decision-making. How large do we build? What seating capacity is needed? What projection for growth should we consider?

After a lengthy and unfruitful discussion, one wise member suggested we

invite the president of the construction company to meet with us. I recall with clarity the president's unhesitating response to our dilemma: “Build it and they will come.”

For decades, “build it and they will

come” was a successful story for the church in North America, steeped with meaning, beliefs, expected outcomes, assumptions and more. Not only has this predominant congregational story become a limiting narrative, but it has also become a problematic story for a missional Mennonite church.

Today, while the language may be different, this story continues to be told. Perhaps it sounds like this: “Let’s launch a new program to strengthen children’s and youth ministries!” Or this: “Let’s ramp up music in worship!”

Deeply embedded in this story is the expectation that if *we* work hard enough, if *we* change our programs, if *we* get worship “right,” the community will be prompted to “come,” because *we* have something *they* need. We expect that the congregation will grow. Growth will be tied to our efforts. Neighbours will stream through our doors.

Could this be anything but a “stumbling block” story that risks keeping the church stuck from moving forward as God is doing something new among us?

As disciples of Jesus, rather than look to our neighbours or culture as problematic, our liberating God is inviting us to look within and reflect upon our congregation’s predominant stories.

What values, worldviews, meaning and more can we identify as we tell our predominant stories? A predominant

story may be rooted in a congregation’s founding, a significant transition or conflict, or a particular ministry or loss. Stories are containers of information, meaning and theology. What might we unearth as we pay attention to the stories we tell and live into?

As humans, we live storied lives. As Christians, we locate ourselves within God’s unfolding story of salvation and redemption. Stories provide a framework to understand lived experience. They also inform future action. The process of telling and re-telling predominant congregational stories uncovers limiting narratives as well as burning bush places, revealing the presence and activity of God.

The church has a sacred story that has been, and continues to be, written by God, the Master Storyteller. Faith communities live into this sacred story, interpret this story, make meaning of this story and live into this story in relation to other stories. Now more than ever, it is sacred work for congregations to identify their predominant story, to communicate their story well, and to embody their story as co-creators with God.

Reframing stories, challenging limiting stories and living deeply within the power of story not only shapes new stories but also creates new pathways, enabling the church to move forward into unknown sacred spaces.

I have a pastoral colleague whose congregation travels from many different communities to participate in worship and the life of the church. He once told me, “Mennonites tend to value their community almost above all”

My colleague suggests his congregation’s predominant story focuses on “community”—church members care deeply about one another. At the same time, they realize they are perhaps too inwardly focused. Church members desire to connect with the people in the neighbourhood surrounding the church, but there is hesitation to “disrupt the harmony in our conformity.”

Stories reveal tensions and competing priorities as well as strengths and gifts. Re-storying does not involve discarding communal values but is rather an opportunity to be open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who disrupts, breathes new life and inspires God’s people to take new pathways.

My colleague’s congregation wants to create a prayer labyrinth on church grounds with the hope that it will be accessible to the neighbourhood. How might this dream be a step of re-storying “community” for the congregation?

What an exciting journey of faith to be the utensil in God’s hands, co-creators with God, writing new stories of hope. ☯

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Valaqua cabin dubbed 'the bat cave' after furry visitors move in

By Emily Summach
Alberta Correspondent

Things got a little batty at Mennonite Church Alberta's Camp Valaqua this summer.

During spring cleaning at the camp, located an hour northwest of Calgary, staff discovered a maternal colony of little brown bats in one of the cabins.

Camp director Jon Olfert and his colleagues first noticed a strange odor and droppings inside cabin four. They initially suspected a mouse infestation, but the truth was revealed when they took down part of a wall to investigate.

"When they pulled off that piece of the wall, bat guano fell out, along with an unfortunately deceased baby bat," Olfert said.

Further investigation revealed that the little brown bats had nested in the space between the ceiling and the roof of the cabin. Unlike some other species of bats, who raise their young in various nests and bat boxes in a given area, female little brown bats gather in one "maternal colony" for the purposes of giving birth and raising their young together during the spring and summer months. A maternal colony usually has a few dozen mothers and pups.



FLICKR PHOTO BY ANN FROSCHAUER

Little brown bats like this one took over cabin four at Camp Valaqua this summer.

"Little brown bats are endangered in Canada, where 50 percent of the species' global range is located," according to the Nature Conservancy of Canada's website. "This status is mainly due to an invasive fungus that causes white-nose syndrome. This fungus thrives in cool, moist environments and infects the exposed skin of the muzzle and wings of hibernating bats. It causes bats to use more energy than they can afford during hibernation and to wake up more frequently than healthy bats, usually leading to death."

After Valaqua staff realized how significant and delicate the colony in cabin four was, they knew they couldn't move it. "We needed to ensure the health of our population of bats born that year, so we looked at our numbers and decided that we could decommission cabin four for the summer season," Olfert said.

Olfert dubbed the cabin "the bat cave." Staff sealed the rest of the cabins to ensure that the only mammals staying in them

were the campers.

After raising their young, little brown bats exit the maternal colony in late summer and early fall to find places to hibernate for the winter. Once all the bats are gone, staff will seal the cabin. The camp is hoping to create a structure just for bats that will entice them to set up a colony again next year.

"We really love bats here at Camp Valaqua," Olfert said. "They're great at keeping the mosquito population down and are important to the local ecosystem."

Despite the logistical challenges these furry friends created, Olfert said the experience was a "neat wrinkle" in camp life this summer.

"The slogan for Camp Valaqua is 'Discovering God in creation,'" he said. "We feel a sense of responsibility to protect and maintain our corner of that creation, and to help kids see that things like this are part of caring for and appreciating creation." ❧

News about Mennonites in Canada and beyond

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Anti-poverty advocate calls for guaranteed liveable income

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

Mark Olfert has always been passionate about helping people. He wishes the systems in Canada would do more to support people, too.

Olfert, 60, is an anti-poverty activist and a member of Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Man. He advocates for a guaranteed liveable income, something he says would have made a big difference numerous times in his own life.

For many years, Olfert rented stable housing and worked a steady job at Superstore. Several years ago, however, he had to take a leave from his job because of an injury and subsequent surgery on both knees. When he returned, he had a boss whose mean treatment of Olfert caused him so much stress that work became a harrowing experience. “I just couldn’t work under those kinds of conditions. I had to stop,” he says.

