

JEEP WEEKEND 20 | FAITH BEFORE FLAGS 22 | INVOLUNTARY 38

CANADIAN MENNONITE

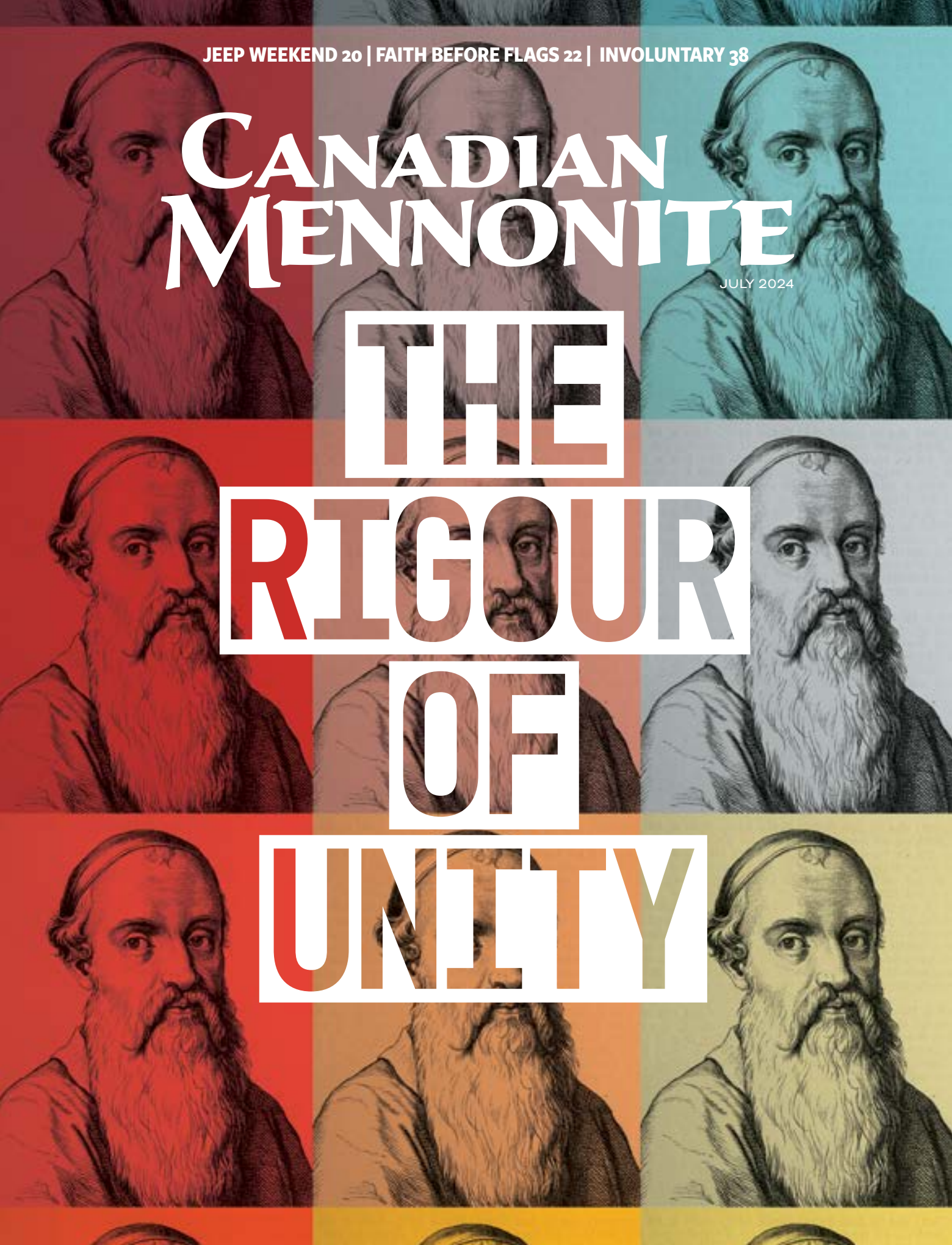
JULY 2024

THE

RIGOUR

OF

UNITY



A bullet point editorial

WILL BRAUN



This issue of CM contains much intense material. I want to take this opportunity to not add to that, (though I had started writing about an unanswerable question I inherited when I took this job). Instead, I offer quick thoughts on a bunch of elements in the following pages (with page numbers in parentheses).

- I don't do movies and I have no deaf friends, but I want to see the new Jesus film done entirely in sign language (4). The trailer grabbed me. A fresh take. Expressive.
- Fifty years ago (4), this magazine talked about "voluntary service as a negation of materialism and an enhancement of the spirit of servanthood." We'll revisit that territory in the July issue.
- I encourage you to join the Mennonite World Conference July 17 online prayer hour (7). There's a big, beautiful Mennonite world out there.
- As per the ad on page 8, with our monthly print schedule, we're sending Friday emails to fill the gaps. If you want timely Menno news, behind-the-scenes comment and the odd surprise, send us your email address to Lorna at office@canadianmennonite.org.
- If I ever go to Africa, I'll visit Barbara Nkala (page 10) who someone once described as a "rock star" of the Mennonite World Conference scene.
- Last year, columnist Troy Watson asked readers to share their Holy Spirit experiences. The response was astounding. I will remember this piece (11).

• I dream of having a weekly, televised panel discussion, set in the foyer of an old church, with the Deeper Communion writers (12, 13).

• Lots of people bemoan division and polarization; our Anabaptist seminary is doing the hard work of bringing diverse people together (14).

• A year or two back, a Canadian Mennonite University prof pointed me to the video of a speech by student Alayna Smith. It stuck with me (18). A leading young voice.

• Readers who recall my 2022 series, "The sweet solace of polarization," will get why we included Josh Garber's "Jeep Weekend" (20). Vroom, vroom!

• Rhianna McGregor Hajzer writes about something I only discuss with certain friends: amid all the talk of identity in progressive Christian circles, what about identity in Christ (22)?

• I long for stories of Christians directly engaged on the margins of society. Windsor Mennonite Fellowship is there (32).

• If you are intrigued by Simone Weil, justice, "literary afterlives," feminism, the "challenge of religion" or what a recovering fundamentalist, Mennonite, young mom, English professor does at her day job, see Katie Doke Sawatzky's piece about Cindy Wallace's new book (44).

I must mention one rather intense item. This issue includes an in-depth investigation into the cases of seven people who were terminated by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The piece raises uncomfortable questions (39).

Many of my most valued experiences

have come via MCC—in Brazil and with Indigenous communities in Canada. I have also witnessed imperfections of MCC. That sort of tension pervades the article.

I hope people can read it with a view to something more than just choosing sides. If the article evokes impulses of vilification or defensiveness in you, I invite you to examine those impulses.

As always, we welcome your responses.

Finally, the article leading off the feature section (page 14) marks Aaron Epp's final contribution to *Canadian Mennonite*—at least as a staffer—after more than 16 years in various roles.

From among the 329 articles he wrote, you may recall his "Year of reading biblically" series in 2014, his reporting from the Indonesia global gathering in 2022 and his innovative work as Young Voices co-editor.

Virginia Hostetler, executive editor from 2017 to 2022, says "Aaron brought insight, clear and concise writing, creativity, and respect for readers and colleagues."

I would add that I valued Aaron's dependability, solid judgement, good cheer and dashes of humour. Plus, when it was his turn to offer the reflection at staff meeting, I would lean forward in anticipation. Recently, after one such reflection, a colleague suggested Aaron do them for every meeting.

