

CANADIAN MENNONITE

March 8, 2024 Volume 28 Number 5



A mother's 'yes'

A little girl, an oak pulpit and attention to call

PM40063104 R09613

THE MAIZE OF PEACE 16
SHORT PANTS AND FUNDAMENTALISM 19
FIFTY YEARS OF POETRY 20

Longing for transformation

WILL BRAUN



I recently attended the Mennonite Church Manitoba annual general meeting (AGM) in Winkler. I find those events both energizing and demoralizing, which is why I have attended only a few in my life.

You visit with good people, listen to inspiring words, weather the budget anxiety, then leave with the hollow feeling that key realities were not confronted. I posit two such realities.

First, large chunks of our denomination are fading and we don't have an effective plan to change course.

Second, the cultural and theological gap between the dwindling and vital churches is wide.

Exceptions exist, but allow some generalization based on my latest AGM experience (a full AGM report will appear in the next issue).

A resolution that will see MC Manitoba sign a letter calling on governments to implement a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty passed overwhelmingly. Two of 104 delegates quietly voted against it. There was zero discussion in the plenary session, though a breakout session included conversation.

A resounding victory, of sorts.

But one long-time MC Manitoba member told me privately that the passing of the resolution—which has no budget or action implications—made it look like we had “done something” when we had not.

Does that comment apply more broadly?

The theme of the AGM was intercultural church. Input on the topic from Fanosie Legesse was deeply challenging on spiritual and practical levels. In a breakout session, a large delegation from the Vietnamese Mennonite Church in Winnipeg shared beautiful stories of faith, conversion and vitality (no mention of climate or the like).

I would have been fully geared up to conclude the day with an hour of planning around intercultural integration: practical ideas, next steps, commitments and prayer. Or two hours. Instead, we adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

One organizer said experience shows that delegates leave if the sessions go later. Some have far to travel; some have Sunday responsibilities coming; some sat through sessions all day Friday.

Another person said an AGM should be “as boring as possible.” Groundwork is done in advance, and the AGM is a time to report, invoke Robert's Rules and head home. Real work happens elsewhere.

But this is the one time a year we gather as a broader body. Let's make it count. We need change.

I could imagine people huddled in one corner over lunch refining a resolution, Bibles open. Others using precious time to compare notes on newcomer integration. A group of youth pushing decision-makers for more youth nominees.

Yes, Godly work happens elsewhere, but the AGM felt like a troubling indicator of a general posture.

The seats at the Friday evening service were about half full. As I left the

church, I saw the sign of the non-denominational church kitty-corner to the one that graciously hosted us. The sign was bold: “8:30, 10:00, 11:30.” They pack the place, in large part, with ex-Mennonites.

I plan to visit that church. From what I hear, it will be a big, theologically troubling show, but I'd sooner see if there is something to learn there than sit smugly in a declining church, watching the list of the deaths in the previous year utterly overwhelm the number of births, a fact my 16-year-old son—who seemed to be the only teenager in attendance that evening—noted.

He did like the music and certainly the reflection by Fanosie Legesse, who he later described to his brother as a “guy who really cares.”

The church is still God's, and people are being loved in and through our churches. But the overall reality is dim.

The point is not who is to blame for the current reality but who will make change. It's up to all of us to really care—to do something about the fact that business as usual is not enough.

Much gratitude to Arli Klassen, whose final column appears on page 10. Arli's amazing experience throughout the Anabaptist world has brought great value to her writing. Thanks!

Finally, to hear a healthy discussion among two vegans and a cattle rancher—hosted by a conflicted small farmer—tune in on March 20 at 7:30 p.m. CT. Register at canadianmennonite.org/events. ☘



Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Canada

ISSN 1480-042X

ABOUT THE COVER

Emily Summach and her daughter Junia Grace.
Photo by Taylor Summach.

16 The maize of corn

Theo Wiederkehr and his household grow corn to untangle themselves from war.

19 Short pants and fundamentalism

Bill Block answers our 'Life in the 80s' questions.

20 Fifty years of listening to poets

Aaron Epp interviews Hildi Froese Tiessen about her new book on Mennonite literature.

23 Beyond Revenge

Maoz Inon, an Israeli Jew, speaks about forgiving those who killed his parents on October 7.

Regular features:

4 What in the World

6 Readers Write

8 Milestones

30 Calendar

31 Classifieds

12 A mother's 'yes'

Emily Summach shares the unlikely story of how she ended up behind the pulpit.



9 Gathering matters more than you think

Shelby Boese

10 One more on unity and diversity

Arli Klassen

11 Seeing clearly

Troy Watson

CANADIAN MENNONITE

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One-year Subscriptions

Canada: \$49+tax / U.S.: \$65 / International: \$80

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)

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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

CM What in the World



Wooden books
A collection of 30 books hand-carved out of discarded wood was recently donated to Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. The collection, called "Heart for Wood," was created by artist Christine Langerhorst of Utrecht, Netherlands, and donated by AMBS professor emeritus Daniel Schipani. Source: AMBS.



Church aims for 40 megaplants
Calvary Temple, the largest church in India, with more than 300,000 members, wants to plant 40 megachurches in the next decade. The Hyderabad-based church reportedly feeds 200,000 people monthly and runs its own hospital. Source: CBN

Astronomer pessimistic about life on other planets

Waterloo, Ont. — Owen Gingerich, astronomer from Harvard University, is pessimistic about life on other worlds. In the first of a series of lectures at Conrad Grebel College February 17-19, the professor and astrophysicist at the Smithsonian and Harvard Observatories in Cambridge, spoke to a packed room on the possibilities of and conditions for life on other planets and in

other galaxies.

His highly technical, illustrated lecture proved to be a fascinating journey into the intricate workings of the universe. In conclusion Gingerich stated, however, that the question of life elsewhere is a philosophical one depending on one's view of the uniqueness of human life on earth.

**50
YEARS AGO**

MENNONITE REPORTER, MARCH 4, 1974





Wrestler turns to God

In an online post following his baptism in December, retired professional wrestler Hulk Hogan, 70, wrote: "Total surrender and dedication to Jesus is the greatest day of my life. No worries, no hate, no judgement . . . only love!" Hogan and his wife Sky Daily Hogan were baptized at Indian Rocks Baptist Church in Florida. Source: CBN

Photo: Wikimedia



'I will prevent WW III'

"The Bible says blessed are the peacemakers. I will be a peacemaker and I will be the only president who can say—and I say this with great conviction—I will prevent World War III."

– Donald Trump, speaking to a convention of the National Religious Broadcasters in Nashville, Tennessee, February 22



Billboard ads raise hell

These billboard slogans were noted in, "The Problem with Aggressive 'Billboard Evangelism,'" *Relevant*, Feb. 2024.

- "Discover the bread of life or you're toast."
- "Stop, drop, and roll doesn't work in hell."
- "There's no air conditioning in hell."
- "Are you against Jesus? There will be hell to pay."

Photo: frankieleon/flickr.com

FROM



10 items you should not donate to the Abbotsford Thrift Store

7. Used tea bags – These should not be donated to the thrift store, but instead collected and shipped off to missionaries.

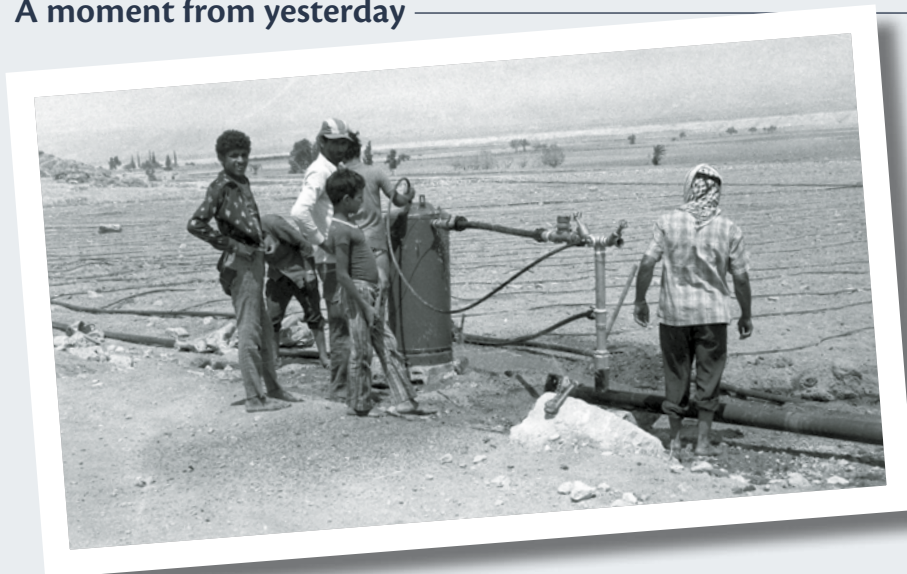
6. Dentures – For some reason these are usually not a hot seller, especially during corn on the cob season.

1. Lutheran hymnals – These, along with all of that Andrew Unger guy's books, are on our forbidden books list. For obvious reasons.

Full list at ungerreview.com.

By Andrew Unger. Used with permission.

A moment from yesterday



This photo shows several people at the installation of a drip irrigation system on the dry lands of the Jordan Valley, West Bank, Palestine. Mennonite Central Committee assisted in this project.

Text: MCC/archival

Photo: Jan Ebersole/MCC



archives.mhsc.ca

Be in Touch

• Send letters to letters@canadianmennonite.org. Our mailing address is on page 3.

✉ **To pay the price of peace**

Thank you for the February 21 webinar with Maoz Inon. He reminds me of the many Israelis who work for peace by embodying forgiveness, hope, justice and reconciliation. Their witness affirms my commitment to Anabaptism.

The three Abrahamic religions clearly value the sacredness of life. The Qur'an states: "Whoever takes a life—unless as a punishment for murder or mischief in the land—it will



be as if they killed all of humanity; and whoever saves a life, it will be as if they saved all of humanity" (Qur'an 5:32-34).

The Jewish Torah says, "*Thou shalt not kill,*" (Exodus 20:13) and "*Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*" (Leviticus 19:18).

In the Gospels, Jesus goes further: "*But I say to you, love your enemies, bless*

them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Jesus was crucified for these upside-down values. Sadly, each tradition has developed exceptions to these core beliefs, such as Just War theory in the case of Christianity.

Early Anabaptists embraced Jesus' teachings even when it resulted in persecution and death. How do I respond to Jesus' teaching? Am I prepared to pay the price? Can I take actions that save lives in Gaza? Can I follow Maoz Inon's example of living into forgiveness, hope, justice and reconciliation?

Can I plant seeds in my prayers, by contacting elected leaders, by joining rallies and vigils, by adding to the chorus that will grow into a diplomatic pathway to peace with justice that will end the violence and deaths in Gaza?

JOHANN FUNK, SURREY, B.C. (LANGLEY MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP)

✉ **Sadness over Suriname**

A group of us at Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church in Winnipeg are reading and discussing *The Land is Not Empty* by Sarah Augustine. Augustine helps readers understand the roots and vast impact of the Doctrine of Discovery (DoD), especially on Indigenous peoples.