The year after he stopped working, 2018, was a real struggle. Friends helped him with rent while he struggled to navigate the bureaucratic systems for various benefit plans. Employment and Income Assistance was not enough for him to live on. Then his landlord renovated his apartment and dramatically increased the rent. Olfert could no longer afford it.

Manitoba has a shortage of social housing, with many units labelled affordable but still priced far too high for people surviving on income assistance. Olfert found a unit he could afford in a rooming house, but it was in bad shape, including a leaking ceiling and a soon-broken furnace. He says he was one of the lucky ones, with his

own bathroom and kitchen. Others had to share a bathroom, and the conditions were unspeakable.

He had lived there for two years when a fire ravaged the building. Olfert was rushed to the hospital, where he was checked and cleared, but he lost almost everything he owned.

He moved to a better apartment downtown, but it was loud. “I was just terrified all the time, hearing all these sirens . . . it scared me,” he says. “I was traumatized because of the fire.”

In August, within six months of the first fire, he was evacuated from his new

home for two weeks when a neighbouring building went up in flames.

Throughout all this, Hope Mennonite showed up for him with money, meals, supplies and friendship. “Hope has shown me how much they care about others,” he says. “They showed so many acts of kindness to me that I will never forget.”

He started attending the church in 2019 and became a member later that year. “It made me so happy to know that I belong to a faith community that really cares about me . . . It makes me very emotional thinking about it. It feels good to be loved.”

The care he has received from his congregation and others in his community inspires him to help others. “I’ve had lots of people help me out over the years. It’s my way of giving back.” Volunteering is also a culture he was raised in, as his parents volunteered at the Mennonite Central Committee thrift shop and his mom knitted endless items of warm clothing for the Christmas Cheer Board. “It’s part of our family,” he says with a smile. “That’s just the way I’m wired.”

Olfert volunteers weekly at 1JustCity, a non-profit helping people experiencing homelessness, food insecurity and marginalization. He runs bingo by phone for seniors who are frequently housebound, joins protests with multifaith climate action groups, and campaigns for members of Parliament. It was after meeting Leah Gazan, Member of Parliament for Winnipeg Centre, that he got interested in guaranteed liveable income, or basic income, as a model for addressing poverty.



Mark Olfert was raised to support those in need.

Evelyn Forget, a health economist and professor at the University of Manitoba, defines basic income as “a transfer of money from the government to individuals, sufficient for them to meet their needs . . . to participate in a reasonable way within the community. It’s available both to people who don’t work and who may currently be subsisting on something like employment and income assistance . . . but it’s also available to people who are working but who don’t earn enough to raise themselves and their family above the poverty line.”

She’s heard all the misconceptions and assumptions about a basic income program, but she repeatedly points to

the research and studies that show it works. The common objection is that if you give people money they will stop working. “There’s no evidence of that,” she says. “There are projects around the world . . . people have done this over and over and over again, and there’s never any significant reduction in the amount of work effort.”

Another main criticism is that it’s too expensive. “People forget that poverty has a lot of costs associated with it,” says Forget. Taxpayers spend more on health-care, prisons, education and welfare when poverty increases. She references a study done in Ontario a few years ago, which calculated that expenditure related to

poverty costs 6.6 percent of the GDP annually. In Manitoba, that’s \$4 billion. “We’re paying a lot of money . . . to treat poverty in a really inefficient, ineffective and undignified way,” Forget says.

So, it’s not about spending a lot of money, but about how we choose to spend it.

“I believe as a Christian ethic we all deserve to have a guaranteed basic income,” Olfert says, “because a lot of people are struggling out there. I’ve been one of them, and it does make a difference when you get people helping you out. I really want people to get help. As a Christian I feel my duty is to help people.” ❧

Three Sisters theme flavours Reconciliation Day potluck

By Fred Kinsie, Preston Mennonite Church

On Sunday, September 24, members and friends of Preston Mennonite Church in Cambridge, Ontario, held a Three Sisters potluck. The date was chosen to commemorate The National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, which followed a few days later.

Many in attendance wore orange shirts designed by Indspire, a national Indigenous charity that invests in the education of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people.

Prior to the potluck, the congregation approved a new, extended version of the Preston Mennonite Territorial and Land Acknowledgement. We have been using a shorter version at the beginning of our worship services for many years. This is one of our responses to the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. We have also worked with Clarence Cachagee in supporting Crow Shield Lodge and have offered many learning



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Indigenous chef Sydney Keedwell speaks at Preston Mennonite Church.

opportunities to our members. Reconciliation is a long journey.

At Preston Mennonite, no celebration is complete without food, and what could be more appropriate than a Three Sisters theme? One of the Indigenous traditions on parts of this continent is the practice of growing corn, beans and squash together, as the plants develop a synergy and support each other during the growing season.

Provisionally, some of our members met Sydney Keedwell at an event earlier in the year. Sydney is the Food and Nutrition Coordinator at White Owl Native Ancestry Association, and we invited her to provide recipes and be guest chef at our potluck. Dishes included Mohawk Indian Corn Soup, Bannock, Three Sisters Vegetarian Chili and of course, Three Sisters Soup (two versions). Sydney judged them all as very good! ❧

In Memoriam

Charles Christano (1939-2023)

Mennonite World Conference

Rev. Charles Christano, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) president from 1978 to 1984, and one of the cornerstone pastors of GKMI (Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia church) in Indonesia, died Friday, 22 September 2023, at age 84.

He was born Tan Ing Tjioe in Indonesia in 1939. He wanted to be a doctor but felt a strong calling to be a pastor when he was in high school, so chose to enter seminary instead.

In 1976, he became senior pastor of GKMI Kudus, one of GKMI's pioneer churches and mother church of many congregations in Central Java.

GKMI Kudus went through a transformation under his leadership. He firmly believed in the importance of laypeople (non-theologians) in the church and welcomed them in church

leadership and evangelistic ministries. Their outreach in the 1970s resulted in a lot of young people coming to GKMI Kudus. Today, many are leaders and theologians in the Mennonite church.

During his presidency (1978–1984), Mennonite World Conference began to evolve from a conference (focused around an event) to a communion (koinonia). This was a pivotal time when MWC transformed from a Europe-based movement to a global fellowship of churches linked together in worship, service, witness and fellowship. Concurrently, he also served as moderator of GKMI.

Charles Christano was described as very principled and firm, but generous with his time to mentor and be a role model to younger leaders.