Aaron now occupies a desk at the *Winnipeg Free Press*. We offer our gratitude, affirmation of his gifts and best wishes. ●



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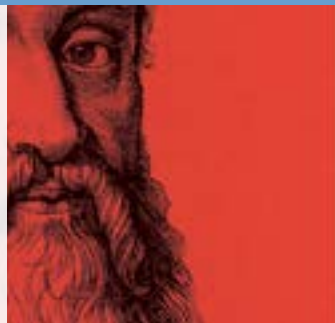
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What in the World



Fake supernatural news

A new Vatican document tightens the rules for assessing the truthfulness of claims of supernatural phenomena. Social media has led to a sharp rise in such claims, and the Vatican wants to protect against phony stories. Source: BBC

Photo: Farlight/Pexels



Deaf Jesus

On June 30, an all-sign-language film about the life of Jesus debuted in more than 300 theatres. "Jesus: A Deaf Missions Film" is billed as "by Deaf, for Deaf." Hearing viewers are welcome. See the trailer at jesusdeaffilm.com.

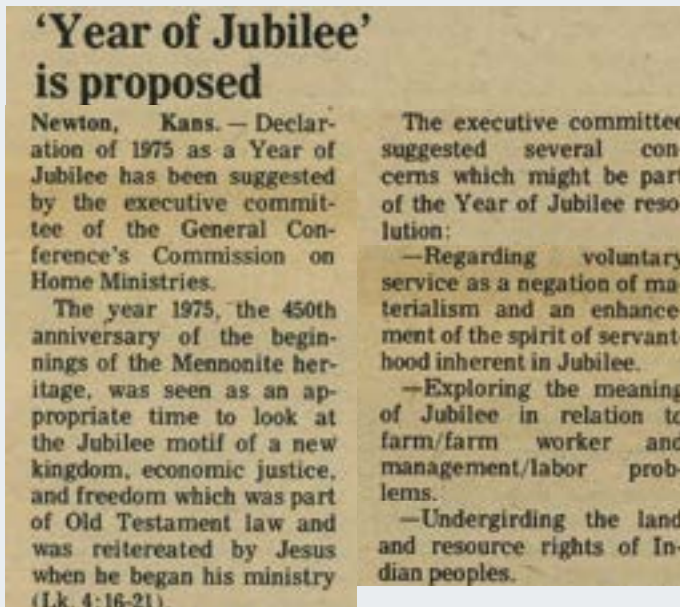


Swift liturgy

The 600-year-old Church of the Holy Spirit in Heidelberg, Germany, drew 1,200 parishioners for a special service centered around the music of American pop icon Taylor Swift. Pastor Vincenzo Petracca said of Swift, "her faith knows doubt and inner-conflict."

Source: Deutsche Welle

Photo: Paola V/Flickr





Pope wants short sermons

During a June 12 speech, Pope Francis said priests should limit homilies, or sermons, to eight minutes, down from the 10 minutes he recommended in 2018. “After that time you lose attention and people fall asleep,” he said. Source: Catholic News Agency

Photo: Marcelo Leal/Unsplash

Belief in Asia

A survey of people in Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam found that six to 26 percent of people consider religion very important in their lives, while 48 to 86 percent, depending on the country, offered food or drinks to ancestors in the past year. Fifty-nine to 90 percent believe in God or unseen beings. Source: Pew Research

Photo: Romeo A/Unsplash

Religious opinion

Seventy percent of Canadian Jews say anti-Semitism is a “major problem” in Canada. Eight percent of Canadian Muslims agree. Fifty-four percent of Canadian Muslims say anti-Muslim discrimination is a major problem. Twenty-seven percent of Canadian Jews agree. Source: Angus Reid Institute

Photo: Modified image by Lamarbelina/Pexels

Like other news sources, we present information because we deem it worthy of consideration, not because we necessarily agree with it. – Eds.

A moment from yesterday



This photo depicts the birthday party of Anna Hamm in Rosthern, Saskatchewan in the '30s or '40s. Little information is provided. Presumably, the girl standing on the chair with an “x” above her is Anna. Birthdays are marked in various ways. For some they are great celebrations with gifts, friends and special food. For others, they are just another day. When a new family is created, family of origin traditions such as birthdays need to be negotiated.

Text: Conrad Stoesz

Photo: H.H. Hamm photo collection / Mennonite Heritage Archives



archives.mhsc.ca

CM READERS WRITE

✉ A Mennonite life

My story is somewhat different than Troy Watson's "Am I Mennonite?" (May 2024), but my considerations are similar to his.

I was born into a Mennonite family—does that make me a Mennonite for life?

I attended a Mennonite church with my parents and listened to the instructions of our elders. At 14, I was baptized and accepted as a full member of the congregation. I was a Mennonite.

Years later, after I had immigrated to Canada, my wife and I became cofounders of a new Mennonite church in Vancouver. We were active youth leaders and I, as church secretary.

A few UBC students in our group told us about a team of a Methodist preacher, Lutheran theologian and a Catholic priest connected with charismatic revival meetings on campus. The students thought we should come and listen. We went and thought they were fully Bible-based and had a good message for church renewal and enrichment.

Sometime later, our church deacons found out that we had a positive attitude toward the charismatic movement. They asked us to recant or leave the church.

Was I still a Mennonite, having been expelled from the Mennonite church? Could I be a Mennonite in an Episcopal church?

A friend of mine who is a Lutheran pastor was asked by Mennonite settlers in Paraguay to help them establish a Christian education system. When he left several years later, some of them said: "Pastor Schneider has become a better Mennonite than many of us."

Time went by and I heard that some UBC professors had founded a small Mennonite fellowship close to the campus with the purpose of providing student residences and being available as mentors for students, especially new students and foreign students. I joined them.

For 35 years I have again been a member in a Mennonite fellowship.

Being Mennonite means living a life based on the faith of Mennonites and Mennonite principles which Troy describes so well in his article.

– HELMUT LEMKE, VANCOUVER, B.C. (POINT GREY INTER-MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP)



CM LET US PRAY

Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers will be meeting with Mennonite Mission Network (Mennonite Church U.S.) workers for a joint retreat in Thailand from July 8 to 12. This is the first retreat since 2017. Pray that it will be a time of renewal and revisioning, a time of listening and healing, a time of prayer and recommitment to the paths they walk as they follow Jesus.

– MC Canada



✉ MWC global prayer network

Every two months, the Deacons Commission of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) hosts an international online prayer hour. Each session includes a particular focus, news from the global church as well as sharing and prayer in breakout groups.

The next one is scheduled for Friday, July 19 at 9 a.m. Central Time. To register, go to mwc-cmm.org (click on "Get Involved") or contact Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle at prayers@mwc-cmm.org.

Also, MWC posts regular prayer requests from around the Anabaptist world on its website (mwc-cmm.org/prayers) and on social media.

– Staff



Mennonite World Conference

✉ A pastoral letter for Anabaptist-Mennonites in Colombia

Beloved brothers and sisters:

The council of elders (*Consejo de Ancianos*) of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Colombia (Iglesia Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia) calls on the global Anabaptist Mennonite family to support them in prayer.

In mid-May, approximately 300 people took shelter in the village of La Toma, Suarez Cauca, Colombia. These people abandoned their farms and animals as a result of the crossfire between illegal groups and the army.

The Mennonite Brethren congregation (La Samaritana) located in La Toma welcomed them in the church building with food, mattresses and messages of encouragement.

“It is our desire that the global Anabaptist community learn about and support us in prayer for the difficult situation of the people of northern Cauca, Colombia,” write church leaders from Colombia.

“We ask for your prayerful support for the end of this armed conflict, that the families may return to their homes in peace and security, and for God’s blessing on the congregation in La Toma, which is manifesting God’s mercy to those who need it so much.”