The Doctrine of Discovery was blessed by the church and legitimized the settling of new lands for the purpose of economic gain without due consideration of the peoples and cultures already resident in these lands. The DoD has hugely affected the lives of Indigenous peoples and has contributed to immense trauma within these communities. The greed for land and resources has also had long-term effects on pollution and climate change.

One of the communities that Augustine frequently highlights is the small nation of Suriname. Indigenous peoples in Suriname continue to live in the rainforest, which the government considers uninhabited and therefore available for clearing and repurposing.

Because of Augustine's repeated referencing of Suriname, we read the news brief "Mennonites threaten Suriname forest" (January 12) with special interest and profound sadness. Mennonites are damaging the environment and cutting down forests without consideration of those who live in and tend these forests?

Are we alone in feeling discomfort and sadness? Who is there to challenge or intervene so that an acceptable resolution is sought?

We wonder if Mennonite Central Committee or Mennonite World Conference, with their connections to the Mennonites in Bolivia, Belize and Mexico, can offer some guidance in seeking a way that is just and follows the teaching of Jesus in loving our neighbours as ourselves.

The challenge really is for all of us to grow in understanding the wide-ranging impacts of the DoD and support efforts to work at reconciliation and appropriate change. Reading *The Land is Not Empty* provides a good encouragement and start for this direction.

JANET PETERS, JONATHAN MUEHLING, GERHARD NEUFELD, KATIE NEUFELD, RUBY ZACHARIAS, MARY PENNER, WALLY PLETT, LYDIA WIEBE, RUTH EPP AND EDWIN EPP

✉ **Breaking the cycle of violence**

The smiling faces of Gustavo Zentner and Richard Marceau, both representatives of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), look out from the pages of the January 26 issue ("Jewish perspectives").

CIJA is a prominent Canadian Jewish advocacy organization.

When asked to explain Zionism, Marceau said the Jewish people have “the right to the ancestral lands of the Jewish people.” He said nothing about the fact that those lands have been home to Arab Palestinians for generations and that an estimated 700,000 of them were driven from their villages in 1947 and ’48 in what is known as the Naqba (Catastrophe).

Many of them ended up in the Gaza Strip.

Marceau and Zentner did not tell readers that, for 17 years, Gazans have been strictly controlled, with Israel controlling the amount of water, food and electricity they are allowed.

I sensed in the words of Zentner and Marceau a willingness to accept massive modern weaponry donated by the United States for the purpose of destroying Hamas, and also to kill some 30,000 Gazans (as reported by the Hamas-run health body), including women, children, journalists, aid workers, doctors, nurses and more.

My wife and I watched the February 21 webinar featuring Maoz Inon, an Israeli entrepreneur and peace advocate. *Canadian Mennonite* was one of the sponsors. Inon’s parents were both killed by Hamas on October 7. His response to that tragedy was that he would not seek revenge. This was an incredibly difficult thing to do. But it is the right response because it breaks the cycle of killing.

Inon also said he imagines seeing Palestinians and Israelis treating each other as equals. I wish those would be the responses of Israel and CIJA.

MURRAY LUMLEY, TORONTO (DANFORTH MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ Palestine, past and present

I have sat with a Palestinian farmer watching for movement of bulldozers across the valley, anticipating the demolition of his house.

I have sat with a stricken Palestinian mother who was trying to find out which prisoner her 12-year-old son had been taken to for throwing a stone at an Israeli soldier.

I have seen with my own eyes a whole residential city

block demolished by the Israeli forces, leaving dozens of families homeless and without their family momentos.

I have watched helplessly as Israeli bulldozers uprooted a whole olive grove that had been in the family for generations.

I have stood with the Women in Black in the middle of a large roundabout in West Jerusalem. A dozen Jewish women dressed in black stood silently each Sabbath, holding signs saying “End the Occupation,” while passersby spit at them.

And today I grieve for the village of At-Tuwani in the South Hebron Hills. I had accompanied the shepherds herding their flocks of sheep, harassed almost daily either by Israeli soldiers, or Jewish settlers. According to Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT), the whole village fled, after intimidation and threats from armed settlers.

From 2002-2011, I spent one month each year in Hebron with CPT. I witnessed the oppression of the Israeli occupation in the West Bank. Since then, the blatant attacks and restrictions against Palestinians have increased significantly.

Canadian companies supply military goods to Israel. The Canadian government has withheld aid money to UNRWA [the UN body providing humanitarian aid in Gaza] for Palestinian refugees. That makes us guilty of contributing to collective punishment.

Palestinian Christian pastors have asked us for meaningful action. I hope it happens soon.

BARBARA MARTENS, LEAMINGTON, ONTARIO (NORTH LEAMINGTON UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH)

Editor’s note: The Canadian government has since reinstated funding for UNRWA.

✉ Mouthpiece for militarism

I applaud the effort to include Jewish perspectives on the situation in Gaza (“Jewish perspectives,” January 26).

However, *Canadian Mennonite* fell into the trap of centering the view of the Jewish Federations of Canada-UIA and its political action arm, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs



CANADIAN
MENNONITE

MEAT

A HEALTHY ONLINE DISCUSSION

Wednesday, March 20, 7:30 p.m. CT / 8:30 p.m. EST
Register at canadianmennonite.org/events

(CIJA).

These organizations claim to speak on behalf of the entire Jewish community, but a significant segment of Canadian Jews do not align with their position.

It would have been important to include the Independent Jewish Voices Canada perspective.

As it is, *Canadian Mennonite* was a mouthpiece for a supposed military solution when we as Mennonites are, in fact, opposed to all forms of militarism.

SUZANNE GROSS, EDMONTON (HOLYROOD MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ What if 1,000 Mennonites would . . .

In his last column, “A different kind of yes-man,” Ed Olfert poses the question many are asking today: “What does ‘yes’ mean when people are dying in Gaza, in Ukraine, in Russia . . .?”

In the past, some young men chose to say “yes” to a way other than war by refusing the state’s call to arms. In fact, during World War II there were some 10,000 Canadian conscientious objectors (Mennonites, Quakers, others).

We no longer have military conscription in Canada, but since 1978, we have been given the option to state our objection to war and military taxation. This option is made available by completing Conscience Canada’s Peace Tax Return (PTR) in conjunction with our annual tax returns.

The PTR provides two options. Option A is a declaration of conscience and an objection to paying for war. Option B is a declaration of conscience accompanied by withholding/diverting military taxes. This involves sending the 6.5 percent of federal income tax that goes to the military, or a symbolic amount, to a peace-minded organization instead of government.

Many years ago, we joined Conscience Canada in response to a letter to the editor of *Canadian Mennonite* in which the writer asked: “What if a thousand Mennonites would refuse to pay for war?”

Sadly, those thousand Mennonites did not emerge, at least not with Conscience Canada.

We wondered why, because even if there was a fear of withholding/diverting military taxes under Option B, there was no consequence for exercising Option A.

Given the horrific nature and consequences of war as we see today, you might want to consider saying “no” to war and “yes” to so many life-giving alternatives available to us.

See consciencecanada.ca for details, and related.

What if a thousand Mennonites/Christians/people for peace would refuse to pay for war and instead support alternative life-giving options?

ERNIE AND CHARLOTTE WIENS, LA SALLE, MANITOBA
(LA SALLE COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP)

CM ONLINE COMMENTS

✉ Thankful for multiple viewpoints

I’m writing to express my appreciation for this issue of *Canadian Mennonite* (January 26).

To think about issues well, we need to hear the perspectives and experiences of the parties involved and impacted. I am thankful that you are providing us with multiple viewpoints.

LORNA GOERTZ

CM MILESTONES

Births/Adoptions

Wipf—Natalie Joy (b. Jan 12, 2024) to George and Lizzie Wipf, North Kildonan Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Weddings:

Braun/Rath—Jessa Braun and Kyle Rath, Breslau Mennonite Church, Feb. 17, 2024, Breslau Ont.

Deaths

Albrecht—Orie John, 81 (b. Aug. 22, 1942; d. Feb. 5, 2024), Wellesley Mennonite Church, Wellesley, Ont.

Andres—Eva (nee Rempel), 97 (b. April 8, 1926; d. Feb. 19, 2024), Bethany Mennonite Church, Virgil, Ont.

Bauman—James (Jim) H., 81, (b. Aug. 31, 1942; d. Jan. 30, 2024), Elmira Mennonite Church, Elmira, Ont.

Bergman—William (Bill), 78 (b. Oct. 31, 1945; d. Feb. 28, 2024), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man.

Bowman—Bryan, 75 (b. Oct. 19, 1948; d. Jan. 29, 2024), Breslau Mennonite Church, Breslau Ont.

Dang—Lap Than, 73 (b. Feb. 10, 1951; d. Feb. 9, 2024), North Kildonan Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Hoban—Kimberly Jane, 57 (b. Dec. 31, 1966; d. Dec. 30, 2023), North Kildonan Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, MB.

Sawatzky—Andrew, 95 (b. Jan. 12, 1929; d. Feb. 17, 2024), Foothills Mennonite Church, Calgary, Alta.

Tom—Waldemar, 92 (b. July 15, 1931; d. Feb. 24, 2024), North Kildonan Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Please send Milestone announcements, including congregation and location, within four months of the event. Send to milestones@canadianmennonite.org. For deaths, please include birth date and last name at birth when applicable.

FROM OUR LEADERS

Gathering matters more than you think

Shelby Boese

I am a huge advocate for the local church.

It is the gathering of people around the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus that frees our imaginations and forms our hearts to be a different kind of nation on the earth.

Yet, it seems we often are pulled into the sexy idolatry of the power-over ways of the politics of the world instead of living into a different politics.

In his book, *Desiring the Kingdom*, philosopher James K.A. Smith notes, “We don’t just ‘naturally’ desire particular configurations of the kingdom; we are formed or trained to be aimed at particular configurations of the good life.”

Walter Brueggemann tells of the totalizing narratives of empire we are immersed in and seduced by. Smith reminds us, “There are no private practices; thus our hearts are constantly being formed by others, and most often through the cultural institutions that we create.” Culture is an activity.

“So what?” you ask. Our churches, when understood as places that cultivate a counter-formation to the world around us, should be of paramount importance. The gathering of the local church in worship and groups is not a side quest (as the kids say these days) to justice or holiness but central to being counter-formed.

A renewal of imagination is one of the powers of worship. It’s a space for the play of the Holy Spirit in community and might be one of the most important things to continually, repetitively and intentionally invite people into.

The weekly pattern of worshipping



Photo by Pavel Danilyuk/Pexels

on the day of the resurrection (the eighth day of creation) is needed now more than ever, given the de-formation of secular liturgies all around and ever present through social media and de-forming, groupthink-reinforcing algorithms.

Secular liturgies are calling and forming us to centre our identity first on ideologies like consumerism, economics, sexuality or family of origin, to name just a few. But none of these identities can carry the full freight of the Jesus-centred chosen family and gifted identity as a beloved child of God.