“His involvement as president of

Mennonite World Conference when I was still a teenager inspired me to be involved also with the global church, because he often spoke to me personally about MWC and its work,” said Paulus Widjaja, chair of the MWC Assembly 2022 advisory board and former chair and secretary of MWC's Peace Commission.

“He was adamant about protecting the church from a monopoly of what's right and true by an individual pastor,” said Nindy Sasongko, Asia representative of MWC's Creation Care Task Force. A former youth pastor of GKMI Kudus who calls Charles Christano his spiritual father, Nindy Sasongko, cherishes these words from a decades-past sermon that ring true today: “Truth doesn't belong to an individual, rather a community.”



MWC PHOTO FROM MENNONITE ARCHIVAL IMAGE DATABASE

Charles Christano



MWC PHOTO FROM MENNONITE ARCHIVAL IMAGE DATABASE

Charles Christano, MWC president 1978-1984, speaks at the Assembly in Strasbourg, 1984.

Eddy Sutjipto of Indonesia remembers Charles Christano's role in helping him see beyond the local church, including attending the MWC Assembly in Winnipeg in 1990. "He said the experience in connecting with Mennonites and Anabaptists from all over the world would be good for us and our ministry in GKMI. And it was! Our being there opened many doors for closer collaboration with churches, as well as development and mission agencies in different countries. The experience of connecting with the global church eventually led me to serve as GKMI moderator, then as member of General Council and Executive Committee (2003–2009)."

Andreas Christanday, Charles' younger brother and an evangelist, said, "His sermons and writings were relevant interdenominationally, while staying true to his Anabaptist roots. He was not afraid to critique the church, but never without showing a way for the church to resolve the issues. . . . Through his work so many people were inspired to follow his example in serving God."

"Charles's integrity and moral standards were unmatched. His words and deeds are in line with what he believed in his heart. He served not only his own congregation, but also the national and even international churches. I am grateful for all the

encouragement, constructive criticism and mostly being a role model," said Paulus Widjaja.

"A wonderful man: humble and joyful," said MWC president Henk Stenvers. "At age 39, Charles Christano followed Million Belete as the second president of MWC from the Global South. Highly respected in Indonesia, he brought his principled but generous leadership to help shape MWC into a global communion. We are grateful for pastors and church leaders like him who show us how to follow Christ in unity and peace." ❧

Poet Sarah Ens wins national book award

By A.S. Compton

Manitoba writer Sarah Ens has won the national ReLit Award (poetry category) for her book *Flyway*. ReLit is hailed by the *Globe and Mail* as "the country's pre-eminent literary prize recognizing independent presses."

Flyway (Turnstone Press, 2022) is a single, long poem that follows the connections between the Russian Mennonite diaspora and the disrupted migratory patterns of grasslands birds, drawing on eco-poetics and family history. While writing, Ens visited the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve for the first time. With grass up to her shoulders she says the poem felt very alive.

She told *Canadian Mennonite* that her favourite lines from the book are: "In my Oma's margins: How do you remember home?" and "Birds, like poems, follow the river."

Ens is currently working on a sound installation adaptation of *Flyway* with musician and artist Jami Reimer. She's also working on a far-off collection of essays. ❧



PHOTO BY LYNETTE ENS

Sarah Ens

Spirit of MDS Fund invites applications for 2023–24

By John Longhurst
Mennonite Disaster Service

One way that Peace Church on 52nd in Vancouver serves its local community is by hosting community dinners that are free and open to all.

Over the time it has been offering the dinners, the church, which is part of Mennonite Church B.C., has seen an increase in the number of people who come for food.

“Our attendance has been noticeably growing due to a number of factors, one being the rising cost of food and the growing number of cases of families facing food security issues,” said Sonja Everson, who directs the church’s community engagement work.

The church also hosts a weekly Food Hub—and participation is growing there, too.

“When we first opened our doors we were serving 18 families, and now we’re capped at over 40, with many left on a waitlist,” she said, adding that some of those families are now attending community dinners.

The growing numbers are putting a strain on the church’s finances. “We don’t want to turn these opportunities for ministry away, and yet our resources as a church are dwindling as well,” said Everson.

To assist with meeting the growing need, the church received a Spirit of MDS Fund grant of \$5,000 from Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada. Funds from the grant were used by the church this year to buy ingredients needed to continue the dinners, all of which are run by volunteers from the church.

“Our community dinners are well received and have become a rewarding space for not only nourishment but an opportunity for fellowship and ministry,” Everson said. “We always try to make extra for the families that could use leftovers for another meal.”

The grant to Peace on 52nd was just one of 26 grants totalling just over \$137,000, given to churches and organizations across Canada by MDS Canada in 2022–23. For 2023–24, the organization is once again inviting Canadian congregations and organizations that need assistance in serving their communities to consider applying for funding.

The Spirit of MDS Fund was created during the pandemic, when MDS Canada was unable to do any projects but wanted to assist congregations responding to needs arising from that challenging time in their communities. When the pandemic abated, it was retained as an ongoing program of the organization.

Grants from the fund can be used for things like construction or renovation projects of homes for people in need; for food or other needed resources for those in crisis; for ministry and service projects that involve volunteers serving the neighbourhood; or other creative ideas that are a fit with MDS Canada’s two Core Values: faith in action and caring relationships.

Grants of up to \$5,000 are available. For more, see mds.org/spirit-of-mds-fund/.



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Scholar seeks wisdom from Mennonite green projects

By Emily Summach
Alberta Correspondent

Joanne Moyer is looking for stories. Moyer, who is the associate professor and director of Environmental Studies and Geography at The King's University in Edmonton, is undertaking a large-scale research project on environmental initiatives that involved Mennonites.

Through archival work, interviews and focus groups, Moyer is aiming to collect as many stories as possible about Mennonite-related environmental initiatives.

Moyer cited the involvement of Mennonites in launching recycling programs in Edmonton and Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, as examples. Her eventual goal is to write a book that



Joanne Moyer

SUPPLIED PHOTO

shares these stories.

"I'm partly hoping to collect all our stories in one place to help us reflect on how creation care is part of our identity, theology and practice," said Moyer. She wants to ask people what they needed to learn to do what they did, and what insight they can share with others. "I'm gathering wisdom for how to do more of this work, and how to do it better," she said. "This is about learning from our past experience to guide and deepen our future work." ❧

If you have a story to share about environmental initiatives involving Mennonites, contact Moyer at Joanne.Moyer@kingsu.ca.