“We also thank God for the prompt response of the Mennonite Central Committee in sending support to help with the maintenance of the people in refuge in La Toma.”

Pray for the farming families who fear for their livelihoods

and their lives. May they be able to safely return to their land.

Pray for the peace processes that continue to struggle to take root in all corners of Colombian society. May patience and nonviolence prevail.

Pray for the people of La Samaritana. May they receive an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so they can act with courage and love to transform violence into justice, truth-telling and shalom.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. In the name of Jesus, Prince of Peace, amen.

HENK STENVERS, PRESIDENT,
MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE



Be in Touch

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

Share your important moments!

Announce births, adoptions, baptisms, marriages, deaths, arrival of sponsored newcomers, reunifications of newcomer families or suggest a new category.

Church administrators: Submit announcements within four months of the event to milestones@canadianmennonite.org

CM MILESTONES

Baptisms

Matthew Fullerton—Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man., May 26, 2024

Geno Obonde—Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man., May 26, 2024

Christine Lee—Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship, Vancouver, BC, May 19, 2024.

Cindy Martinez—Wideman Mennonite Church, Markham, Ont., April 21, 2024.

Deaths

Byrd—Glenda Marilyn, 84 (b. Oct. 7, 1939; d. April 28, 2024), Poole Mennonite Church, Poole, Ont.

Dick—Helen (Bergen), 100 (b. March 22, 1924; d. May 13, 2024), North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

Epp—Elsie, 91 (b. Feb. 27, 1933; d. June 3, 2024), Mount Royal Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask.

Friesen—Dorothy, 76 (b. Feb. 22, 1948; d. May 26, 2024), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

Heinrichs—Peter J., 85 (b. Oct. 25, 1938; d. May 19, 2024), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

Hildebrand—Katherine (Lehn), 92 (b. Oct. 9, 1931; d. May 25, 2024), Grace Mennonite Church, St. Catharines, Ont.

Hoffman—Lena (nee Dueck), 91 (b. Aug. 1, 1932; d. May 9, 2024), Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man.

Janzen—Timothy, 63 (b. June 10, 1960; d. May 24, 2024), Grace Mennonite Church, St. Catharines, Ont.

Klassen—Gerhard (George), 82 (b. July 7, 1941; d. May 10, 2024) Calgary First Mennonite Church, Calgary, Alta.

Martin—Ruth (Graham), 86 (b. Dec. 9, 1937; d. April 18, 2024), St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, St. Jacobs, Ont.

Paul—Margaret (Johnston), 79 (b. Sept. 18, 1944; d. May 23, 2024), Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Regier—Marie, 96 (b. June 23, 1927; d. June 1, 2024), Rosthern Mennonite Church, Rosthern, Sask.

Regier—Sarah, 94 (b. June 17, 1929; d. May 8, 2024), Rosthern Mennonite Church, Rosthern, Sask.

Stadler—Helene (Janzen), 101 (b. Feb 7, 1923; d. May 30, 2024), Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington Ont.

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.



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FROM OUR LEADERS

A church of surprises

Len Rempel

What lies ahead? As I write this reflection, I have just completed my first week as executive minister of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan. Stepping into this role, I ask myself, “What does the future hold, and am I equipped to handle it?”

We are in a time of transition—not just MC Sask but the broader church as well. The church today faces various challenges and many questions about its future. As I prepared for my first days and weeks in the role of executive minister, I reflected on what the future might bring. In some ways it would be easy to throw up my arms in despair and prepare for the demise of the church, but that’s not what I am feeling. I am excited about the church. I know it is changing but I choose to embrace that reality.

When Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus, he described the work of the Spirit as a wind blowing “*where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes*” (John 3:8). The Spirit of God can be unpredictable and she can surprise us. The fact that I am now executive minister of MC Sask is proof of that. This is not something I anticipated three years ago when we moved west.

At our MC Sask Annual Delegate



Session earlier this spring, I heard stories of the Spirit’s movement within the church here in Saskatchewan.

There is one small rural congregation that has been serving the community without a pastor for some time and is experiencing a vibrancy that is drawing in participants from other denominations whose own congregations have closed. There is a house church which meets on Tuesday evenings in person and online. They connect with participants from outside Saskatchewan and outside Canada.

These stories don’t sound like the church of my childhood, with people

filling the choir benches at the front and multiple Sunday school classes for each age group, but it is part of the church today. The church is changing, and the Spirit is doing surprising things.

I have questions and some concerns as I move into my new role, but there is one thing that I am confident about: the church will continue, in some form, and God’s Spirit will continue to lead us and surprise us.

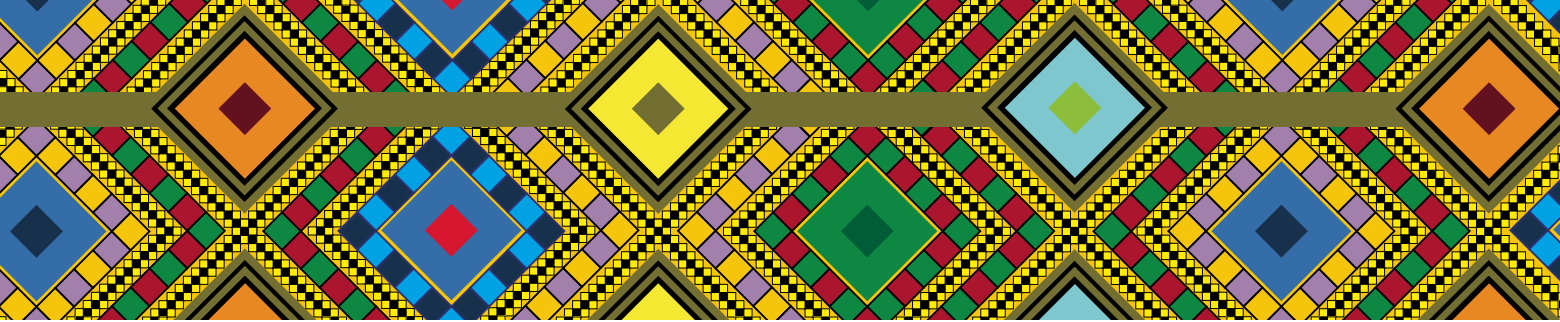
This isn’t a hope built on some naïve sense that the church couldn’t possibly end. But for the church to move forward we need to recognize that the institutional church has challenges that need to be addressed. We need to embrace where we are

today and open ourselves to the movement of God’s Spirit.

As I work together with the MC Sask team and congregational leaders, I pray I can be sensitive to the movement of the Spirit and that I can lead and serve the church faithfully as we move into this next chapter. ●



Len Rempel lives in Warman, Saskatchewan, and can be reached at minister@mcsask.ca.



Long live Ubuntu

Barbara Nkala

Every Tuesday evening, my five sisters, two cousins and I join Aunt Musa Mashamba for online prayers. Aunt Musa, who recently celebrated her 99th birthday, remains a vibrant and humorous figure, even though she has outlived all her direct siblings.

Despite using a walking stick, she insists on maintaining her independence, making her bed and washing some of her belongings. Aunt Musa is renowned for her embodiment of the *Ubuntu* philosophy, a Southern African ethos that declares, *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*—a person is a person because of other people.

She lives it and promotes it by being a bubbly person who has respect for young and old, shows humanity, compassion, love, forgiveness, kindness and generosity, and has lived in solidarity with others. She has always been the epitome of Ubuntu.

Ubuntu embraces the values that Aunt Musa has practised throughout her life. She is dearly loved by her relatives and the community at large. Up till recently, her church still asked her to share her wisdom with congregants.