Smith writes, “Doctrines, beliefs and a Christian worldview emerge from the nexus of Christian worship practices; worship is the matrix of Christian faith, not its ‘expression’ or ‘illustration.’ Just as [Charles] Taylor emphasized that ‘humans operated with a social imaginary well before they ever got into the business of theorizing about

themselves,’ so too did Christians worship before they got around to abstract theologizing or formulating a Christian worldview.”

The church’s intentional worship is vital if we are to be the people we say we are.

We need worship teaching and then practicing in many of our Mennonite churches. We unpack the different elements of classical Christian worship. (Yes, we can also use our secondary debate filters regarding patriarchy or God-talk or particular use of scripture, etc., but we are foolish to not also embrace the formational pieces of our ancestors. Our minds and emotions are not much different from theirs).

Perhaps *Canadian Mennonite* can add a spiritual formation and worship section to highlight these kinds of conversations and practices.

Worship renewal, and teaching the elements of worship gatherings as embodied counter-formation to the powers in and around us, is something every church most likely needs to lean into every few years.

It will lead to us actually being a counter-community in the world as we name Jesus as Lord.

I recommend *Desiring the Kingdom* or *On the Road with Saint Augustine* for some thinking that agrees with and challenges our Anabaptist movement—from a very eirenic (conciliatory) Reformed professor, no less.

Just some lighthearted thoughts from the West. ☺



Shelby Boese is executive minister of Mennonite Church B.C. He can be reached at shelboese@mcbc.ca.

One more on unity and diversity

Arli Klassen

I've been writing this column for four-and-a-half years, and I'm sure I've used the same ideas more than once. In this, my last column, I return to the two core ideas that I get passionate about the most often.

There is plenty of danger in a single story, and yet my story is not dissimilar to many others.

All my grandparents, and those of my husband, came to Canada as immigrants and refugees who didn't know English. Our grandparents lived in communities that included many people with the same ethnic heritage, sticking together for church participation and their primary social community. Immigration to Canada, recently or longer ago, is part of the stories of nearly all Canadian Mennonites.

In 2023, for the first time since 1958, the average age of Canada's population was younger than the year before. That is a good thing, because the birth rate that grew the Canadian economy and Canadian churches in my childhood is now so low that society can no longer maintain itself.

Our Canadian society is becoming bigger and younger only because of immigration. Unlike my early years, most immigrants in recent years are not from Europe but from all over the world. Canadian society is shifting dramatically and maintaining itself (even growing) because of immigration.

I wonder if this is true in our congregations.

I worry about how Canadian society will create strong ties that bind us together in healthy ways across all the different ethnicities.

Will recent newcomers follow similar



Photo by Mckenna Phillips/Unsplash

patterns as previous newcomer groups, sticking to themselves and their own language, culture and religion for a generation, and then becoming much more "Canadian" a generation or two later?

Will the oldcomers integrate the newcomers into their churches and social circles?

All urban public schools today are incredibly diverse. Do our congregations reflect that diversity? Or do our churches mostly reflect the aging white population that came to Canada two or five generations ago?

I believe there are biblical and sociological arguments for why our churches need to not only embrace the intercultural aspects of Christianity, but also be a witness to our society that integration is possible. I worry about future divisions in society. I want the church to be on the forefront as examples of being intercultural. The

church is bigger than our ethnic or cultural roots, right?

That leads me to my second topic: Unity in the church.

I fear that our churches will not be able to rise above the human tensions that so often divide us. Part of that tension comes from our diverse languages, cultural heritages and worship styles.

I think another aspect of these tensions comes from our diverse interpretations of the Bible as we consider our life and ethics in these times. Our religious values and ethics are deeply impacted by our cultural heritage. Sometimes it is hard to say which comes first, the biblical interpretation or the cultural heritage that shapes that interpretation.

Our call by God, as found over and over again in the New Testament, is to be unified.

Jesus's prayer in John 17 was to "protect them, so that they may be one." And again, Jesus says "that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you love me."

Being one might be the hardest thing for us to be, but that is my prayer for our Canadian Mennonite congregations and churches. ❧

Arli Klassen is a member of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, and can be reached at

klassenarli@gmail.com. She is grateful to have had this column because once upon a time she considered a career in journalism.



Seeing clearly

Troy Watson

I saw a commercial during a hockey game recently that ended with an image of an Uber Eats bag sitting beside a bowl of macaroni and cheese and a Kraft Dinner box. This struck me as odd. I wondered, what's the connection between Uber Eats and Kraft Dinner?

A few minutes later, the same commercial came on, but I noticed there was no Kraft Dinner box at the end. Everything else was exactly the same. I was dumbfounded.

I saw the same commercial probably a dozen times over the next 90 minutes, but there was no Kraft Dinner box anywhere. I eventually concluded my mind had played a trick on me. I must have associated the bowl of macaroni and cheese with Kraft Dinner, and thought I saw something that wasn't there.

Near the end of the game, the commercial played once more and beside the bowl of macaroni and cheese was a blue Kraft Dinner box. Clear as a bell.

I couldn't believe it. In a state of astonishment and delight, I celebrated that I hadn't lost my mind. For some reason, Uber Eats had produced two different versions of this commercial.

As I reflected further, I marvelled that it took less than two hours for me to become convinced I had not seen what I had in fact seen.

That's how easily we doubt, question and discount our own observations and experiences in life. This is without taking into consideration the colossal impact artificial intelligence and advancements in audio visual technology will have upon us in the very near future.

Our perceptions and memories are malleable, impressionable and fluid. They are heavily influenced by many factors, most notably the people around us and the "authorities" we trust.

Numerous social experiments have demonstrated how prone we are to conforming to the opinions of others, even when they're obviously wrong.

In the Asch conformity experiments, subjects were put in a room with seven actors. The group was shown a series of slides depicting lines of various lengths and asked which two lines they thought were the same length on each slide.

At first the actors gave the right answers. After a few rounds, they unanimously started choosing the same obvious wrong answers. Seventy-five percent of the test subjects conformed and chose the wrong answer at least once to go along with the group.

There is a saying that seeing is believing. The truth is that we often don't believe or trust what we see if everyone around us sees something else. Whether we see evidence for God's existence or not, for example, usually has more to do with the culture we are immersed in than our own perceptions, reason and experiences.

No matter how intelligent or old we are, we continue to be influenced, socialized, normalized and conditioned throughout our lives by the people around us and the environments we inhabit. As a result, we often deny or dismiss our own perceptions and experiences.

During his baptism, Jesus saw the Spirit descend upon him like a dove and heard the Creator say, "You are my beloved son." Immediately after this,

Jesus went into the wilderness. The Adversary began testing him, saying, "If you really are the Son of God..."

I think this was the real temptation. The underlying tactic of the Adversary was to get Jesus to doubt himself and the truth he had just heard, seen and experienced.

We are confronted with this same Adversary today in our churches, schools, workplaces, culture—even our own minds. It wants us to doubt who we are and the truth we have experienced.

How can we trust and stay grounded in the truth we perceive and experience?

This is a complex question with no easy answers.

In part, we must choose wisely how and with whom we spend our time. We must guard our inner beings and filter the ideas, thoughts, beliefs and attitudes we allow to take root in our minds and hearts in light of the kind of fruit they produce.

It's important to listen and learn from others, but it's even more important to preserve and strengthen our capacity to perceive clearly and trust our "inner teacher," the Spirit within us.

As Jesus says, when your perception is clear, your whole being is healthy and full of light. ✎

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





A mother's 'yes'

By Emily Summach

In this two-part, then-and-now feature, Emily Summach tells the story of a little girl, an oak pulpit and attention to God's call.

Photo by Taylor Summach

Part I: For Junia Grace, 2017

I don't like to write sermons. I am, at best, an unlikely preacher in our small Mennonite church.

I languished through theology courses in college, earning mostly high C's. I feel easily overwhelmed when researching scripture, and I have no knowledge whatsoever of Greek or Hebrew. I'm constantly sending rough drafts to my pastor friends to ensure that my words from behind the oak pulpit aren't inadvertently heretical.

Why, then, do I sign up for the quarterly preaching rotation?

I do it because I have a 3-year-old daughter.

Junia Grace, our firstborn, arrived in the pre-dawn hours of a beautiful late September day in 2014. Her arrival changed me in every way that I expected it would. My body was pushed to the physical limits of sleep deprivation. I grew more emotionally tender with each passing day. Spiritually, I felt myself opening to new possibilities as I finally understood the fierce, protective and devoted love of a parent.

However, Junia also began to change me in a way I had not expected: theologically.

I was first introduced to the concept of biblical gender equality and egalitarianism in a gender studies course during my third year of college. The revelation that God did not prefer my boyfriend to me was, in no uncertain terms, life-altering.

I was raised to believe men are the head of the home and the leaders of the church. A woman never stepped behind the pulpit unless she was a missionary, home on furlough. And, of course, she "shared"; she did not preach.

I joyfully embraced the new notion of equality. And when that boyfriend and I married two years later, we agreed that our future children, female and male, would know that they stood equal before God.

When we relocated to Saskatchewan in 2016, we made

certain to choose a denomination and church that affirmed women as pastors. Our church, Langham Mennonite Fellowship, in the small Saskatchewan town of Langham, is led by male and female elders, and both sexes are encouraged to participate in all areas of church life, including preaching. It was a perfect fit for our growing family.

However, I soon noticed that only men were preaching. The opportunity to preach was open to all and encouraged by our pastor, but only men seemed to volunteer.

The reasons women did not step forward were as varied as the women in the congregation. Some devoted countless hours to other ministries in the

church. For others, the fear of public speaking was insurmountable. And I suspect that for some, who were raised as I was, the weight of past beliefs about women's roles kept them from preaching.

As the Sundays passed, an uncomfortable feeling settled into my spirit. What about me?

I protested inside. I wasn't "called." I did not have sufficient education. I was not interested in theology. I simply was not a preacher.

But my blue-eyed girl, sitting next to me in the pew, had yet to see a woman preach. What good, I feared, would it do Junia to know that she was equal, but only in theory?

How could she envision herself preaching if there were no women to spark her imagination? How could she be what she could not see?

When our pastor approached me a few weeks later and



Photo by Dawn Mcdonald/Unsplash.

**I have been mistaken
for the church secretary
more times than I can count.**

asked me if I would be willing to preach while he was away the following month, I heard my voice say, “Yes.”

I needed my daughter to believe that the Holy Spirit that rained down on the women at Pentecost would rain down on her too. I needed her to know that the outcast woman at the well was the first person whom Jesus trusted with the news that he was the Messiah.

I needed her to know that Jesus chose to reveal his resurrection to women first, charging them to go and tell their brothers. This good news is given to every woman to proclaim—educated or not, “called” or not. It is mine to proclaim, and I hope and pray that someday, Junia, too, will proclaim it.

So here I sit in the quiet evening hours, kids asleep, in the early stages of writing a sermon, toiling at a task that does not come naturally, leaning heavily on the help of others and earnestly hoping that someday my daughter and son will see equal representation of women and men—all the living streams flowing through the church. I will choose to say yes to that hope, wherever it may lead me.

Part 2: Trepidation and commitment, 2024

My evening hours are no longer as quiet as they were six years ago, when I first said yes to preaching. My not-so-littles are now nine and six years old. Piano lessons, playdates and math homework fill our evenings.