/// Staff Changes

Mennonite Church Manitoba



Janet Peters began the role of co-pastor at Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on October 1. The opening came after the retirement of lead pastor Marla Langelotz and the resignation of associate pastor Andrea De Avila, both in the summer of 2022. Peters spent the last six years working at Mennonite Church

Manitoba as the associate program director of Camps with Meaning, a ministry of the regional church. She holds a Master of Arts in Christian ministry from Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg.



Janessa Nayler-Giesbrecht became the pastor at Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Man. on September 10. She recently concluded her role as pastor of youth and young adults at Fort Garry Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on August 31. She served in the position for ten years and volunteered with

the church's youth ministry for seven years prior to being hired. Nayler-Giesbrecht holds a graduate certificate in Christian Studies from CMU and is set to complete her Master of Arts in Christian ministry at CMU in April 2024.

—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

Mennonite Church Alberta



Aiden Scherzinger joined the pastoral team at Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary, Alberta, on September 1. Scherzinger's portfolio includes overseeing the youth program. Originally from Newmarket, Ontario, he recently graduated from Ambrose University in Calgary with a bachelor of theology focusing on youth

ministry. "I'm overjoyed about the students I get to work with," he said. "I get to reap the benefits of strong, engaged and welcoming kids who are excited to be part of the faith community. They're my biggest blessing, and I know they're going to teach me in awesome ways."

—BY EMILY SUMMACH

News shorts

Global climate series

Mennonite World Conference will hold a webinar series on climate change. People from around the world will share how climate change affects them and how they are responding. Webinars:

- **Oct. 17**, Africa focus
- **Nov. 14**, Asia focus
- **Dec. 12**, Europe focus
- **Jan. 16**, Latin America focus
- **Feb. 13**, North America focus

SEE MWC-CMM.ORG.

MCC receives \$15M for Zimbabwe projects

Mennonite Central Committee Canada will receive up to \$15 million in funding from the Canadian Government over two and a half years for climate change adaptation work in Zimbabwe. The work will include nature-based projects like reforestation, wetland rehabilitation, conservation agriculture, beekeeping, eco-friendly stoves and other energy saving technologies designed by women engineers. These are measures that have proven effective in addressing climate effects. MCC will work with three existing partners in Zimbabwe, scaling up existing efforts.

SOURCE: MCC

MCC B.C. receives huge real estate gift

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) B.C. has received a gift of property worth an estimated \$229.6 million. The portfolio of rental and development properties, scattered across B.C., was bequeathed to MCC by Henry and Mary Rempel, formerly of New Westminster, B.C. Henry died in June 2023. Mary died in 2014. The properties will be owned and managed by subsidiary companies owned by MCC B.C., generating income to support MCC ministry.



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Untitled by Esteban Klassen of Artes Vivas.

SOURCE: MCC B.C.

Winnipeg gallery showcases Paraguayan artists

A new exhibit at MHC Gallery in Winnipeg asks visitors to explore what new relationships are built and what might be lost when migrants settle in a new location.

Entangled, on now until November 4, features two exhibits. *Layered Histories: Perspectives on Colonization from the Chaco* is by Winnipeg printmaker Miriam Rudolph, who was raised in Paraguay. *Drawings* features work by Artes Vivas, an Indigenous collective of artists from Paraguay.

"It is our hope that these two exhibitions will spark radical dialogue about complex relationships and, ultimately, considerations of reconciliation," curator Sarah Hodges-Kolisnyk wrote in *CANVASs*, the gallery's newsletter.

MCC sale in B.C. nets \$1 million for hunger relief

More than \$1 million was raised at the 54th annual Mennonite Central Committee British Columbia (MCC B.C.) Festival for World Relief, Sept. 16-17, in Abbotsford. The money will support MCC's work feeding the hungry.

Thousands of people gathered to enjoy food, crafts and artwork, donated plants and produce, homemade baked goods, a fundraising cycling event, entertainment and children's activities.

The festival highlighted MCC's work in South Sudan and Syria, as well as its response to local need in the Fraser Valley.

SOURCE: MCC B.C.



PHOTO BY AMY RINNER WADELL

A volunteer serves up "Mennonite poutine"—fries, cheese curds, gravy, fried onions and farmer sausage—at the MCC B.C. Festival for World Relief.

Mennonites celebrate 40 years in Nova Scotia

In August, the Northfield Colony in Nova Scotia celebrated 40 years since Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites arrived there from Belize. A large tent was set up in the churchyard for the event.

Located about 80 kilometres north of Halifax, the settlement is home to 60 families and a total of about 300 people. From the beginning, these people have tilled a few acres, kept a few cows and chickens, and supported their families by selling firewood or picking strawberries and blueberries.

SOURCE: *DIE MENNONITSCHHE POST*

All or none

A witness of holy defiance at Ak Metchet

By Amalie Enns

While Jakob Rempel was being transferred by train from one Gulag camp to another, he jumped from the train in a snowstorm. Ultimately, he ended up in Uzbekistan, near the town of Ak Metchet, since made famous in Sofia Samatar's celebrated 2022 book, *The White Mosque*. Having escaped the Gulag and trekked to Uzbekistan, Rempel witnessed first-hand the grim end of the unique settlement of Ak Metchet. The Mennonites of Ak Metchet had left Russia to follow the apocalyptic vision of Claas Epp and ended up living peaceably with surrounding Muslims for many years.

In 2009, Jakob Rempel's granddaughter, Amalie Enns, went on a tour of Uzbekistan led by Mennonite historian John Sharp. The group visited Ak Metchet. There, surrounded by a group of villagers dressed in traditional clothing, Enns shared a version of the following story of the 1935 demise of Ak Metchet, as witnessed by her grandfather Jakob Rempel (1883–1941) and his son Sacha (1915–1985), who had joined him there.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES.

Jakob Rempel and his family, ca. 1925. Sacha is next to him. The girl on the left is Eleonore, mother of Amalie Enns, who contributed this article.

While Jakob and Sascha lived in nearby Khiva, they witnessed the final fate of the Mennonite colony of Ak Metchet. The community, according to Sascha, had

lived in peace for 55 years, disturbed only once by the local authorities. When the congregation subsequently sent representatives to Moscow to meet with President

Kalinin, they returned with a document, written by Kalinin, which ordered the local authorities to respect and maintain the spiritual and material independence of

the community, not interfering with them in any way.

They were left in peace until 1935, when the village mayor was ordered by the government in Khiva to call a meeting of all the villagers and inform them that they would be organized into a collective farm. The villagers refused.