Ubuntu encourages us to cherish one another, and the spirit of Ubuntu abhors the hatred and ravages we daily hear about, regionally and globally. It embraces a spirit of community.

The spirit of Ubuntu calls for shared responsibility. In yesteryears, whatever was owned, whether land or other possessions, had to benefit everyone. For example, even if you had no material resources or implements, you would still harvest in your fields. There was *ilima*, a coming together of all

those in the neighbourhood to plough a field or to cultivate or harvest a crop for the one who lacks. The whole team of people gathers to help somebody else. It was a communal system. It worked efficiently.

Aunt Musa always flew the Ubuntu flag high in her area. People used to bring their problems to her for counsel because of her wisdom and her beautiful Ubuntu spirit. We were surprised to learn last year that some leaders in her area continue to consult her.

Aunt Musa's favourite scripture is Matthew 7:12: "*in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.*" Ubuntu espouses the golden rule.

Aunt Musa has been preparing for her funeral for the past 10 years. When she started these preparations, she tasked a number of us nieces and some of her grandchildren with duties. Some had to sew aprons that would be worn by people serving food after her funeral. One had to enlarge the photograph that would be on display on the day. One had to prepare a long pole for a flag, and there were other tasks too. My special task was to prepare the flag that would be flying at the entrance of her home on the day of the funeral, so that all people coming in would read:

CELEBRATING MUSA MASHAMBA

Do to others what you would have them do to you. Matthew 7:12

The scripture is in Shona, the language of her late husband's tribe. She literally forced me to prepare the flag sooner than I had anticipated, just

before Covid-19 struck. When I protested, she said, "Barbara, I want to see that everything is in place before I go to rest."

She is still alive. We joke about her preparations to die, but we learn from her all the time. Some of those tasked to speak at her funeral have preceded her in death, so the program keeps changing, but she is at peace.

I believe Ubuntu is related to the Christian value system. In Acts 2 we read about the fellowship of believers who made up the first church. We read that, "*All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need*" (Acts 2: 44, 45). I note among first believers all those Ubuntu values stated at the outset. This was Koinonia in action. I learnt this word when I was with Mennonite World Conference as regional representative for Southern Africa. Aunt Musa is with the Dutch Reformed Church, and I am part of the fellowship of believers under the Anabaptist faith. We all practise Ubuntu. Long live Ubuntu. ●



Barbara Nkala is a writer, teacher, speaker and former Southern Africa regional representative for Mennonite World Conference (2016-2022). She is a member of the Brethren in Christ Church, Mount Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Open to the Spirit

Troy Watson

Just over a year ago, I invited readers of *Canadian Mennonite* to share their Holy Spirit experiences with me (April 6, 2023). I was pleasantly surprised by the response. I was moved and encouraged by the messages I received. Thank you to all who responded.

These messages were shared in confidence, and confidentiality is sacred. Although I wish everyone could hear some of the stories people shared with me, they are not my stories to tell. Instead, I want to list the types of “God experiences” many of my Mennonite sojourners have shared with me over the years:

- Divine healing, including mental, emotional and physical healing.
- Being empowered with a supernatural capacity to forgive people who had wronged or abused them.
- Receiving timely guidance and insight when facing difficult decisions.
- Waking up with words, an image or a Scripture passage that addressed a situation they were facing, or an encouraging message to share with someone else, sometimes directly addressing a specific concern, need or prayer request of the other person.
- Receiving signs from God or answered prayers.
- Being empowered with mystifying patience, endurance and energy to provide care for others during trying circumstances and seasons.
- Praying and singing in tongues.
- God communicating through dreams, reoccurring numbers, close encounters with animals, symbols, a sudden thought, word, Bible reference or song entering their minds.
- Seeing or sensing the presence of an angel.
- Seeing visions.
- Being “slain in the Spirit.”
- Sensing God’s presence in the

room, sometimes accompanied by seeing colours, hearing sounds (like a rushing wind) or feeling overwhelming peace, joy or comfort.

– Family members seeing Jesus, an angel or a deceased family member as they approach death.

Some people have also shared disappointment in seeking God’s presence or baptism in the Spirit and not sensing anything, at least not in ways they expected (e.g. speaking in tongues). However, all but a few said they sensed God’s presence with them over the years in spite of this disappointment.

Perhaps even more interesting than the specific experiences people have shared is how these experiences and encounters changed them. Here are some of the common transformations people reported as a result of their encounters with the Spirit.

- More joy in life, including in the trivial, mundane and difficult aspects of life.
- More patience with others, themselves and adverse circumstances.
- More energy and endurance to serve and help others.
- A consistent inner peace, even in difficult and painful times.
- A surprising source of inner strength during times of struggle and suffering.
- A heightened sense of God’s presence with them, in others and the world around them.
- An ongoing sense of companionship or friendship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit.
- A deeper and more enriching prayer life.
- More love for others, including enemies and difficult people.
- A growing desire to help people in need, care for the hurting and bless

those around them.

– More compassion and grace for others, and less judgment.

– A greater sense of connection to nature, the environment and animals.

– More attention to creation care.

– A settled and grounded spirit, unshaken by circumstances and events, confident in God’s faithfulness and goodness.

As I reflect on the many Spirit stories I’ve heard from CM readers and hundreds of others who have shared their spiritual experiences with me, I’m encouraged and inspired. Seeking God and being open to God’s Spirit is clearly a worthwhile way to live. We don’t always get the experiences we are looking for—in fact, we rarely do—but God does interact with us in surprising and life-changing ways.

The impact of the divine in our lives makes our faith not only experiential but practical. We are transformed by seeking God. Our lives, hearts, attitudes, desires, goals, ways of thinking and behaving are changed as a result of us being open to God’s presence.

Some of us are wired to seek mystical experiences and the gifts of the Spirit, which is good, if we can be flexible with our expectations. However, what we all need is the fruit of the Spirit. As we intentionally invite the Spirit into our lives, the fruit of the Spirit will grow and become more manifest in us. Over time we will become more loving, joyful, patient, compassionate, self-controlled, peaceful and generous. This is the Spirit at work in us. ●



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



CINDY WALLACE

DEEPER COMMUNION

The urgency of untidy joy

I've been thinking again about joy. I know this theme is counterintuitive. The scope of violence and injustice in the world is crushing right now, both far away and close to home, and it's proving chronic in ways that undermine efforts to be "joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Romans 12:12). We need urgent action on so many fronts, and instead we find ourselves learning to live in long-scale uncertainty. It wears us down.

We're tempted to become so focused on everything that's wrong that we fumble around in a fog of sorrowful frustration, or to block it out with distractions.

In this setting, joy can seem almost obscene. But I think we need it now more than ever.

I know this is a risky claim, so I should clarify. I don't mean that we should pressure each other to perform cheerfulness or hide our struggles. In fact, I think we need *more* room in our lives, and especially our churches, for lament. I'm learning about this practice from my friend Liz Digitale Anderson, who leads song circles in the Twin Cities that offer a container for grief. (Do you have containers for your grief, my friends?)

I also don't mean joy in a way that

spiritually bypasses the here and now. I don't mean the old distinction between joy and happiness, where happiness is fleeting and joy is eternal. This distinction makes for a tidy sermon, but it misses a fulsome theology of creation and incarnation. Our delight doesn't have to transcend the here and now to be holy.

No, what I'm thinking about is joy experienced in our bodies, joy experienced together, joy as a counterweight to our sorrow, joy as a ballast. I'm thinking about joy that reminds us why life is so precious, why peace is so precious, why we shouldn't give up the struggle for a world in which all can flourish.