Church business meetings and sermon writing are mixed in there too because, four years ago, I accepted a call to be the pastor of Langham Mennonite Fellowship.

Motherhood pushed me to say yes to

joining the preaching rotation, and it was motherhood again that pushed me into exploring the pastoral vocation.

I had just finished my second maternity leave. Month after month, our bank account told us I needed to return to paid work. The thought of clocking hours at an office job felt disheartening. I longed for meaningful work, something that could wrap around the lives of my growing



Photo by Artur Aldyrkhanov/Unsplash.

The ghosts of the evangelical patriarchy chased me.

children in the best way possible.

I shared all this at a friend’s kitchen table, as my toddler repeatedly climbed on and off my lap. “Have you considered ministry?” she asked. No, I had not.

But suddenly the idea was in the air, and as with all matters of the Holy Spirit, the idea took on new life.

In March 2019, the members of

Langham Mennonite Fellowship voted unanimously to call me as their pastor.

While the church had a long, rich history of female lay leaders, I was their first female pastor.

My imposter syndrome was very real in the first months. The ghosts of the evangelical patriarchy chased me, and all the images in my head of what a pastor should sound like and act like were decidedly male.

In a meeting with a church leader, I kept noting how I was “different from other pastors.” My trepidation about the role bled out everywhere. The church had “never had a pastor like me,” I said. She looked at me and asked, “What do you mean by that?”

“I...I mean I’m a woman. The church has never had a female pastor,” I replied.

Her blue eyes locked onto mine: “And why should that matter?”

I would like to say that her words cured me of my doubts, but that wouldn’t be true. That conversation did, however, set me down a path of acceptance. I

stopped trying to fit myself into my image of a middle-aged man in a suit and tie. Instead, when I stepped behind the pulpit, I tried to show up as exactly who I had always been, exactly who I wanted my children to see. After the service, I shook hands while holding a toddler on my hip.

I cried as people shared their grief in prayer requests. I preached the

scriptures with special attention to the women in the texts.

Over these years, I have been shocked by both the audacity and the beauty of being a female pastor. I have been mistaken for the church secretary more times than I can count.

A man once phoned my office looking for pastoral counseling, only to launch into a sexually explicit story.

I overanalyze my Sunday morning wardrobe and wonder if my male counterparts do the same. After one Sunday morning service, all the women of the church headed to the kitchen to begin setting out the potluck lunch. A man stopped me and said, "It's not the pastor's job to be in the kitchen. You should be out here talking with your congregation."

I swallowed my anger and replied as evenly as I could, "Exactly whose job is it, then, to be in the kitchen? Isn't that also my congregation in that kitchen?"

My heart rate rises at those memories, but it's the moments of beauty and hope that remind me that this is good work that is worth doing. It's knowing that I'm standing on the shoulders of so many women in this denomination who have gone before, who did things for the first time, so that I could be welcomed. It's the little girl from the community who said: "I didn't know girls could be pastors." I smiled: "They definitely can."

It's the women who thank me for preaching our stories from scripture.

On one occasion, I visited a man who had been part of the congregation his

whole life. I was struck when he told me that was the first pastoral visit he had ever received. It was the first time a pastor had appeared at his door for



Photo by Taylor Summach.

One evening I was sitting at the kitchen table with my daughter, the child who had started me on this surprising journey. We were talking about jobs and occupations.

"Maybe you'll be a pastor someday," I suggested.

"Maybe," she replied cheerfully, "but I think I'd rather be a zookeeper."

Her off-hand comment came as a joyous gift to me. She had no concept that women were once barred from the pulpit—no idea that her mother's role is still somewhat of an anomaly.

To her, being a pastor was something she could choose as a grown-up. It was the same to her as any other job. The world, in all its sacred goodness, was wide open to her. Hallelujah. ☯

Emily Summach grew up attending an Evangelical Baptist Church in Roseau, Minnesota. In 2009, she graduated from

Providence University College in Otterburne, Manitoba. Summach recently accepted a full-time position as lead pastor at Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon starting in April.

coffee and conversation. The relational side of ministry is too often minimized.

I see people's longing for a church in which everyone's gifts can be used to build up the body.

CM FOR DISCUSSION

1. How has your congregation benefited from leadership of women?
2. Are there ways in which women's leadership, whether recognized or behind the scenes, is stifled or undervalued?
3. What more can your congregation do to create space for everyone's gifts?
4. What stories of the goodness of women's leadership can your congregation tell?

-Staff

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Cascade Ruby-Gold flint, Arkhipov White Dent, and Tuscarora White flour corn braided and hung for storage. Photo by Andre Wiederkehr.

The maize of peace

By Theo Wiederkehr

By avocation, I am an historian with a strong interest in global geopolitics, so it feels odd to be a subsistence farmer. I spend much of my time just meeting my daily needs, while hearing about wars in Ukraine, Gaza and elsewhere.

Does my life ignore others' pain? Could I do more?

I constantly seek to discern whether my life and work is a faithful response to suffering in those places.

As I see it, my subsistence life is a crucial response to war. A foundation of my analysis is an awareness that Gaza and Ukraine are only two of many crises. People in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Myanmar, among other places, are also suffering greatly. Our response to war must include them too.

We need war

Wars are not usually due to a single cause. Any large-scale conflict has many people approaching it from many perspectives, with many different stories of what drove

them to that point. But one thread that I see running through the conflicts listed above is a desire for material security. Humans want to make sure we will have enough (and more than enough), and that no one will wrest our stuff from us.

I don't think desiring security is wrong. The problem is that we need to balance meeting our legitimate needs with keeping them small enough to remain within the physical limits of our planet. When we use non-renewable resources to meet our needs, or when we use renewable resources faster than they renew themselves, they eventually run out.

Then, we either have to do without (a rather unpalatable proposition for essentials like food, water, shelter and fuel), or get resources somewhere else. If others already claim those resources, we need to take the resources away from them. We call this colonialism. If they resist, we call what happens next war.

Pacifism places boundaries on how we

live. We halt the pattern of colonialism and war by limiting both the type and the quantity of resources we use.

We can use only renewable resources, and only at a rate less than their rate of recharge. There can be some exceptions for easily recyclable and abundant materials such as iron and silica (for glass), but relying too heavily on exceptions is risky.

The place of maize

Corn, also known as maize, offers a powerful case study in colonialism and pacifism. Corn has shaped our society tremendously. Domesticated in Central America 8,000-9,000 years ago, it reached my region of Southern Ontario somewhere between 0 and 1,000 AD. Everywhere it went, it changed cultures dramatically.

Two characteristics were key to its effect: big seeds that could be planted with simple tools immediately after forest had been cleared, and the ability to produce

more carbohydrates per hectare than any crop before it on this continent. This allowed for higher population densities and complex societies.

When Europeans arrived on this continent, they appreciated corn's uniqueness. They promptly adopted it and carried it to southern Europe and Africa, where it became a staple.

But the colonists' iron tools allowed them to clear far more land far faster than the Indigenous peoples had. Private land ownership prevented shifting cultivation. An expanding population and the option to sell excess produce encouraged them to grow more and more corn, year after year, on the same fields. This pattern of rising resource use without recharge for the land was one factor which drove them to displace Indigenous people across the continent.

Eventually, colonists covered the whole continent. Eventually, we also figured out how to bring in replacement nutrients to fertilize the land and keep it productive. Fossil fuels were critical in this process.

This is a terribly brief and simplified summary of our continent's history with corn, but there is truth in it. As I bike past huge fields of perfectly uniform, genetically-modified hybrid corn on my way to church, I recognize them as the logical development of how we have historically related to corn, the land and our fellow human beings.

But our relationship did not, and does not, have to develop this way. An alternative approach involves identifying limits and choosing to abide within them. In our time, and in our excessively wealthy society, this will require nearly all of us in Canada to decrease our consumption.

Paradoxically, one way our household seeks to do that is by growing corn.

Maize on our place

Our corn-growing is not conventional in our time and place. We do

all the work by hand: cultivation, planting, fertilizing with our humanure, harvesting, storage (braided and hung in our house),

shelling, and processing it into our meals. Usually it ends up as polenta, various cornbready things or hominy.

Corn makes up about 1/5 of the carbohydrates in our diet. We expect to eventually double that.

We grow open-pollinated flint, flour and dent corns and save seed for them all. It is a lot of work, but it is also wonderful to work with corn. It is a beautiful plant that turns into delicious dishes.

How, then, does our little corn patch form part of our response to war?

As a person of relative wealth on this Earth, I have a responsibility to diminish my use of resources. Growing our own corn helps us reduce the energy and technology required to feed us. If we weren't doing this, our food would require fossil fuels in every step mentioned above.

Growing corn our way takes more time and thus keeps us tied to this place through the seasons, naturally reducing leisure activities and travel which would use more fossil fuel or electricity.

As I see it, if I am to speak against what Israel is doing in Gaza, or what Russia is doing in Ukraine, or what Western capitalism is doing in countless places, I must first work at removing the metaphorical log from my own eye. If I don't, my critique is undermined by my diet, which tacitly states that I intend to continue depending on colonialism and war to feed me.

This work is part of my faith. It is part of my effort to try to live up to my words, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven."

I try to say that humbly. I know that by my own strength and willpower I can never come near it, but I hope that by God's grace I might get closer.

In explaining my response to war, I do not want to criticize too harshly those who choose to get in the way of war more directly, by protesting



Photos, from top: Two ways to plant corn. Corn freshly fertilized with humanure. Theo Wiederkehr in the corn patch. Theo with braids of flint corn. Photos by Andre Wiederkehr.



Flint corn drying in the sun. Photo by Andre Wiederkehr.

here at home or by actively entering conflict zones through organizations like Community Peacemaker Teams.

I appreciate and honour the desperate need to respond to acute suffering with immediacy. But I see that work as primarily treating symptoms. I think we also need to treat the underlying disease if we ever want to hope to hold the evil of war in remission for the long term. The two approaches need to be held in balance, and the work of subsistence does not have nearly enough adherents yet.

As a community of faith that points to an alternative kingdom of shalom, we need to be able to say “Stop!” and simultaneously say, “There is another way. Look here. Plant these seeds. Root your living in the soil. Our survival does not have to depend on the destruction of others.”

Theo Wiederkehr is part of a household of subsistence farmers near Mildmay, Ontario. He is breeding a new variety/grex of white dent corn. Theo can be reached at rumithan@gmail.com.



Bill Block, a retired pastor in Winnipeg, turned 90 last month. Photo by Aaron Epp.



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Bill Block in 1990. Photo courtesy of the Mennonite Heritage Archives.

Short pants and fundamentalism

An interview with Bill Block

By Aaron Epp

Associate Editor

From southern Manitoba to B.C., and from Idaho to India, Bill Block had a long and varied career as a pastor. Along the way, he and his wife Dolores, who died in 2019, raised four children.

Block, who is a founding member of Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, spoke with Canadian Mennonite four days after his 90th birthday. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What is your earliest memory of church?