The reaction of the government was swift. After several meetings with the villagers in which no compromise could be found, the mayor, the leading church elder and all the preachers of the congregation were arrested.

The Soviet authorities came for a third time and the procedure was repeated. The villagers remained intractable. This time the newly elected mayor and several farmers were arrested.

For several weeks, the fate of the 10 arrested villagers remained undecided. Then came an announcement in the local newspaper: the arrested villagers were to be tried in an open trial in Khiva.

Sascha described the incident in later writings:

On the day of the trial Gerhard Wiebe, my father and I took up positions in the city where our Ak Metchet friends would pass on their way from prison to the law courts. Finally, they were led past us. What a dreadful sight. Ten pacifist Mennonites, who a few weeks earlier had been strong, healthy men, were emaciated to such a degree that only skin and bones were left. These skeletons dragged themselves like shadows through the streets of Khiva, guarded by a party of the GPU [secret police], armed to the teeth. Two GPU cavalry men rode ahead, two others behind the prisoners, their sabres drawn. In addition, two soldiers walked on their right and two on their left with drawn pistols aimed at the prisoners. Thus surrounded, the whole procession dragged itself to the law court building. We also made our way there.

The proceeding continued far into the night. Our brethren defended themselves exceedingly well. Late in the evening, when the accused were given an opportunity for a last word, the men requested a Bible, which their defense counsel had promised to bring. The Bible was handed to them. The first of our men in the prisoner's

dock rose, holding the Bible in his raised right hand. Briefly, yet clearly, he stated that even the harshest verdict would not shake his faith because this holy book was the foundation of his way of life. Then he passed the Bible to his neighbour in the prisoner's dock, who basically repeated the first prisoner's words. The same statement was repeated 10 times.

The sentence for all the accused followed shortly: "Death by firing squad," repeated 10 times. The assets of all the prisoners were to be confiscated and their families were to be exiled to Siberia.

The very next day, several GPU vehicles appeared in Ak Metchet to take away the families sentenced to exile. The news spread throughout the village. The 10 families were herded together in the centre of the village, where the vehicles were waiting for them. The loading of the families had barely begun when all the women and children of the village appeared. More than 200 women and several hundred youngsters surrounded the cars. A great din set in. Everything was in turmoil. The children cried and screamed; the adults shouted the demand to release the exiled families.

The GPU refused, whereupon the women of Ak Metchet shouted that all or none should be banished to Siberia. "Either, or; all or none!" was their slogan as they charged the officials. The GPU men defended themselves with their revolver butts, but did not dare to fire into the crowd, a rare occurrence for Soviet officials.

"Either-or; all or none!"

These calls echoed through the streets of Ak Metchet. The women and children crowded into the cars with the exiles, climbed onto the hoods and cabs of the trucks. Others lay down in front of the wheels with their children. They formed a wall that defied crossing. Again and again, the shouts of the women were heard above the tumultuous noise of the screaming children.

The GPU officials were unable to move. They finally left the scene, leaving behind their vehicles because they could not be moved.

Several days later, a long column of vehicles approached Ak Metchet. The

inhabitants were told to abide by their words of some days ago. "All or none," they had demanded. "All it shall be," the GPU announced.

Everyone was to take as much luggage as he or she could carry. Bravely, all the inhabitants of Ak Metchet boarded the trucks and cars. Tears alternated with songs as they were transported to an unknown future.

A few days later, we heard that the Ak Metchet exiles had to wait for a ship at the harbour of Novo-Urgench. Gerhard Wiebe, who shared a room with my father, had a service horse at his disposal. He rode to the harbour day after day, but was not able to speak with the heavily guarded exiles. Only once was he able to make contact with several of our people. Our brothers and sisters had submitted completely to God's will and remained unshaken in their faith.

Each time Wiebe returned from his ride, late at night, my father would jump up from his seat and ask: "How is it going?"

Then one evening, when Wiebe returned at a particularly late hour, his whispered answer to father's hurried question was: "Everything is over now; they were transported today."

My father folded his hands and said to us: "Children, this is the greatest heroism our Mennonites have achieved during their history. Let us kneel and pray for them."

Far into the night we discussed Ak Metchet and the heroism of those women. We almost heard the call, "All or none!" while Wiebe described the scene of the departure. The entire deck of the ship had been filled with the Ak Metchet people waving their handkerchiefs to him while they sang, "God be with us till we meet again." More and more tears rolled into my father's gray beard, even though by that time he had probably been hardened to such scenes of grief.

When we finally went to bed, a silvery moon shimmered through delicate clouds, a sign of divine omnipotence. ❧

Adapted from the book Hope is Our Deliverance, by Alexander (Sacha) Rempel and Amalie Enns. Shared with CM by Amalie Enns.

Grebel at 60

By Fred W. Martin, Director of Advancement
Conrad Grebel University College

In the fall of 1963, J. Winfield Fretz began his role as the first president of Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario. In addition to hiring the first employees and spearheading a \$750,000 building project, he taught courses in the sociology

department at the University of Waterloo. The beginnings of this educational initiative by Ontario Mennonites began in 1959 with a study group from various Anabaptist denominations who wanted to explore options to support young Mennonites in

higher education.

Ultimately, these leaders responded to the invitation from the newly established University of Waterloo to join three other denominational colleges on the campus that opened in 1957. When writing about



PHOTO COURTESY OF MENNONITE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

Sixty years ago, Conrad Grebel College's first president, J. Winfield Fretz, laid the College's cornerstone, along with board members Milton R. Good and John Neufeld, envisioning a thriving Mennonite school integrated into the secular University of Waterloo campus.

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Grebel's history, Grebel historian and professor, Marlene Epp, noted, "They were embarking on a venture quite radical for its time, although it may be hard for us to see today how truly innovative their vision for postsecondary education was" as they "affirmed the presence of Mennonite young people on a public university campus."

This model of a Mennonite college on a public university campus is indeed unique and provides many opportunities

the College's Dean. Today Grebel teaches more than 3,200 UWaterloo students in its undergraduate courses each year. Graduate programs teach an additional 65 students in theology and Peace and Conflict Studies.

When the residence opened in 1964, it had 106 beds. Today the campus houses 172 students in the residence and apartments. In addition, Student Services supports off-campus students as associates, bringing the total number

of the residence population. Interestingly, the number of Mennonite students has remained relatively stable over the last 60 years, with about the same number in residence in 2023 as in 1964.