I'm thinking about the joy of a new baby or a 70th birthday, 90 days of sobriety, a completed cancer treatment, or the green haze of carrot sproutlings in the garden. I'm thinking about ice cream at a funeral reception, an eight-year-old's sense of humour, the wind in the trees, and the sound of rain on the roof. I'm thinking about a party I plan to host this summer, the only purpose of which will be to eat pie in the yard.

I need to "taste and see that the LORD is good" as the Psalmist puts it. As a person living in a chronically ill

body that soaks up all the world's sorrows and turns them into pain, I need to remember with all my senses that "every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). I need to embrace the earth's goodness so I have the strength to hope and pray and work for the earth's goodness.

Paul's letter to the Romans is full of references to joy alongside struggle, which is wild if you think about first-century life and all the more reason to take his calls seriously. We are not the first humans who need reminding to "rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). It can feel so wrong, on a Sunday, to share good news right after someone else has shared a diagnosis, but we need to open our hearts to both. We need to walk with each other through both.

I know all this (I've even written about it before), but I forget. I need reminding. Do you need reminding too, dear fellow columnists and readers? Where are you finding joy these days? ●

Cindy Wallace is professor of English at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan.



Fireballs

You never forget your first.

It arrives—a molten-hot basket is placed at your table. You stare at it with questioning eyes until someone flips open the lid. A plain-looking group of oval fireballs stare back at you.

“Allow me,” someone at the table offers. So they pick up your bowl and serve you. “Be careful,” they say. “It’s hot.” But of course, you don’t listen and you pop the whole thing into your mouth.

An explosion. Pain. Your soul cries out. People laugh.

But after the agony of these Chinese steamed buns subsides, it hits—the ecstasy. Then, the questions: How can anything in a world this troublesome be this singularly good? How did it take *this long to know* this joy with your own body?

I’d like to believe everyone’s life is changed after their first . . .

The suffering in this world weighs heavy every day, and I struggle to experience joy without a voice in my head telling me it’s wrong to know joy when others do not. But today, I am grateful, firstly, for Cindy’s reminder to be open to both the good and difficult, and, secondly, for xiao long bao’s reminder of goodness and goodness shared—what we strive for, ultimately. ●

– Justin Sun, youth pastor at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond, B.C.

Sharing

I recently joined two friends on a patio where folks from my neighbourhood like to gather. In the early summer, these sorts of evenings come as a surprise, a delight. Air warm but not yet weighted by the mid-summer humidity. The smell of lilacs drifting in the air.

“What’s a question you wish people would ask you more often?” my friend said. I considered for a moment, and answered, “I wish people would ask me more often about moments where I experienced joy.”

“Well then, where have you experienced joy recently?” my friend asked.

I recalled a day a few weeks prior that felt particularly heavy with grief. Leaving a vigil for Palestine, I biked to an urban farm, where friends gathered to share a meal. As people began to leave, I heard shrieks of laughter behind me. Turning around, I saw two friends, alive in their adult bodies, somersaulting and rolling down a hill. Despite myself, I laughed, too. A deep, belly sort of laugh. Joy!

I am grateful for Cindy’s reminder to practice sharing and asking one another about these moments. ●

– Anika Reynar, recent graduate, Yale University

Defiant

American poet Christian Wiman wrote an article a few years ago probing the idea that good art requires “friction.” “Light writes white,” the saying goes—if you’re happy, the page stays blank. Wiman, who has lived with cancer for years, knows a thing or two about suffering producing good art. His poems and prose have never shied away from the gritty, painful parts of reality. And yet, Wiman’s article was a plea to not forget joy—that joy, too, tells the story of our world and ourselves.

I love Cindy’s image of joy as a “ballast.” I, too, need to taste and see that the Lord is good. Yes, there is a kind of wilful head-in-the-sand naïveté that pretends all is well, that ignores the hard truths of existence and only focuses on the saccharine and the cheaply uplifting. But there is a kind of joy that is more like a “defiant nevertheless.” A happiness that persists, even though all the facts have been considered, to borrow from Wendell Berry. Or, as Wiman summarizes: “Praise, too, is part of any whole artistic and existential vision. Joy is one kind of courage.” ●

– Ryan Dueck, pastor, Lethbridge (Alberta) Mennonite Church



HOW TO DISAGREE WITH THE BELOVED OF GOD

Seminary takes specific steps to foster unity among diverse student body

By Aaron Epp

Ian Funk remembers the last time he arrived on campus at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS)—how he walked into the guest house late at night and was welcomed by a fellow student sitting at the dining room table. People heard them exchanging greetings and popped out of their rooms. Within minutes, a group of students from North America, Africa and Asia were sitting at the table chatting.

“[It was] an instant family,” says Funk, pastor at Langley (B.C.) Mennonite Fellowship, who graduated

from the seminary last year. “We would talk about substantial things because we were there to study substantial things.”

Funk’s story sounds utopic and effortless, but what transpired that night was the result of something faculty, staff and students at the seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, have worked hard to cultivate: a globally connected community where students from a range of backgrounds can find belonging and have respectful discussions as they learn together.

The changing nature of the seminary demands it. A

decade ago, the percentage of international students was in the single digits. During the 2023-24 school year, students from 22 countries other than the U.S. and Canada made up 49 percent of the student body.

“We’ve had to work hard at intercultural communication and how we work at inclusivity for all,” says seminary president David Boshart.

God’s beloved

The first step to creating a seminary where everyone belongs, Boshart says, is by recognizing that God has created and loves everyone.

“We presume the belovedness of God of everyone who studies at AMBS,” he says. “That’s foundational.”

All students are required to take Leadership Education in Anabaptist Perspective (LEAP), a course that orients them to their studies, outlines how they are expected to conduct themselves in the learning community and explores spiritual practices they might use to sustain them.

LEAP also provides opportunities for personal assessment around building and tending to intercultural relationships.

All incoming students take the Intercultural Development Inventory, a 50-item assessment that identifies their strengths and developmental opportunities when interacting with people from cultural backgrounds different from their own. Students create development plans with goals for their intercultural growth as part of their program of study.

Additionally, as part of its commitment to intercultural competence and undoing racism, the seminary has developed a “conversation covenant” to guide classroom interactions in all courses. A short version of a larger covenantal agreement approved by faculty states:

–We commit ourselves to welcoming the insights that come from our rich diversities.

–We commit to fostering a welcoming environment for both introverts and extroverts.

–We commit ourselves to authentic interaction.

–We commit to the hard work of giving and receiving respectful challenge in conversation.

Techniques

To honour these commitments, professors use different approaches. One of these is the circle process, which is a conversation structured around a series of questions. Every participant has a chance to answer each question without interruption. Circles use a talking piece which is passed

work at is slowing the conversation down.”

For Ruth Gelane, a theology and peace studies student from Ethiopia, LEAP has been foundational to her studies at AMBS.

One assignment asked students to respond to two of their classmates on an online forum, using a specific approach. First, students were instructed to express appreciation for ideas they agreed with. Second, they were instructed to preface their disagreement with a statement like, “I respectfully disagree.”



David Boshart, AMBS president, talks with Olufemi (Femi) Fatunmbi, a student from Los Angeles, California, during orientation week in 2021. Opposite page, graduate students meet in the AMBS courtyard in April 2023.

from person to person, to designate who can speak at that moment, and who is listening (everyone else).

Other discussion techniques include appointing a guardian. This student will interrupt if they sense the discussion is not going well. The guardian might call for a 10- or 30-second period of silence and then say why they initiated the pause. This gives the class an opportunity to regroup before the discussion moves forward.