When I was four or five, we had a Sunday School Christmas Eve program. I remember confronting my mom and my aunt Margaret—I was complaining because I was wearing short pants with stockings. “I’m not going up there in short pants to say my Spruch (reading).” I was too old to wear short pants. But Aunt Margaret said, “Oh but you’re so handsome” or whatever... I could see right through that. That’s my first memory of church.

What is your best memory of church?

I have so bloomin’ many, you know? Christmas Eve again. My kid is up there reciting at Christmastime and his poem had a line, “In Jesus’s name,” and he’s a preacher’s kid so he puts an “Amen” on the end of it, which wasn’t in the script. That’s a bit of a highlight that sticks out in my mind. It was quite an improvement over the short pants, I would say.

What is your most difficult memory of church?

The great divisions and separations that have come from our sexuality journey—just the suspicion and the dividedness and the judgmentalism that comes with that. I think it goes both ways: You can be a fundamentalist at both ends of the spectrum.

Tell us about the people who have influenced you the most.

At [Canadian Mennonite Bible College], I ran into a guy named Nicholas Dick who was around six years older than me. He took me under his wing in a way. He was a thinker, and he knew some things about the world, so he raised an awareness in my mind about some realities about life and a little bit of philosophy. Professor Jacob Enz was also an influence. He taught Old Testament courses. He was a polio survivor, walked with a limp, ponderous—the thing I learned from him is that a messy desk is OK. His desk was a mess, and he was slow, but if you waited for him, there was wisdom.

Can you share a favourite book, passage, poem or song?

“Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts” (#98 in The Mennonite Hymnal [1969]), attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux. I sang it to Dolores many a night: “Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts! Thou fount of life! Thou light of men! From the best bliss that man imparts, we turn unfilled

to Thee again. Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood; Thou savest those that on Thee call; To them that seek Thee, Thou art good, to them that find Thee, all in all.” If I ever get trapped and someone says, “Hey, come up here and preach,” I would preach that. The whole thing is just a beautiful sermon.

What don’t young people understand about old age?

They can’t imagine it happening to them. They have a very limited grasp, imagination-wise, of what it is. And I think that’s as it should be. I don’t think that’s a defect. Why should they get that?

What is the hardest thing about getting old?

Fear of losing your mind or not being able to communicate. The fear of losing yourself, your dignity, your knowledge and your place in the scheme of things. Also, I had a friend, Bill Kruger, and he would say something in Low German: *Eena weet soo fael, oba kjeena frajcht.* (One knows so much but nobody asks.) I think that many an old person has that feeling.

What is the best thing about getting old?

Discovering that fellowship and friendship are worth more than money. I just made that up. I wonder if anybody’s ever thought of that before. [Laughs.] You should write that down. ☺

Fifty years of listening to poets

Mennonite literature scholar Hildi Froese Tiessen looks back in new essay collection

By Aaron Epp
Associate Editor

A new book celebrates the work of one of the foremost scholars of Mennonite literature.

On Mennonite/s Writing: Selected Essays is the first collection of work by Hildi Froese Tiessen, professor emerita of English and peace and conflict studies at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo.

Edited by Robert Zacharias and published last December by CMU Press, the book includes 18 essays that reflect a half-century of critical engagement.

“A lot of Mennonite writing illumines the ambivalence and desire, the confusion and comfort a person of faith might encounter,” Froese Tiessen says. “Like all great literature, the finest writing by Mennonites is full of seekers, characters interested in spiritual things, people who strive to live well together.”

In 1973, Froese Tiessen published one of the earliest academic essays about Rudy Wiebe’s fiction. Since then, she has examined the literary careers of writers like Di Brandt, Patrick Friesen, Sandra Birdsell and David Waltner-Toews in essays, book chapters and talks.

She is credited with shaping the field of contemporary Mennonite literary studies.

Still, when Zacharias suggested the idea for a collection of her work more than a decade ago, Froese Tiessen wasn’t interested. She was wary of the amount of work that goes into editing a collection and wanted to direct her energies to fresh writing instead.

Zacharias approached her with the idea again in 2022, with the offer that he would edit the collection and CMU Press would publish it. This time, Froese Tiessen was receptive.

“So why did I say yes? This question offers me an opportunity to thank Rob Zacharias and (CMU Press publisher) Sue



Hildi Froese Tiessen, a scholar of Mennonite literature, has published a collection of essays that span 50 years. Supplied photo.

Sorensen, who worked so very hard on my book—who were generous and forbearing, skillful and insightful on every front,” Froese Thiessen says. “They made this book. I was privileged to be able, nevertheless, to have ‘the last word.’ What a gift.”

That last word is “Some Hidden Rhythm,” an essay she wrote specifically for the collection. In it, she reflects on her experience as a scholar of Mennonite literature and the changing nature of the field.

Revisiting 50 years of her work left Froese Tiessen with the strong sense that there was a coherence to her critical approach and that she had come to the end of some kind of cycle in her own writing and thinking.

“Whatever that project was, [it] was coming to completion or had been completed,” she says.

For Zacharias, a professor at Toronto’s York University, it was obvious that a collection of Froese Tiessen’s work

needed to be published.

Between her scholarly work and her involvement organizing Mennonite/s Writing, a series of international conferences that started in 1990, Froese Tiessen hasn’t commented on the field of Mennonite literary studies so much as she’s enabled it, Zacharias says.

“She started fostering a critical conversation about Mennonites, bringing together authors and other scholars, and created a space where the rest of us could join a conversation,” Zacharias says. “There’s no question she’s been the animating figure for the critical conversations across North America.”

On Mennonite/s Writing was published with a few audiences in mind, including general readers. Zacharias notes that two of the essays originated as public talks intended for general audiences.

“It occurs to me there are people well beyond the literary community who would find a work like this genuinely worth dipping into,” Froese Tiessen says. “A lot of the work I did has a lot to do with the relationship between a community and a writer more than delving into a text... It’s much broader than a conventional literary analysis.”

A Kitchener-Waterloo area launch for the book will be held in the chapel at Conrad Grebel on Thursday, April 4, at 7:30 p.m. Froese Tiessen hopes to hold a launch in Winnipeg, where she was raised, later this year.

For Froese Tiessen, who attends Rockway Mennonite Church in Kitchener, her work as a teacher, administrator, scholar and event organizer has all been part of her spiritual being.

“I think my writing reveals that my faith was alternately challenged, enhanced and sustained by the many stories and poems I

was privileged to read and teach,” she says. She points to something that American writer Jeff Gundy once said: “I believe that we will benefit from listening to our poets. I doubt that they will save us, but I believe they can make us a little less lost.” ❧



Hildi’s recommendations

Who is your favourite Mennonite writer? Or, whose work do you find yourself revisiting most often?

I am not being disingenuous when I say that I don’t think in terms of favourites. I do often revisit the work of Mennonite writers. The texts I might be drawn to depend on my circumstance and mood.

Often, I am drawn to work that offers the kind of evocative intimacy I might find in Rudy Wiebe’s beautiful memoir of childhood, *Of This Earth*, or the compelling sensuousness of Patrick Friesen’s *The Shunning*. Other times I might seek out the acerbic wit of Miriam Toews or Dallas Wiebe.

What is your favourite book by a Mennonite writer?

Depending on my mood, I might enjoy some of the domestically inspired poetry of Jeff Gundy, Sarah Klassen or Julia Kasdorf. Or I might return to the fiction of Rudy Wiebe, from the thoroughly accessible (and profoundly prophetic) *Peace Shall Destroy Many* to the more challenging and more complexly rewarding *The Blue Mountains of China* or *Sweeter Than All the World*.

What is your favourite poem by a Mennonite writer?

I find myself revisiting work as delicious as Patrick Friesen’s “An Audience with the Dalai Lama” or as moving as some of the gently evocative unnamed pieces near the front of Di Brandt’s *questions i asked my mother*.

What is the most recent book you’ve read by a Mennonite writer?

David Bergen’s *Away From the Dead*, a fabulous novel by an extraordinary writer who somehow never wastes a word. Before that, I read Sarah Klassen’s *The*

Russian Daughter, which I also greatly enjoyed. And poetry. Sarah Ens’ *Flyway* is one of many terrific newer poetry collections published recently by younger—and older—poets.

Is there a Mennonite writer that has emerged in the last 10-15 years whose work you’ve enjoyed?

The luminous beauty of the early chapters of Sofia Samatar’s *The White Mosque* grabbed my attention, as did the startling provocations embedded in Rachel Yoder’s *Nightbitch* or Elina Penner’s (German language) *Nachtbeeren*.

If someone is new to Mennonite literature, where do you suggest they start?

What comes immediately to mind is this: If you like to read prose, why not start with *Liars and Rascals*, a collection I edited that includes really wonderful short fiction by Rudy Wiebe, David Waltner-Toews, Sandra Birdsell, Sarah Klassen, Armin Wiebe, Andreas Schroeder and others. If you like poetry, seek out Ann Hostetler’s compilation of 24 Mennonite poets entitled *A Capella*. Decide which of these writers you like and move on from there. For an accessible critical essay on Mennonite writing, you might visit chapter 11 of my new book. Goshen College’s online Center for Mennonite Writing (mennonitewriting.org) is a great source for those interested in what is happening in the field now. ❧



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'Stuck together' at MCBC AGM

Story by Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

With the theme of "Stuck Together," delegates from all 23 congregations rejoiced together, wrestled with a budget deficit and welcomed a new church plant at the 2024 Mennonite Church B.C. annual meeting.

Prayers were offered throughout the day in various languages spoken in MCBC congregations: Spanish, German, Hmong, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese and Chinese. The meeting took place February 24 at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford.

A presentation titled "The Big Challenge is to Listen Well," by J. Nelson Kraybill of Elkhart, Indiana, began the morning plenary session. "Most of society has lost the will to listen," said the former head of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, explaining that the tribal tendency to affiliate almost exclusively with our own kind is a danger in society. Urging people to listen to those with other views, Kraybill said, "It might change us!"

During the business session, delegates approved a motion related to the Peardonville property, the site of the former Clearbrook Mennonite Church, which closed in 2015. The property was sold last year for \$6 million. Delegates decided that 10 percent of the sale proceeds will go into a fund for the Indigenous Relations Task Group, another 10 percent will go into a fund for MCBC leadership and the remaining 80 percent into a fund "to support starting new congregations, revitalization, service, peace and justice initiatives and leadership training in individual congregations." Camp Squeah is included alongside congregations in this case.

This will be revisited in three years.

The proposed 2024 budget was approved, including funds for a new Youth Director position and \$260,000 for church revitalization and church plant projects. It was noted that even with the Peardonville funds covering the expenses

noted above, the resulting net deficit is \$121,417. This amount will be withdrawn from unrestricted reserves.

Some people emphasized the need to address structural deficits so that MCBC can be a denomination for the future, not just the present and the past. Steve Unger, a member of the Finance Committee, admitted that, "It's been a difficult budget to work with. I don't like to spend the money, but we're Canadians and we live with deficit." Tim Miller, MCBC finance chair, noted that the deficit was not sustainable. "If, after the next two years, our income levels do not improve and the budget deficits persist, MCBC will need to relook at staffing and program costs," he said.