"From the beginning, the Grebel vision was to be a partner in a larger university. Winfield Fretz talked about a college that would serve and teach people from all walks of life—not just Mennonites, and not just Christians. He imagined Grebel as a kind of offering to the wider



PHOTO BY JEN KONKLE

On September 10, 2023, more than 200 alumni from across the generations joined with current students to celebrate Conrad Grebel University College's 60th Anniversary with a reunion, kids' activities, hymn sing, faculty panel, and picnic.

and challenges. "Our teaching, integrated within the Faculty of Arts, emphasizes Mennonite strengths of music, peace studies, and theology, but students from across the University enrol in our courses," noted Professor Troy Osborne,

of students connecting to the residence program to around 300 per year. Part of this number includes co-op students who are on campus from May to August in the spring term. Students who identify as Mennonite represent about 25 percent

world," observed the eighth president, Marcus Shantz. "I think we've lived into that founding vision wonderfully over the past sixty years, and it continues to shape our future." ❧

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

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ROCKWAY
MENNONITE COLLEGIATE
A SMALL SCHOOL FOR A BIG WORLD

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DISCOVER ROCKWAY

Thursday, November 9, 2023 | 7 pm

"Rockway's sense of community is unlike any other. Teachers are passionate and go above and beyond with students. The friendly, small school environment allowed me to get to know my teachers and peers."

Owen Unrau – Rockway Class of 2023
University of Guelph, Mechanical Engineering



#LifeAtRockway

Register at rockway.ca



FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Reconciling with the land

By Rebecca Seiling, Faculty member
Rockway Mennonite Collegiate

“Reconciliation . . . needs to start with the earth. It’s the foundation of everything.”

Isaac Murdoch, Serpent River First Nation

What would it look like to reconcile with the land—to get to know the created world as our relatives? Who is benefiting from this land where Rockway is situated? How can we give back to the land? These are a few of the questions that students in the Grade 11 Land-Based Leadership class are wrestling with this semester.

Rockway Mennonite Collegiate is developing this new, interdisciplinary course from a “two-eyed seeing” approach—one lens, looking from a Western perspective, and the other looking from an Indigenous perspective. According to Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall, two-eyed seeing (*etuaptmumk*) braids together the best of Western and Indigenous perspectives, encouraging learners to “become students of life, observant of the natural world.”

The class explores topics such as land use, treaty and wampum teachings, the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, appreciation for Indigenous teachings and ways of being, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The cultural learning portion of the course features discussions and visits with local leaders (Indigenous and non-), and regular trips to a local natural area to learn from Jan Sherman, Anishinaabe Knowledge Keeper, about how to live in a good way in relation to the land.

Much of our first month has been



PHOTO BY REBECCA SEILING

Grade 11 Rockway students working to prepare the pollinator garden as part of the new Land-Based Leadership course.

spent in the outdoor spaces at Rockway—digging, planting, writing, sharing and observing. Imagining the land through a bee’s eyes, a lawn area could be seen as “wasted space.” One hands-on component has students designing a pollinator garden space. They are currently creating a small, rich, flowering habitat to encourage butterflies and bees to share the land to which Rockway holds title.

Being good stewards of the land means finding ways to share the bountiful resources and making space for those

small ones—our relatives who buzz and fly around the grounds and fulfill a critical role, directly linked to the food we eat. Reconciliation with the land can include restoration of habitat and seeing the land through more eyes than just human ones. As we expand our notion of kinship to include the flowers, bees, and butterflies, we take an active role in caring for and giving back to the land that gives us life. We recognize the crucial part that we can play in our relationship with the land. ♪

Bringing UMEI into the future

By Sonya Bedal
UMEI Christian High School
LEAMINGTON, ONTARIO

UMEI Christian High School is growing! In March 2022, the Board of Directors announced Project ReNew, an ambitious

fundraising project to bring UMEI into the future. This project is currently funding half tuition for two years as well as

improvements throughout the school building. The leadership structure was also changed, with the addition of Darcy Bults

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

as vice-principal and Chani Wiens as the director of enrolment and community engagement, with Sonya Bedal remaining as principal. Under this leadership team, the plan was to strengthen the programming and operations of the school, while also growing outreach and community initiatives. Within the school, the new lightning robotics zone was revealed, a new enriched French program was initiated, and new clubs and learning opportunities

have added to the already rich and rewarding student experience.

The greater Leamington and Essex County community is being engaged in new ways as well. Programs like Robotics Mini and Discovery Day have brought hundreds of new people into the building. UMEI is pleased to announce that we have 21 new Grade 9 students eager to learn and grow academically, spiritually and as individuals. In the past year, UMEI has

also welcomed 10 new transfer students in other grades. These additions represent 75 percent growth from June 2022! Through many prayers and a lot of hard work, God has blessed our efforts and we praise God for the joyful growth of our school.

Thank you so much to all who have donated to Project ReNew so that more students may experience the whole-person Christian education from an Anabaptist perspective that UMEI provides. ☸

RJC receives generous legacy gift from Elizabeth & John Armbruster

By Alex Tiessen, RJC Director of Development
RJC High School
ROSTHERN, SASKATCHEWAN

For her Grade 12 year, Elizabeth Armbruster (Zacharias, 1944), known as Beth among her family and friends, decided to leave her family farm near Meadow Lake, Sask., to attend RJC (then known as the German-English Academy). She was determined to prepare herself to attend normal school to become a teacher after graduation.

During her time at RJC, Beth spent much of her time focusing on her studies. In the 1944 LINK yearbook, Beth described

herself as a “weak rabbit hunter” and found much more pleasure in learning biology.

Though she only attended RJC one year, it was a very meaningful experience for her and changed the course of her life. Since there was a shortage of teachers in the province at that time, the government provided a six-week teacher training course. Beth took advantage of this opportunity and began her teaching career. She taught in the Meadow Lake School Division for several years and attended the University of

Saskatchewan during the summers, taking classes toward her permanent certificate.

She never forgot the impact RJC had on her life. “The faith-based nature of the school would have been very important to her,” says Jim Skinner, a nephew of Beth. After growing up in a Mennonite family, Beth married a Lutheran man named John Armbruster in 1968, whom she met in Edmonton, Alta. They worked together at John’s family company, Armbruster Lumber in Stony Plain, Alta., until they sold the business in the early 1990s.