“When tension starts to emerge, the natural inclination is to speed up and move past it,” Boshart says. “That’s exactly the wrong impulse. What we

That approach has stuck with Gelane.

“After I came to AMBS, I had many discussions both inside and outside the classroom, and our discussions were shaped by the approach of appreciating the person with whom we agree and telling them politely and respectfully that we disagree with some of their ideas,” she says. “I decided to take that approach for a lifetime.”

Gelane says students have challenged her many times with ideas that are different from her own. While taking the class “Religion, Violence and Peacebuilding,” she expressed her belief that religion is not a means for

peacebuilding. That conviction was borne out of her experience coming from a country plagued by political crises and civil and tribal wars.

Gelane says her professor and classmates helped her see the positive ways religious people have contributed to peacebuilding. It changed her thinking about religion as a means of peacebuilding.

“It was not an easy journey, as I had to confront my own biases and preconceived notions,” she says. “It enabled me to think about interreligious work in Ethiopia to work towards peacebuilding and reconciliation. Also, it [helped] me to see the commonalities in different religious groups that encourage and teach about peace and love for one another.”

The kind of discussion that takes place is valuable even when people hold firm to their initial position, Gelane says. “Engaging in dialogue with others is not about winning or losing, but about the mutual exchange of ideas. By actively listening and considering different perspectives, we can enrich our own understanding without necessarily changing our views. This approach equips us to better connect with people in the future.”

Setting the tone

As she puts the finishing touches on a graduate certificate in theological studies, Carrie Mast is thankful for her time at AMBS.

“Encountering feminist theology, encountering liberation theology, all of those ways of thinking through particular lenses—it was very good for me,” says Mast, associate pastor of First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio. “My world is not so small in the way I approach things theologically.”

Mast credits LEAP with setting the tone for her time at the seminary. Although she took most of her courses from a distance, getting to know students in her LEAP cohort was important. “[AMBS begins] that process of creating a place where you can have



In 2023-24, international students from outside the U.S. and Canada made up 49 percent of the student body at AMBS.

respectful conversation from the moment you step on campus,” she says.

AMBS faculty and staff encourage students to participate in a variety of activities so that they can get to know each other outside of the classroom. That can happen while worshipping together in the chapel or while eating occasional community meals together in the dining hall.

At times, the AMBS community convenes for impromptu gatherings held in response to world events. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Beverly Lapp, vice president and academic dean, called for a panel discussion where four faculty members shared their views about the invasion as a starting point for the campus community to discuss the invasion.

Other times, the AMBS community

gathers to support one of its students. In April, an Ethiopian student’s relative was killed. The campus held a prayer service to acknowledge the loss and grieve with the student, who could not travel home to be at the funeral.

“When you have those experiences, [it] builds a repository of trust and solidarity and commitment to one another that just naturally has to shape the inclusive nature of the community and bolsters us in our solidarity when we’re facing questions where we disagree,” Boshart says. “When there are disagreements... there are still plenty of reasons to sustain the community.”

Mast found that to be true in a class with people whose views on LGBTQ inclusion differed from her own. “I know I was sitting next to people and



entering forum conversations online where we would not agree,” she says. “I didn’t change my view for myself, but I did have a wider space of acceptance overall for other perspectives.”

“This is what studying together, working together did for me—just created this space,” Mast adds. “I entered [AMBS] with a certain level of tolerance, and what I have now is something deeper than just a simple tolerance for a different perspective. In those classes, I was able to trust if I was entering a conversation, the other person had my back... It felt like a safe space.”

Learning and teaching

Rachel Miller Jacobs, associate professor of congregational formation, likes to remind students that they’re in a group of people who come from different contexts. That means they each have things to learn from their peers and they each have things to teach

their peers.

“I keep encouraging myself, my colleagues, my students, to think of all our conversations as first drafts,” Miller Jacobs says. “Let’s get better at having these conversations. If it doesn’t go well, let’s take a moment at the end to figure out what didn’t work.”

The goal of any discussion is not for everyone to agree, she adds. The goal is to conduct the conversation with respect for everyone involved. People don’t need to be weak about their convictions, but they do need to have

intellectual humility.

Boshart points out that AMBS has “a deeper diversity” than most Mennonite congregations. One of the things that keeps the seminary’s community working at respectful dialogue, he says, is that everyone has something tangible at stake. For students, it might be the tuition they are paying, or it might be the distance they have travelled to be at the seminary.

Boshart observes that Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada congregations seem to miss a sense of what’s at stake when members leave because they disagree with each other.

“It seems to me in our local congregations, where division is happening, we don’t ponder what we really have at stake in this relationship,” he says.

“Surely some of that has to do with forgetting or not affirming the belovedness of the other and [forgetting] the promises we made to each other in baptism.”

He adds that creating a globally connected community where people from different backgrounds can come together for respectful discussions is something that other Mennonite post-secondary institutions, like Canadian Mennonite University and Conrad Grebel University College, are working at, too.

He also thinks that what AMBS is doing has applications beyond the seminary’s walls. Miller Jacobs agrees.

“This has relevance for what happens in our neighbourhoods, local

politics, soccer games people are playing. Our capacity to deal well with other people is huge,” she says. “In our congregations, we could help each other be more Jesus-y in all the places we show up—being clear about our convictions and also willing to meet people where they are.” ●



‘When tension starts to emerge, the natural inclination is to speed up and move past it,’ says David Boshart. ‘That’s exactly the wrong impulse.’



ACTUALLY, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

By Alayna Smith

A couple of years ago my sister and I had hammock party at the park with our friends. The goal of a hammock party is to set up all your hammocks close enough together that you can still hear each other without yelling.

On this occasion my sister and I, or rather my sister, packed up our gear and supper and we biked to the park to meet friends. As we waited for others to arrive, we realized we didn't have the straps required to hang the hammock. My sister had packed the hammock, so, naturally, I blamed her.

For the next several minutes I spewed words at her with the express intent of making her feel bad for failing to pack the straps.

While I could argue it was her fault, it could also be argued that since she did most of the packing and prep, I could have taken responsibility for making sure we had everything.

Whether or not my argument was right, the nature of my response to her was certainly wrong.

Luckily, our friends are generous and

resourceful, and we were able to set up our hammocks and enjoy our meal suspended under the luscious green canopy.

My sister is my best friend. If I love anyone, it is her; yet when I am frustrated or angry, I rarely act in love toward her.

Jesus says . . .

Christianity is rooted in a tradition of love. Jesus says: *"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you"* (Luke 6:27-28). These are not empty words. These are the words of a man who ate with tax collectors and spoke to the woman at the well, who was "other."

This is the God who slowly suffocated to death on a cross. To save us from our sins. To save the very people who nailed him to the cross. This is love.

God calls us to love our enemies. This love is possible because God loves us, and we are all sinners.

Loving our enemies is both simple and incredibly difficult. Our society has

been splitting down the middle. We are tired and frustrated and fed-up. We have been acting out of fear and anger and hatred rather than love. If we are called to love each other, we have to actually love each other.

How do we work at this difficult task?

The work

Loving our enemies is not about who is right. The question is not irrelevant; when we are wrong, we can cause real damage. But in the context of practicing love of the enemy, the question of who is right needs to be set aside at least for a time.

The people who nailed Jesus to the cross were not right. They were wrong, and Jesus loved them anyway.

We lived through a pandemic that tore families and communities apart. Our responses to it and to each other also tore us apart. We have not healed from those wounds.

One group was seen as walking around with no regard for whether they were spewing a deadly virus into the air, while another group was seen as

mandating that people have a foreign substance injected into their bodies so society could regain some semblance of a so-called normal life.