Other matters of note from the sessions included the following.

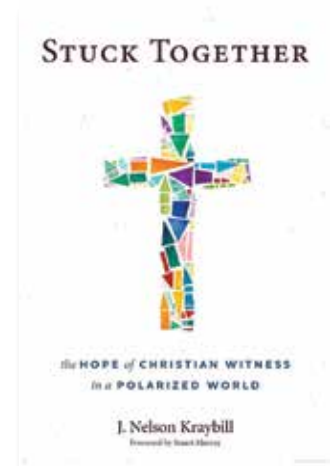
Jordan Pilgrim, pastor of Valley Road Church in Kelowna, gave a video report describing the new church plant as "moving forward with the Anabaptist vision" in that city. The congregation began meeting in January and has attracted many people, including young families, who live in the neighbourhood. Approximately 50 people attend.

It was announced that MCBC's young adults are holding a gathering at Camp Squeah in June. The theme is "Faith, Activism and Church: Building an Active Future."

Steve Brown was introduced as the new president of Columbia Bible College, which is jointly owned by MCBC and the Mennonite Brethren conference.

This was the first MCBC AGM that Shel Boese, executive minister since last August, had attended. In his remarks, Boese reminded the audience: "You do not exist for the regional church; the regional church exists for you. We are called to be focussed on who Christ is, the one thing that can hold us together."

Highlights of the past year included Yarrow United Mennonite



celebrating its 85th anniversary and Eben-Ezer celebrating its 60th. In addition to Boese, two other new staff were hired: John Willms as half-time youth director, and Keith St. Jean as communications coordinator.

The previous day, J. Nelson Kraybill spoke at the LEAD sessions. The theme, "Stuck Together: The Hope of Christian Witness in a Polarized World," was based on his recently published book of the same name. Kraybill engaged the audience with Bible passages and personal anecdotes on the theme of lovingly engaging with those of opposing beliefs.

Speaking on the value of differing beliefs, Kraybill said, "Where everybody thinks alike, nobody thinks very much. I want a church with both liberal and conservative people in it. If we have only conservative, we have brakes and no accelerator. If we are only liberal, we end up with accelerator and no brakes."

He added that it is natural to want to associate with people like us, but the negative side is that "we become destructive; we diminish or disparage other people."

In later sessions, Kraybill pointed out polarization in Jesus' time, when most Jews did not accept Jewish Christians, and neither group accepted Gentiles. In this climate, Jesus reached across boundaries and ministered in love, associating with people whose life choices he did not condone. ▮

Beyond revenge: The story of Maoz Inon

Staff

Maoz Inon is an Israeli Jewish social entrepreneur and peace advocate. During a February online event—Part I of the Peace & Possibility events—he shared the story of his parents being murdered by Hamas and his family’s astonishing journey to peace.

The following excerpts are from an online event with Inon that *Canadian Mennonite* convened in collaboration with *Anabaptist World*, *Christian Courier* and the Mennonite Church Canada Palestine-Israel Network.

Inon started by sharing a vision he saw on the third night after his parents, Bilha and Yakovi Inon, were murdered at their home in Netiv Ha’asara, Israel.

I would like to open with a vision. . . . I woke up at night, my entire body was aching with pain like I have never experienced before. I woke up crying, and through my tears I could see [all] humanity, all mankind was crying. We were all crying—Israelis and Palestinians, between the river and the sea, and in the entire world—we were crying.

And then I could see the tears falling on our body and our body was wounded, wounded from the war, from so many wars we’ve been waging on each other. And our tears washed our bodies and healed the wounds.

It was a miracle that our bodies became whole again And then I looked on the ground, and the ground was red from blood. . . . And then our tears, after healing our bodies, washed the ground and they cured the ground. And then I could see through my tears, the beautiful ground and I could see the path of peace.

It was the second morning of the Shiva [the Jewish ritual period of mourning] when my brother said . . . “I want from our personal tragedy and community tragedy to send a universal message. And I want our message to be [that] we are not calling for revenge for our murdered parents.

“We just want to end the cycle of blood,

the cycle of war.”

And this is the message we started crying, and shouting and speaking from that moment.

As the Shiva ended, after a week of crying, suddenly my mind cleared and became very sharp. And I told myself, Maoz you have a mission, and your mission is to convince yourself and to convince everyone else that the future is going to be a better future. . . .

I have learned many lessons [since then], most of them from Palestinians. And the support we received as a family from Palestinians within Israel, in the West Bank, and the in Arab world for our message was so powerful. And they gave us so much hope in human beings. It made us very, very strong.

In Israel, there are 120 parliament members. They only parliament members who called us were Palestinians.

[Referring to Palestinian peace advocate Hamze Awawde who appeared with Inon’s brother on the BBC:] I told myself, I want to be a great person like Hamze. I want to be able to forgive.

So I said, I’m forgiving. I’m forgiving Hamas, I’m forgiving the Israeli government.

I reduce and erase all the anger within me and I’m just concentrating on building the future. . . .

We are talking about two different stories, two different narratives—the Palestinian and the Israeli. And those narratives split in the holy books, with the

different chosen sons, Isaac and Ishmael. And then the stories split and . . . the gap is getting wider as we get closer to the present with the Israeli Jewish Zionist movement and the Palestinian national movement and all the wars we have been waging



Photo by Tomer Applebaum.

But there is a miracle; it’s a true miracle. We meet. We meet in the future. We see the same future. So many Israeli and Palestinians share the same future—a future that is based on equality, based on justice, based on reconciliation, based on security for everyone, based on “you shall not [seek] revenge.”

Now we have to project this future through our minds, through our souls, and to be able to model it.

This is something we have forgotten in the Middle East and maybe in the Western world—to use our political imagination to dream and believe in a better future. . . . Now we are starting [to] model it, and building the steps and the roadmap to reach this future. ☸

To watch the interview, see tinyurl.com/mipp2024 or visit the *Anabaptist World* YouTube channel.

SCHOOLS

Photo by Lucas George Wendt/Unsplash.

A tribute to two teachers

By James Friesen, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate
WINNIPEG

Since its inception, both the Choral program and the German program have been a strong part of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate's identity. Next school year, both of these programs will look very different as Westgate's choral director, Vic Pankratz, and Westgate's German teacher, Charlotte Kroeker, are both enjoying their last year at the school.

Throughout his long tenure at Westgate, Vic has created an exceptional choral program. He was able to connect with his students by leading worship in our city churches, leading music tours and creating musical productions like "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" which won the Rainbow Stage award of excellence.

It seemed that in every corner of the school, Vic has inspired students to enjoy singing and making music together.

Through music Vic was able to connect with the community beyond Westgate. He recalls arriving at Nutana Mennonite Church in Saskatoon with 70 students and being invited to join a family gathering. Somehow they had enough food, and Vic felt like he had stumbled into another version of the loaves and fishes story. Events like this epitomized the way Vic's musical leadership brought people together.

The level of music that Vic brought to the school was exceptional. Throughout Westgate's performances at ChoralFest, our choirs were always recommended to perform at the National Music Festivals.

Through Vic's leadership, Westgate's choirs have received incredible affirmation from other choral educators in the city.

Charlotte's classes have been full of meaning beyond simply the instruction of German. She recalls explaining the literal translation of *auf wiedersehen* to her class—that it means "until we meet again"—and seeing one of her student's eyes fill with tears. This student shared how the explanation made her understand what her grandfather said to her just before he passed away.

Moments like these showed how Charlotte was able to create a community of caring in her classroom, one in which students could share about their lives, as they worked together to learn the language.

And truly they did learn the language. Charlotte is proud to leave a school that has become a PASCH school, part of a

global network of some 1,500 schools that place a high value on German language education.

International connections are important to Charlotte, as she has shown with her work in coordinating the Manitoba German Exchange Program for students. She showed much hospitality, inviting a steady stream of German exchange teachers to our school.

So many current students and alumni have been given the gifts of music and language by these two exceptional teachers. So many have beautiful memories of visiting different parts of North America, singing in churches and other venues, or being abroad in Germany on the exchange program. Through the dedicated work of these teachers, Westgate surely will continue to be filled with students saying "I love singing" and "I love German." ❧



Vic Pankratz conducting during the 2023 Westgate Christmas concert. Photo by Natalie Johnson.



Photos by Bryan Berg and Steffan Pauls.

Being good people, competitively

By Allison Murray, Rockway Mennonite Collegiate
KITCHENER, ONTARIO

Is it ever okay to protest outside of a politician’s home? What obligations do bystanders have when witnessing a fight, mugging or street harassment? Are progressive fines, such as those that would require wealthy people to pay more for things like speeding tickets, ethically justifiable?

These are some of the moral dilemmas Rockway students reflected on in this year’s Ontario Ethics Bowl (OEB) season.

Participating in the Ethics Bowl encourages students to develop thoughtful and informed responses to important ethical questions and to work cooperatively within their own teams and with teams from other schools as they wrestle with big ideas and their implications.

The OEB compiles a set of case studies for teams from across the province to work through. Each team of 3-7 students has to develop a position on the best course of action for each of the cases. They must include rationale for their positions, consider potential objections to their positions, and come up with responses to those objections.



Students from Rockway’s Ethics Bowl teams musing together over big questions at the University of Guelph regional competition. Photo by Deb Baxter Heeney.

In a match, they also need to respond to the other team’s position, and answer questions from judges, who are usually professors or PhD students in philosophy.

This was Rockway’s second season competing in the OEB. We entered two teams: Kant Stop, Won’t Stop, named in honour of the moral philosopher Immanuel Kant; and Bend It Like Bentham (named in honour of Jeremy Bentham, the founder of utilitarianism).

After meeting together weekly starting in October, both teams competed in this year’s Regional Qualifier at the University of Guelph on February 10. It was a long day of competition with three separate matches for each team. Kant Stop, Won’t Stop responded masterfully when a scheduling error meant they had to present a different case than the one they had prepared. They had only five minutes’ notice. In spite of that, they managed to tie the match, which was an amazing feat.

Bend It Like Bentham was 2-1 at the end of the day, earning them a 5th place finish. Unfortunately, only the top two teams moved on to the Provincial Championship, so our season came to a close at the regional event. Judges gave us positive feedback, and one told us we had their favourite team names—an excellent consolation prize.

I am grateful to my fellow teacher-coach Mr. Penny for helping facilitate this rich opportunity for our students. Plans are already underway to make our next season in the Ethics Bowl even better. ☘



Supplied photo.

Vegetables as service

How a week of chopping and dehydrating shaped perspectives

RJC High School
ROSTHERN, SASKATCHEWAN

For most people, cutting vegetables is just part of their regular daily routine. There aren't many lessons to be learned from chopping onions and peppers. But for the Grade 10 RJC students who spend time at the Okanagan Gleaners, the simple act of chopping veggies can shape their worldview.

Every year during RJC's Alternative Learning and Service Opportunities (ALSO) week, the Grade 10 class goes to volunteer with the Gleaners in Oliver, B.C. The Gleaners' mission is to take produce that would otherwise be wasted and turn it into healthy food that is sent to hungry people around the world.