John passed away in 2017, and Beth in 2020. Though they supported several organizations throughout their lives, RJC held a special place in Beth’s heart and she made plans to support the school with a gift in her will. While a portion of the gift will go to address some significant capital infrastructure projects, the gift left to RJC will also be used to create the “John & Elizabeth Armbruster Scholarship” for new students attending the school. Beth held a particular interest in supporting students who otherwise could not attend the school due to finances.

John and Beth’s generosity will leave a lasting legacy that will significantly improve school facilities and allow future generations of students to attend. ☸



PHOTO COURTESY OF RJC HIGH SCHOOL

The RJC class of 1944 in front of the German-English Academy.

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Seminary reports highest enrolment in 14 years

By Annette Brill Bergstresser
Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary
ELKHART, INDIANA

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana, is celebrating its fourth consecutive year of growth in student numbers this fall, with a total enrolment of 189 students (157 in 2022) as of Sept. 11, 2023. Of these, 149 are graduate students (141 in 2022) and 40 are participants in the undergraduate-level nondegree Journey Missional Leadership Development Program (16 in 2022). Thirteen Canadians are included in this total—11 graduate students and two Journey participants.

According to Scott Janzen, Assistant Dean, Registrar and Director of Retention, the number of graduate students marks the seminary's highest enrolment in 14 years, and the full-time equivalency of student enrolment—56.8—is the highest in 11 years. The incoming class of 49 students (up from 29 in 2022) is the largest since 1999. The number of degree- or certificate-seeking graduate students also rose significantly, jumping to 132 from 116 in 2022. This year's growth reflects increases in U.S. and Canadian student numbers, and the graduate student body represents 22 countries.

"We're experiencing enrolment growth in remarkable ways in a time when many seminaries in the U.S. and Canada are struggling," reflected David Boshart, President. "We don't take it for granted that our numbers are some of the highest we've seen in years. AMBS's programs and initiatives are attracting people from across the globe in addition to our U.S. and Canadian students. Our increased collaboration with Anabaptist-Mennonite and other Christian organizations is helping make this possible, enabling more people to access the Anabaptist theological education we offer."



PHOTO BY BRITTANY PURLEE

Eleven graduate students attended an on-campus orientation in August 2023. Front (l. to r.): Kandace Boos of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada; Teresa Martin of Norman, Oklahoma; DJ Polite of Columbia, South Carolina; Hasset (Joy) Shimeles of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Clare Krabill of Goshen, Indiana. Back (l. to r.): Kandace Helmuth of Akron, Pennsylvania; Brian Johnson of Missoula, Montana; Daniel Nugroho of Ungaran, Central Java, Indonesia; Kyle Schlabach of Goshen; Christian Nawai of Ndjamena, Chad; Andrew Zetts of Souderton, Pennsylvania.

Janzen noted that enrolment in AMBS's distance-friendly programs represents 77 percent of admitted students in 2023 (up from 65 percent in 2022). The online Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism (MATGA) has 51 students in 2023, compared with 40 in 2022 and 32 in 2021. Nine of these are South Korean students taking MATGA courses in South Korea through a new partnership between AMBS and the Nehemiah Institute for Christian Studies in Seoul. Twenty-nine are Ethiopian students enrolled in MATGA cohorts through a partnership between AMBS and Meserete Kristos Seminary in

Bishoftu/Debre Zeit, Ethiopia.

Additionally, 10 students are enrolled in an online Spanish-language graduate certificate program that began this fall through a partnership between Mennonite Education Agency and AMBS. Seven students are enrolled in AMBS's Doctor of Ministry in Leadership, which launched in January.

The increase in Journey program participants has come from overseas, with 26 of 40 residing in countries other than the U.S. and Canada. A new cohort of 21 participants in Southeast Asia has begun online classes in languages other than English. ▮

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Connecting MCI's Past & Future

By Janna Wiebe
Mennonite Colligate Institute
GRETNA, MANITOBA

For 134 years, Mennonite Collegiate Institute has offered young people an Anabaptist-centred education, a community to explore faith in, and a place to excel in music, academics and sport. The rich legacy of developing young peoples' God-given gifts in an Anabaptist-Christian setting continues to live on in the halls of MCI today.

For Roxanne Friesen (class of '86), an MCI alum and current MCI staff, MCI's mission is as relevant as ever. "Today's youth are searching, and I believe MCI has a unique and beautiful opportunity to lead these teens to scripture and share Christ's truth with them," she says. Friesen speaks from a place of experience—not only as a mother of four young people, but also as the school's receptionist and point person for student needs.

Friesen is one of six current staff members who were once MCI students, with over a dozen student-turned-staff at MCI in the last five years alone. Why do so many former students return to MCI after graduation? The answer is rooted in the love of a community whose deep traditions and meaningful relationships have left a permanent mark on them.

"I'm excited to still be a part of a school that was influential in my teens. Having Christ-centred teachers challenged me to grow in my personal faith and relationship with Jesus," Friesen shares. "While living in dorm at MCI, I made some great friends, some of my closest friends to this day."

Friesen's positive experience as an MCI student led to her four children enrolling at the school, and she volunteered on the Parent Advisory Council and in the library before officially joining MCI staff in 2017. For Friesen, the students who fill the familiar hallways are the highlight for her.

"My absolute favourite thing about working here is my daily interactions with students! Whether it's celebrating



PHOTO BY JANNA WIEBE

Roxanne Friesen holds her grad photo in the academic wing of MCI.

last night's soccer goal or sharing their heart about a struggle or difficulty, it's such a privilege to laugh, encourage and pray with them," she says.

Friesen and the countless alumni who have "come home" to MCI connect MCI's past with its future, helping to create an environment that they thrived in and

ensuring that the place that helped shape them is still shaping the next generation of young people.

"I'm just excited to be a part of this school and watch how God will use it for His glory." ❧

Calendar

British Columbia

Oct. 20-22: MC B.C. women's retreat at Camp Squeah, "Planted-Rooted-Growing" with Bonnie Esau. To register, go to www.mcabc.ca.

Oct. 23, 25, 26: Theatre of the Beat presents "I Love You and It Hurts," a series of three short plays reflecting on abuse and family violence, at Sardis Community Church (23), Peace Mennonite Church (25) and Langley Mennonite Fellowship (26)

Nov. 2: Books and Borscht at the Mennonite Heritage Museum. Manitoba author Mitchell Toews introduces his new collection of short stories, "Pinching Zwieback: Made-up Stories from the Darp." Lunch at Noon in the MHM restaurant, reading and book discussion at 1 p.m.

Nov. 14-18: Mennonite Heritage Museum Christmas Market. More details to come.