When we look at the climate crisis, some people want to implement measures that would slash jobs and raise the price of gas so much that meeting basic needs would be nearly impossible for those already struggling. Others relentlessly pump carbon into the atmosphere, wreaking havoc with the earthly systems that support life.

Fearfully and wonderfully

The temptation is to get defensive about whatever position you hold. Do not get defensive.

Remember, we are putting aside who is right for a moment. Instead, think about your enemies—the people you think are wrong.

How exactly you love these people will vary, but it means not assuming that you are superior and they are idiots. It means not shutting certain groups out of conversations or spaces. It means recognizing that issues are complex and other people are trying. It means accepting others first as fellow children of God, fearfully and wonderfully made by the same creator who made you.

I grew up hearing stories about radical acts of peace and love in spite of great hardship. The most memorable of these is the story of Dirk Willems, the 16th century Anabaptist who famously escaped prison, fled across a frozen body of water, then turned back to save his pursuer who had fallen through the ice. Because he turned back, Willems was recaptured and put to death.

Practice

It is easy to believe that when our

moment comes, and we are faced with the cross or a frozen pond, we too could love our enemies. It's a nice thought. I sure hope so, but these actions are insanely difficult, and we have to practice. We have to practice loving our siblings and our friends. We have to practice loving those of different faiths and those who vote for different people. We have to practice loving those whose views about life seem fundamentally opposed to our



Alayna Smith

own.

These small actions strengthen our ability to love, so that when the big moments come, we will be ready.

That is not to say that loving our enemies or our neighbours is easy. I struggled to love my sister even when we disagreed on the most insignificant thing. If it was easy, we wouldn't be failing at it so much. It is hard, but loving people matters.

If we believe we are called to love our

enemies, we have to actually do it.

When I got home from the hammock party, I looked in my backpack and realized that a hard drive I had borrowed from school and was storing in an outer pocket of my backpack had come along to the park but had not come back. I searched for the missing hard drive, without success. I felt terrible about losing it.

Earlier in the evening, I had been frustrated with my sister's carelessness when packing the hammock. It turns out I am human too.

When I told my teachers about the missing hard drive, they offered grace and love.

After the hammock party, and after coming back from the hard drive search, I found a note from my sister on my pillow. It was kind. She didn't harp on me for having yelled at her. I was shown love even though I was wrong.

We are called to go out and love our enemies. We are called to love in small moments, in the petty fights and daily annoyances. We are called to love in big ways when real lives are at stake. We are called to love when there is injustice. We are called to love when we are right, and they are wrong. We are called to love when we are wrong, and they are right. It is hard when it is small and it is hard when it

is big, and it matters every time. Jesus said, "Love your enemies." Go, and love your enemies. ●

Alayna Smith wrote this speech in 2022 while a student at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). The speech was an entry in the initial school-wide round of the bi-national C. Henry Smith Peace Oratorical Contest. It has been adapted slightly. Smith plans to return to CMU in fall.



JEEP WEEKEND

By Josh Garber

If I'm not careful, I find myself surrounded by similar-minded individuals who are great at reflecting my own perspectives and values back at me. In a society that continues to grow increasingly polarized and tribalistic, the ease with which this can happen worries me. After all, part of what made Jesus' ministry so dynamic stems from the diverse company he kept.

Just over a year ago, my friend Daniel invited me to join him and his closest, mostly conservative, evangelical-minded childhood friends for Jeep Weekend: a weekend of driving heavily modified 4x4 Jeeps through off-road trails that would be impassable for any normal vehicle.

While Daniel and I share a similar

worldview, he wanted me to know that my Anabaptist perspective and left-leaning social values would cause me and many of the Jeep enthusiasts to land differently on many theological, social and political issues. Nevertheless, he also made it clear he'd love for me to join them.

What happens at Jeep Weekend . . . stays at Jeep Weekend. So, although I've promised secrecy on all that transpired, it's now one year later, and I've just returned from my second Jeep outing with Daniel and his crew. Here are five reasons to make a spiritual practice of saying "yes" to encounters outside your typical social spheres:

1. Community and diversity

While Anabaptists argue that

community is the center of our lives, the reality is that all humans are designed for relationship and connection. Witnessing this type of community among Daniel and his friends—and then being warmly invited to join—created a dynamic scenario in which we encountered our differences in the context of friendship and compassion. These scenarios foster empathy and understanding in places that would otherwise feel distant or irrelevant.

2. Confrontation and self-reflection

I am not someone who seeks out confrontation and, while I don't hide from it, I also don't come across it often in my typical social circles. Times like Jeep Weekend put me face-to-face with

folks who hold very different perspectives from my own on things like military service, firearms and “biblical manhood.” I want to emphasize that I am not making a value statement here. When I confront different viewpoints, this prompts self-reflection and challenges me to grow in my convictions and understanding of myself.

3. Empathy through encounter

Jesus calls his followers to love their neighbours and enemies, and he commands this in a way that implies action rather than just warm feelings. Like many Anabaptists, I

used to claim that as a peacemaker I don't have enemies. My friend Hal reframed the idea for me: “Your enemies are the people and groups that are hardest for you to love.”

Society has made it easier than ever to relegate folks to categories that, like it or not, help define who we view as our enemies. Søren Kierkegaard is credited with saying, “If you name me, you negate me. By giving me a name, a label, you negate all the other things I could possibly be.” Interacting with folks who hold different beliefs de-objectifies them and encourages empathy. These are vital steps in loving like Jesus.

4. Meaningful relationships

It feels a bit narcissistic if I only choose to build relationships with people who view the world the way I do. After all, Jesus wasn't just friends with Jewish carpenters from Nazareth. The band of disciples he assembled came from a hodgepodge of different backgrounds

and were often found bickering. And yet Jesus called them “friends” (John 15:15).

I've learned to be more comfortable with ideological dissonance within



relationships than I once was. During these Jeep Weekends, we mostly get along and, when conversations move into territory that highlights differences, I find myself saying, “I don't think we're going to agree on this topic,

but I'm still OK being friends if you are.”

5. Collective impact

Experiences like Jeep Weekend can enrich the collective witness of

Anabaptist Christianity. While engaging with diverse perspectives is more a byproduct of the weekend than a motive for participating, it underlines the importance of embracing diversity within the Anabaptist community as a way to promote peace, justice and reconciliation in the world.

In other words, if we want to see the world less divided, then let the first step begin with us. ●

Josh Garber attends Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Arizona. This article originally appeared online at anabaptistworld.org on April 26, 2024. Used with permission.

CM FOR DISCUSSION

1. AMBS has a “conversation covenant” (page 15); would something similar work in your congregation?
2. Alayna Smith says the people who nailed Jesus to the cross were wrong but still loved (page 18); who are people in the wrong (in your view) who you love?
3. What is a Jeep Weekend-like experience that would take you to new territory? How can you make sure your heart is in a good place for such an experience?
4. Rhianna McGregor Hajzer writes about identity (page 22); how does identity in Christ relate to other claims on your identity?

-Staff

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FAITH BEFORE FLAGS

By Rhianna McGregor Hajzer

I spent my mid-twenties holding my disability flag high, confident that I'd found my calling. This was my cause. These were my people. Wholly devoted to the disability community and its quest for equality, I wrote and spoke, adding my voice to the throng of those already raising the battle cry. This was where I belonged.

I was a disability rights advocate, and a proud one.

But after a couple years of following the diversity, equity and inclusion agenda, all the energy, time and words that I'd poured out for the cause were coming back to me void. I was drained and unmotivated, my fingers poised above my keyboard, ready to write more advocacy rhetoric, but I couldn't type a single word. What was wrong?