When the RJC class heads to the Gleaners, they work alongside other volunteers, who are often older. That intergenerational experience is fun and meaningful for the students.

"The people we were working with were so open to working with a bunch of teenagers," says Eliza Rinholm, a Grade 11 student who went on the Gleaners trip last year. "They treated us as equals and with respect. And we worked really well together . . . we just really had a good time working with them."

Having a group of students for the week is also a nice change of energy for



An RJC student processing discarded vegetables at the Okanagan Gleaners in Oliver, B.C. Supplied photo.

the regular staff and volunteers. "It's so exciting," says Greg Masson, general manager of the Okanagan Gleaners. "New energy, youthful exuberance. And

youngsters that are so willing to learn about helping others that are struggling."

That learning component is a big part of what RJC hopes students will take away from their time at the Gleaners. RJC principal David Epp says in the lead up to the trip they gave students three frames of reference to think about their work at the Gleaners.

First is Menno Simons's concept of true evangelical faith that becomes fruit of the spirit. Second is the song "Will You Let Me Be Your Servant." The last one is a prayer by Teresa of Ávila in which she speaks of the idea that Christ has no hands and feet on the earth except ours.

RJC appreciates how the school's long-standing partnership with the Gleaners allows students a place to learn and practice service. "We have just this amazing classroom to teach lessons about service and learning and relationships, global responsibility and food insecurity," says Epp. "It has been so affirming to work with an organization that understands part of their role as teaching young people how to be servants. . . . This vision of work that is peace-oriented is put before students and then they are shown ways in which their efforts can contribute to that in meaningful ways." ❧



Photo by Margaret Gissing

Grounded in support and community

By Jiho Mercer, Conrad Grebel University College
WATERLOO, ONTARIO

For Kalkidan Ararso, a second year Arts and Business student at the University of Waterloo, the transition to university life was grounded in support and community.

“My friend suggested that I check out the Conrad Grebel University College residence because of the Mennonite community,” explained Kalkidan, who attends Meheret Evangelical Church in Kitchener. “Once I got a glimpse of the people and support system there, I formed an instant connection.”

Soon after moving in, Kalkidan became friends with her roommate and embraced Grebel’s informal “Fill the Table” tradition, which urges students to fill a table before starting a new one at mealtimes, as a way of fostering a welcoming community.

Given her Mennonite background, Kalkidan was surrounded by others of similar values and beliefs, which served as a starting point for conversation. “Connecting with others was easy at Grebel because I felt like I could relate to everybody on some level, even with those who weren’t Mennonite,” she explained. “Since I was on the same page as my peers, I was able to have certain conversations without feeling uncomfortable.”

Kalkidan noted two of her favourite



Kalkidan Ararso in the Grebel Dining Hall.
Photo by Margaret Gissing.

courses at Grebel. “I particularly enjoyed PACS 101 Peace is Everybody’s Business with Eric Lepp and RS 335 The Violence of the Bible with Derek Suderman,” she said.

“My friend recommended that I take RS 335, and I found it to be incredibly

insightful. As a Christian, sometimes I struggle with aspects of the Bible, namely when comparing the Old Testament to the New Testament,” Kalkidan said. “I also took this course amid the Israel and Palestine conflict. RS 335 acted as a safe space where I developed my own spiritual understanding of the world by having honest, vulnerable discussion with my classmates.”

Kalkidan is an active contributor to the Grebel community and is living at Grebel again this winter. She participates in Tuesday Bible Studies, helps wash dishes in the kitchen, and led a Community Supper during her first year. Even when she moved out of residence for a term for the fall, Kalkidan still called Grebel home. “I still had classes at Grebel, and I became a Grebel associate and participated in Community Suppers. I had no trouble maintaining a connection with the Grebel community after I moved out.”

To those nervous about living or taking classes at Grebel, Kalkidan offered assurance. “First year is always stressful, but the Grebel community is a warm one. Being able to talk with the upper years made me feel incredibly welcomed, and since then, I’ve continued to surround myself with good people.” ❧



Photo by David Pennington/Unsplash

AMBS and MC Canada increase collaboration

By Annette Brill Bergstresser, AMBS
ELKHART, INDIANA

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary's Forming Leaders Together campaign has been providing new avenues for collaboration between the seminary and organizations around the world. One such collaboration is a partnership between AMBS and Mennonite Church Canada International Witness. The collaboration is bearing fruit in the following initiatives.

Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program

Thailand

A lay pastor training for a large group of congregations in Thailand launched in the fall of 2023 with a cohort of 20 students. Jonah Yang (MA 2018), AMBS Doctor of Ministry in Leadership student, and Memee Yang, Mennonite Mission Network service worker, are serving as teachers, mentors and translators. International Witness workers Tom and Christine Poovong are serving as translators, mentors and fellow students.

Participant Damnern Chonklang—who co-leads a house church with Fareeya Chonklang in Phrae, Thailand—said that while there are a lot of online study programs in Thailand, most are not connected to a real seminary.

"I appreciate being taught by a reputable seminary," he reflected. "It is also helpful to have the content in English because if I want to connect with the global church, I



Thai participants in the Journey program study together several times per year (clockwise from left): Piti Ounsup, Supasith Nonyaso, Dokmai Nonyaso, Phonexay Mahasongkham, Samai Naivimol and Prayat Naivimol. Supplied photo.

need to learn this vocabulary and how to talk about faith and the church in English."

Philippines

Six lay leaders and pastors in the Integrated Mennonite Church (IMC) in the Philippines are taking the Journey program in English as a first step in obtaining Anabaptist pastoral training for their family of congregations.

Participant Regina Lyn Sumatra said she joined the program because she wanted to grow in leadership, especially in the context of leading a church or faith-based organization.

"Going through the lessons has allowed me to grow in so many ways," she said. "The lessons are meticulously designed so that you can have an introspective experience in understanding the word of God. The forums and sessions with my

mentor are great opportunities to share my reflections as well as to hear how God is speaking to the other participants."

IMC Bishop Eladio Mondez hopes the program will mobilize leaders to talk about further opportunities for Anabaptist education in Asia.

"IMC has no Mennonite Bible school or college where those called to ministry can be trained in the Mennonite belief and practice," he said. "The AMBS Journey program is needed to fill this gap."

Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism in South Korea and Ethiopia

While International Witness is not directly involved with these programs, International Witness Director Jeanette Hanson said that Witness workers in both locations are working to further Anabaptist education for Mennonite congregations and beyond.

"I'm so excited about our collaboration with AMBS," she said. "For decades in Asia, I've heard requests for Anabaptist education from groups of small churches that couldn't sustain their own seminary. They were looking to collaborate with an established institution that would be flexible enough to meet their needs. AMBS offers both academic excellence and the flexibility of an institution focused on service to the global church, and I look forward to seeing how God will continue to lead us together." ❧

UMEI hires new principal

UMEI Christian High School
LEAMINGTON, ONTARIO

Earlier this school year, the current principal of UMEI Christian High School, Sonya Bedal, announced her retirement effective June 2024. Mrs. Bedal has served the UMEI community for 26 years, with the last 14 as principal.

She is known for her tireless support of students and staff, and her ability to approach challenges and opportunities with warmth, compassion and a positive attitude. The UMEI community is beyond grateful for her dedication and hard work.

With this news, the UMEI Board of Directors is pleased to announce Mr. Darcy Bults as UMEI's new principal, beginning September 2024.

Mr. Bults has taught at UMEI for over 12 years, serving as vice principal for the past two years. He has a proven track record of leadership, a passion for creating an enriching and supportive learning environment, and a dedication



Darcy Bults will take over as principal of UMEI in September 2024. Supplied photo.

to Christian education.

"We are confident that he will bring fresh perspectives, energy and innovative ideas to lead UMEI into the next chapter

of its journey," says board chair Mat Suta.

Mr. Bults' began teaching at UMEI in 2011 after spending the majority of his education at Christian schools. He was instantly known as an expert teacher who valued preparing students for post-secondary education and employment pursuits after high school. His expertise in History and Physical Education helped to transform UMEI courses such as Grade 10 History, World History, Kinesiology and Recreation & Leadership. He has also taught many technology courses, developing creative new ways of learning that provide practical and creative skills.

Mr. Bults is best known for his passion for athletics and championing the student-athlete model for Lightning Athletics. As UMEI's athletic director, he made great improvements in the athletic program, fostering deeper leadership, teamwork and dedication amongst the athletes.

He ensures that all students portray a Christian attitude and work ethic on and off the court, constantly reminding players that "the name on the front of their jersey is more important than the name on the back."

Mr. Bults' proven track record of leadership within the UMEI school community, combined with his professional qualifications, make him an outstanding choice to lead UMEI into the future.

"We look forward to a new era of growth under his capable leadership," says Mat Suta, "and the further impact that this growth will have on student success and outreach in the wider community."

Mr. Bults has a strong vision for the future of UMEI. "I'm looking forward to the future of our school, and commit to working hard to create an environment that challenges students academically to better prepare them for post-secondary education," says Mr. Bults. "On top of that, I'm committed to foster an environment that challenges our students to become doers of the Word, to welcome one another, and to live in harmony, all for the glory of God." ❧

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- **Leading Congregations in Transition**
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CM CALENDAR

British Columbia

April 19-21: Youth Impact Retreat at Camp Squeah.

June 7-9: Young Adult (18-35) Anabaptist Conference, "Faith, Activism, and Church: Building an Active Future" at Camp Squeah.

Alberta

March 22-23: Youth Leadership Team World Waterpark Weekend Edmonton

June 15: MCC Relief Sale, Bergthal.

Saskatchewan

April 6: Shekinah Retreat Centre summer camp fundraiser, "Puttin' on the Ribz '24." RSVP by March 28, doors open at 6 p. m., tickets at shekinahretreatcentre.org.

Manitoba

March 29: Soli Deo Gloria Choir presents "Lobgesang," a symphony-cantata by Mendelssohn on Good Friday at 7 p.m. at First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

May 4-5: Faith and Life Choirs Spring Concerts. First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg (4); Morden Mennonite Church, Morden (5).

May 10-11: Voices Together in Worship, a gathering to resource worship planners, pastors and musicians, hosted by MC Manitoba, sponsored by CMU. More information at www.mennochurch.mb.ca/events.

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

Ontario

March 22: Living History of Low German-Speaking Mennonites at Aylmer-Malahide Museum and Archives in Aylmer at 8:30 a.m. or 12:45 p.m. Register at mcc.org/events.

April 4: On Mennonite/s Writing book launch, 7:30 p. m. in Conrad Grebel's Chapel, Waterloo.

April 14: The Soli Deo Gloria Singers present "Letters from the Past" by Elaine Penner at Leamington United Mennonite Church at 3 p.m. All donations to Friends of the Mennonite Centre, Ukraine

April 16: John Dear on his book "The Gospel of Peace: A Commentary on Matthew, Mark and Luke from the Perspective of Non-Violence," in Guelph 3 p.m. All Saints Lutheran Anglican Church, Guelph.