Nov. 25: MHSBC Presents: "Holodomor Remembrance: Voices of Survivors." Doors open at 2:30 p.m.; Film/Presentations at 3 p.m.; Faspa at 4 p.m. For tickets call: 604-853-6177 or online: www.mhsbc.com.

Saskatchewan

Oct. 15: "I Love You and It Hurts," Theatre of the Beat's three short plays reflecting on abuse and family violence, at Osler Mennonite Church, 2 p.m.

Oct. 18: "I Love You and It Hurts," Theatre of the Beat presents three short plays on abuse and family violence, at Sunset United Church, Regina, 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 19-20: Called to be a worship leader, Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon. (19th) Called to be a worship leader: Exploring the role, from 7-9 p.m., (20th) Leading in Worship: Exploring pathways and pitfalls in congregations, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information and to register, go to: mcsask.ca/event/11422.

Oct. 29: "I Love You and It Hurts," Theatre of the Beat presents three short plays on abuse and family violence, at Wildwood Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, 7 p.m.

Manitoba

Oct. 28, 29: Canadian Foodgrains Bank's "Singin' in the Grain" fundraising concerts, featuring the Steinbach Regional Secondary School and Westgate Collegiate: (28) Douglas Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, 7 p.m. and (29) Emmanuel Mennonite Church, 3 p.m.

Nov. 4, 5: Camps with Meaning celebration banquets. Join us at Emmanuel Church, Winkler (4th) and at Douglas Mennonite Church, Winnipeg (5th).

Nov. 5: The Mennonite Community Orchestra presents "The Power of Hope," featuring a tribute to Ukraine and the premiere of "Rains Song" by CMU student Liam Berry. See mennonitecommunityorchestra for more concert information.

Nov. 8: Dual Hybrid Book Launch. Join host Sue Sorensen and authors Ariel Gordon ("Sightseeing") and Mitchell Toews ("Pinching Zwieback"), at 7 p.m. in the atrium at McNally Robinson Booksellers, Grant Park, Winnipeg. Info: bit.ly/GordonToewsLAUNCH

Nov. 15: Local Authors Night at the Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, Manitoba. Join host Nita Wiebe with Mitchell Toews ("Pinching Zwieback") and authors: Elma Koop ("The Little Pioneer"), Noreen Jantzen ("I Wondered as I Wandered: Memoirs and History, Lawrence Klippenstein"), and Mary-Lou Driedger ("Sixties Girl"). Music and refreshments available.

June 21-23, 2024: 75... Already?! Save the date for Camp Assiniboia's 75th Anniversary. More details to come.

Ontario

Oct. 20: Join us for the exciting launch of our new Home Routes folk concert series at Brubacher House, in Waterloo, Ontario! Our first concert features Finnish singer-songwriter Mirja Klippel (Danish Music Award - Songwriter of the Year) and acclaimed guitarist Alex Jønsson. 6 p.m. Potluck, 7 p.m. concert. Reserve your seat: forms.gle/T9SKoXvLwaSJYb7h8.

Oct. 21: MCEC Youth Event at UMEI, 1-5 p.m. at UMEI Christian High School in Leamington, Ont.

Oct. 24: TMTC Closing Ceremony: Celebrating the Legacy of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre. Gather with those associated with TMTC past and present, celebrate legacy, and share stories as the Centre comes to a close during this virtual event. Hosted by Jeremy Bergen, the event will feature brief reflections by some of those who cared for and benefited from TMTC over the years. There will also be an opportunity for brief sharing during an open mic time. Register at: uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/tmtc-closing-ceremony

Oct. 28: *Voices Together* Resource Day, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Shantz Mennonite Church, in Baden, Ont., with hymn sing at 7 p.m.

Oct. 27-29: Fall work weekend at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp. For more information, go to www.slmc.ca/retreats.

Nov. 9: Discover Rockway: Information Night for Grades 7-12, at 7 p.m. To register for this event, please visit www.rockway.ca or email admissions@rockway.ca.

Nov. 9: All are invited to attend the 2023 Benjamin Eby Lecture in the Grebel Chapel at Conrad Grebel University College. Speaker Dr. Maisie Sum, will present her research on the "guembri", a symbolic artifact of the Black African diaspora in Morocco. More information at: uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/lecture-series/benjamin-ebby-lecture

Nov. 18: The MCC Peace Conference is your chance to see, hear and experience first-hand how you and MCC are changing lives and communities through peacebuilding. This event will inspire and inform through general sessions, workshops and conversations with messengers of peace. Visit mcc.org/peace-conference for more details.

Nov. 22: Rockway Mennonite Collegiate invites you to their Annual General Meeting at 7:30 pm. Back by popular demand, this meeting will be online. To receive

the Zoom link, please email AGM@rockway.ca. For membership information, visit www.rockway.ca.

Nov. 24, 25: The Church at Nairn (formerly Nairn Mennonite Church) annual Spirit of Christmas (24th) 6:30-9, (25th) 10-4 p.m. Includes live music, juried crafts, pottery, greeting cards, wood products, stained glass, vinyl signs, quilts and more. Tea room included with admission. Info@nairnmennonite.weebly.ca.

Nov. 25: Prospective students, families, and teachers are invited to visit Grebel to meet current students, staff, and faculty to learn about the residence and academic programs. Learn about student life at the University of Waterloo and tour the wider campus. Register in advance and receive information on in-person sessions, presentations, and how to plan your time on campus. uwaterloo.ca/grebel/fall-open-house-2023.

Nov. 26: Fall Concert of the Soli Deo Gloria Singers at 3 p.m. at Leamington United Mennonite Church. Donations are welcome.

Online

Oct. 17-Feb. 13: Join us for Climate Pollinators, a webinar series on creation care. This webinar is jointly organized by the Creation Care Task Force and Anabaptist Climate Collaborative. Each webinar will take place on Tuesday at 14:00 UTC. For more information and to register, go to mwc-cmm.org/en/resources/climate-pollinators-webinar-series.

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



For more Calendar listings visit, canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.

Advertising Information

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PHOTO BY KATHERINE SYLVESTER

Canoeing for a cause. Giulia Molina was one of more than 20 people who paddled their way down the Harrison and Fraser rivers as part of Camp Squeah's annual Paddle-a-Thon on September 23. Participants raised over \$53,000 for the tuition bursary supporting young people who volunteer at the Mennonite Church B.C.-supported camp, which is located an hour northeast of Abbotsford.