April 24: Training Active Bystanders, 9:30 a.m. -12 p.m., 50 Kent Ave, Kitchener.

Apr. 26-27: MCEC Annual Church Gathering, "Transformed, Inspired, Called," at UMEI Christian High School in Leamington.

April 29: New Hamburg Relief Sale Promotional dinner, 6-9 p.m.

June 21: Aging and Spirituality seminar at Conrad Grebel, 9:30 a.m. More information at uwaterloo/grebel/events.

Aug. 11-23: Ontario Mennonite Music Camp at Conrad Grebel. A two-week overnight camp for students who have finished grades 6-12 to enrich faith, musicality and leadership. Register at uwaterloo.ca/grebel/ontario-mennonite-music-camp.

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.

CM CLASSIFIEDS

John Dear to Speak in Guelph

Peace activist, priest and author John Dear speaks at All Saints Lutheran Anglican Church, 210 Silvercreek Parkway N, Guelph, on Tuesday April 16 at 3 pm on his new book, *The Gospel of Peace: A Commentary on Matthew, Mark and Luke from the Perspective of Non-Violence*. Dear links the teachings of Jesus with the message of non-violence of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Free admission.

Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
March 29	Mar. 20
April 26	Apr 10

Advertising Information

Contact Ben Thiessen
1-800-378-2524 ext. 3
advert@canadianmennonite.org

NOTICE

53rd Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service Annual Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the members of the Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service (CMPS) for the year ending December 31, 2023, is scheduled for **May 8 at 7 p.m. ET by Zoom**.

CMPS is the non-profit corporation that publishes *Canadian Mennonite*. The agenda includes receiving reports from the board of directors, the 2023 financial statements, and election of new directors. The meeting is public. Voting is limited to CMPS members (individuals who donated at least \$25 in 2022 and who register in advance), and board members who represent the regional and nationwide Mennonite Church.

The board of directors includes:

- **MC Canada:** Annika Krause (Quebec), Tim Miller Dyck (Ontario), Aaron Penner (Manitoba), Donna Schulz (Saskatchewan)
- **MC British Columbia:** Mary Barg
- **MC Alberta:** Arthur Koop
- **MC Saskatchewan:** Alex Tiessen
- **MC Manitoba:** Brenda Suderman
- **MC Eastern Canada:** Karen Heese
- **Elected by CMPS:** Lois Epp (Alberta), Kathryn Lymburner (Ontario), after the meeting.

To register as a member for the annual meeting, please email office@canadianmennonite.org by **May 1, 2024** noting "**CMPS annual meeting**" in the subject line.

The annual report and audited financial statements will be posted at www.canadianmennonite.org, after the meeting.

**CANADIAN
MENNONITE**

CM TRANSITIONS



Graham McCarthy

joined Vancouver's Peace Church on 52nd as lead pastor on February 1. McCarthy will preach, do visitation and coordinate the congregation's outreach ministries. He

holds a BA in biblical studies from Prairie College in Three Hills, Alberta, and a master of divinity degree from Carey Theological College in Vancouver. McCarthy previously worked with children and youth at Union Gospel Mission and in spiritual care at Mount Saint Joseph Hospital. In his spare time, McCarthy is an active improv comedian.

—BY AMY RINNER WADDELL



Josh Hill will be the next principal at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ontario, starting on July 1. He is currently serving as vice principal. Hill was previously a teacher in the

Waterloo Region District School Board from 2005-22, including serving as department head for the music program in the school he worked at prior to joining Rockway's staff. He has held numerous volunteer roles in his community and is an active member of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

Anabaptist dictionary takes shape

The initial phase of Menno Media's Anabaptist Dictionary of the Bible is nearing completion. The free online project will include essays written about all 66 books of the Bible—49 are now posted—as well as 100 supplementary essays on a variety of themes. Essay titles include "Political Power" (related to Ecclesiastes), "War, Warfare" (Isaiah), "The Elite" (Lamentations) and "Women in Ministry" (I & II Timothy, and Titus). Search for "Anabaptist Dictionary of the Bible" online to access the materials. Source: Menno Media.

CM NEWS BRIEFS

MAID expansion blocked

On February 29, the Senate passed Bill C-62, meaning that the expansion of medical assistance in dying eligibility to include people suffering solely from a mental illness will be postponed for three years, until after the next election.

MCC war responses continue

Over the two years of escalated conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has raised more than \$19.5 million for emergency relief in Ukraine. Through MCC's partners in Ukraine, 331,976 meals have been served to the hungry, 131,406 food packages distributed and 3,810 people provided with temporary shelter.

In Gaza, MCC is sending cash transfers to people through its partner Near East Council of Churches. Although supplies in Gaza are minimal, the cash is used to buy what is available. Source: MCC

More rallies for Gaza

In collaboration with Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, Mennonite Action plans to send a bus from the Waterloo region to Ottawa on March 21 to take public action on Parliament Hill. Participants will demand that federal representatives end arms exports to Israel and work for a political solution that honours the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis.

Beginning on March 25, Mennonite Action is hosting a binational week of action with the theme "Send Aid, Not Bombs." Groups are encouraged to make physical symbols of aid—such as pie for peace, zwieback for ceasefire, or bread not bombs—to deliver to their MPs with messages to stop sending arms, and start sending aid. Source: Mennonite Action



Benedikt Isert Bender begins term in Philippines

"I want to learn all that I can," says Benedikt Isert Bender of his upcoming yearlong internship in the Philippines.

"I want to become more well-rounded in the way that I see the world, and [I] look forward to discovering if this is the type of work I want to do with my life."

Bender will spend one year with Dann and Joji Pantoja, Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers in Mindanao, Philippines. He was introduced to the work through Joji, Tala Bautista and Joseph Astrophel Ongkiko at the Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) office last fall.

Bender, a Political Science major at Brock University, is from Nith Valley Mennonite Church in New Hamburg, Ontario.

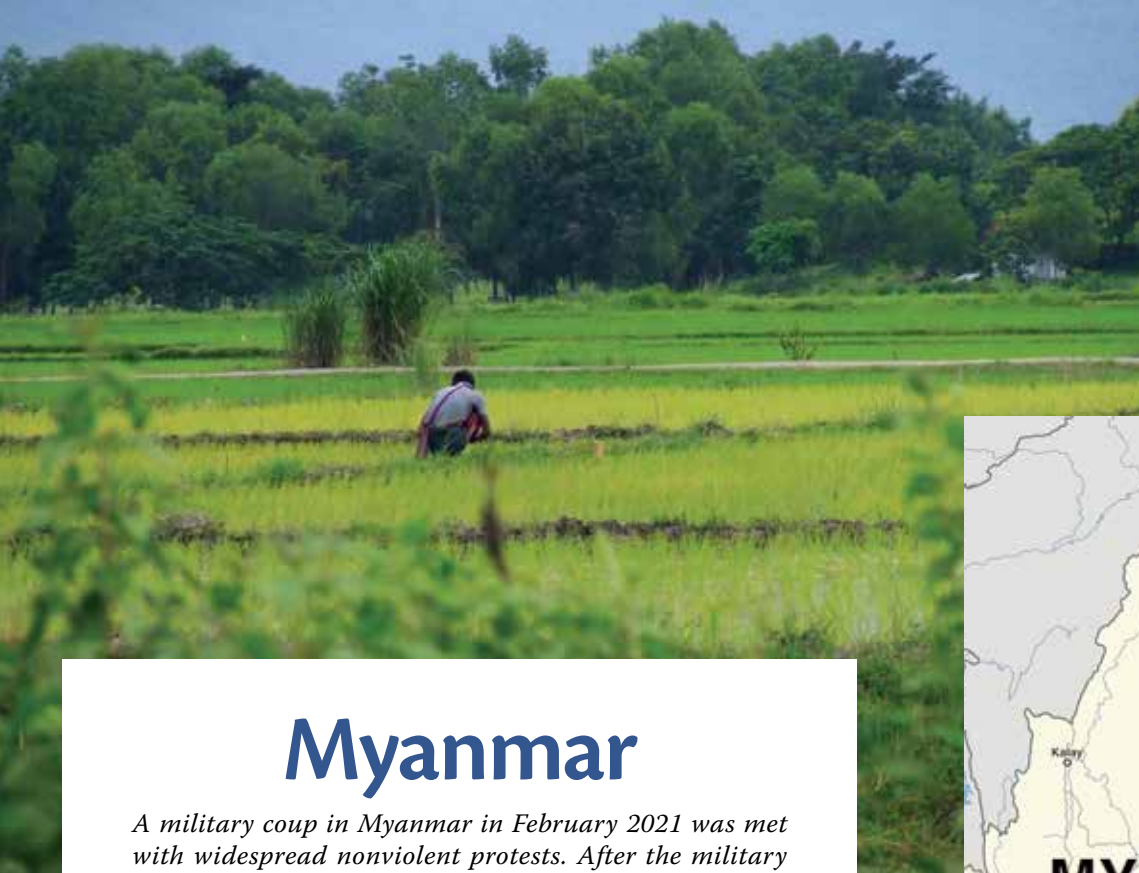
"Through my studies, I became very interested in the colonial history of places and people," says Bender. "I've done research and written papers on colonialism and peace and conflict, but until you are on the ground, you don't get a true feel for the kind of work that is involved."

Through Peacebuilders Community Inc. and its subsidiary, Coffee for Peace, Dann, Joji and their community serve vulnerable people in the conflicted Mindanao region. "We are anticipating with excitement Benedikt's coming to Mindanao as our intern," says Dann. Bender will serve as a communications assistant.

This MCEC initiative, in partnership with MC Canada International Witness, connects youth and young adults in leadership development by providing subsidies for internship opportunities with International Witness ministry partners.

Benedikt leaves in mid-March.

Source: Mennonite Church Eastern Canada release



Images: Left, A field in the Kalay region of Myanmar, near the head office of Bible Missionary Church-Mennonite. Photo by Thomas Khaipi/Wikimedia. Below, Location maps of Myanmar, By Uwe Dederig, Wikimedia

Myanmar

A military coup in Myanmar in February 2021 was met with widespread nonviolent protests. After the military responded with force, protests turned into an armed uprising. The following is a message from our siblings in Myanmar, as shared by Mennonite World Conference president Henk Stenvers. – Eds.

Our country's civil war has been ongoing for more than three years. The death toll is rising every day. More than half of the country is under the control of the revolutionary armies. The junta's military population has decreased, so a conscription law was introduced [in February of this year] to increase the number of soldiers.

Young men and women do not want to join the junta's army, so they are running away.

Wars are raging all over the country. The citizens are also suffering the consequences of war.

There has been fighting in the city of Kalay, where the Bible Missionary Church–Mennonite head office and two BMC congregations are located. Citizens have been ordered to leave the city to avoid aerial bombardment and fighting. Mennonite families are grieving and facing death and displacement.

Lord, have mercy!

Look upon your suffering people in Myanmar with compassion

Bind up the wounded bodies and souls in this civil war.

Minister your comfort to hungry bellies and spirits craving peace.

Bring courage and steadfastness to resist powers of domination and abuse.

– Henk Stenvers, president,
Mennonite World Conference



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