Then my pastor said that to put any worldly identity before our Christian identity is sin, and it clicked. That's what I'd done. In searching for meaning in a disabled body, I'd made disability pride my identity, and consequently, an

idol. I was no different than the people who live without the saving grace of Christ Jesus, who find their identity in the snares of the world's values.

It makes me think about Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel. When she prayed for a child, she promised that if she was granted her request, she would give him back to the Lord and surrender her role as mother to the high priest, Eli.

While handing over a child to a spiritual leader seems unthinkable in our cultural context, parenthood is still important. It can be a marker of status and identity.

Hannah laid it all down for the sake of the Lord, enduring insults from her husband's second wife. She knew her identity was in God, not in her ability to reproduce and raise children.

Hannah's son was a gift, a blessing from the Lord. And her first act as a mother was to give him back. My blindness, though not a gift in the traditional sense, is nonetheless a blessing from the Lord, and I believe

that for it to be used to its full potential to glorify him, I need to surrender it to him, fully and completely.

We read in II Corinthians 5:17 that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." As followers of Christ, our identity is in Jesus because of his sacrifice on the cross for our sins. Whatever he bestows upon us to bear in this life is his concern, not ours. We need only to bear it well.

Embracing my true identity means rejecting my old one. Does this mean that I also reject the tangible issues that disabled people face on a daily basis, such as inaccessibility, discrimination and ableism? Of course not; addressing them is still a worthy pursuit. But I no longer use the term disability rights advocate because, whether or not I wave the disability flag, I know who I am and in whom I'm found: my identity is in Jesus Christ, secure and assured. ●

Rhianna McGregor Hajzer is a writer who lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.



AMBS window

Summer 2024 | Volume 34, Issue 2

Follow Jesus' leadership model, Okanya tells seminary grads

During AMBS's April 27 Commencement Service, **Nelson Okanya**, DIS, urged the Class of 2024 to adopt Jesus' model of "serving leadership."

The commencement speaker addressed an audience of approximately 180 people at the service — including 15 of the 22 members of the graduating class. The event was held in the Elkhart, Indiana, seminary's Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount and was also livestreamed.

Focusing on John 13:3-17 — the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet and his accompanying conversation with Simon Peter — Okanya asked, "How does the serving leader lead?"

"The accusation is that if you're a serving leader, you're a doormat and people can just walk over you," he said. "We don't see that in this text, though. We see Jesus doing something very different. He leads while serving Peter; he serves while leading Peter. He does not get out of the [leadership] role."

In his address, Okanya — who is from Nairobi, Kenya, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania — drew from Scripture, biblical scholarship, leadership theory and his personal experiences as a consultant to

pastoral, business, civic, military and government leaders in Africa, Asia and the United States. He is President of World Serving Leaders, the nonprofit division of the Center for Serving Leadership in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Chair of the Global Mission Fellowship, a global network facilitated by Mennonite World Conference.

Jesus draws his people into a new reality, an alternative narrative that turns leadership upside down.

In exploring how leaders can lead change to benefit their communities, Okanya contrasted leadership motivated by self-interest with leadership that serves others. He noted that during the Passover, when the Jewish people remembered their liberation from slavery, Jesus invited his disciples into an intimate space and did what would have seemed unthinkable: he washed their feet.

"Jesus draws his people into a new reality, an alternative narrative that turns leadership upside down," Okanya said. "As I travel around the world, I've seen people who get into positions of leadership say, 'It's our time to eat.' But no, it's your time to serve — with service that is motivated by love. Jesus loved his own, and knowing his love for the people he served, he laid down his life for them.

(continued on p. 2)

Above: Nelson Okanya, DIS, delivers the commencement address. Behind Okanya are David Boshart, PhD (at left), AMBS President; and Beverly Lapp, EdD, AMBS Vice President and Academic Dean.

(continued from p. 1)

No self-interest but humble service shaped his practice of leadership.”

Okanya described how underlying assumptions that are present in each culture shape how people perceive and understand their contexts and remember history — both individually and collectively. These assumptions also influence which leadership frameworks people will accept, he said.

“Jesus loved his own, and knowing his love for the people he served, he laid down his life for them. No self-interest but humble service shaped his practice of leadership.”

To lead change, leaders need to understand the underlying assumptions of the culture in which they’re serving. In setting the example of washing his disciples’ feet, Jesus knew he was challenging cultural practices and assumptions — reversing the practice of leadership from “being served” to “serving,” Okanya noted.

He gave an example of how assumptions and narratives grounded in colonial history “that reject Africa itself” have shaped conflicts and leadership frameworks in African nation-states. He quoted Ugandan priest Emmanuel Katongole, who wrote in *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Eerdmans, 2010) that a new future in Africa “requires much more than strategy and skills ... it requires a different story that assumes the sacred value and dignity of Africa and Africans, and is thus able to shape practices and policies, or new forms of politics, that reflect this sacredness and dignity.”

This type of new story, one “that forms and shapes people’s memories and how people think

and perceive reality,” is what Jesus models in John 13, Okanya said.

“How are you going to approach leadership?” he asked the graduates. “Jesus showed us a model. It is a costly model, and we’ve seen leaders who have followed it — Dr. Martin Luther King, Father Romero in El Salvador. But you’re not alone. Jesus is with us.”

After the graduates received their degrees and certificates, **Rachel Miller Jacobs**, DMin, Associate Professor of Congregational Formation, gave a prayer of blessing for the graduating class. She spoke each graduate’s name, entrusting them to God’s care.

“Bless them so thoroughly that they can never go where your blessing is not, so that when their sense of themselves as leaders feels tentative or uncertain, you will draw them near to the One who rightly claimed the authority you gave,” she prayed, “and when they are tempted by authoritarianism, no matter how subtle, you will draw them near to the One who stooped to serve. Bless and strengthen them for the paradoxical leadership this world so desperately needs.”

A video of the service is available at ambs.ca/graduation. • — *Annette Brill Bergstresser*

“Bless them so that when their sense of themselves as leaders feels tentative or uncertain, you will draw them near to the One who rightly claimed the authority you gave.”

AMBS Window Summer 2024

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A seminary of
Mennonite Church USA and
Mennonite Church Canada

MKS honors second Ethiopian MATGA cohort

Five AMBS graduates made up the second cohort of Ethiopian students to complete the **MA: Theology and Global Anabaptism** (MATGA) entirely from Ethiopia through a partnership between AMBS and **Meserete Kristos Seminary** (MKS: Ethiopian Mennonite Seminary) in Bishoftu/Debre Zeit that began in 2019. The partnership is helping meet a need to prepare and equip theologically grounded leaders for the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) — the largest national body in the global Anabaptist family.

The MATGA graduates were honored along with 79 undergraduate MKS graduates during MKS’s May 18

Commencement Service in the seminary’s Multipurpose Hall. In his commencement address, Pastor **Desalegn Abebe**, MKC President, challenged the graduates to apply what they have learned when faced with challenges, drawing from Mark 4:35-41, where Jesus calms the storm. He reminded them that God’s power is always there to help them when they face challenges and difficulties in ministry. He also encouraged them to remember that the storms and challenges of life can make them stronger and help them to know Jesus and that Christians need to pay attention to the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit in their day-to-day life. • — *Henok T. Mekonin, MA, Global Leadership Collaborative Specialist*

Meet our new graduates!

Each graduate received one of the following degrees or certificates at AMBS's April 27 Commencement Service.

MACFMaster of Arts in Christian Formation

MATGA.....Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism

MATGA

Ethiopia...Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism: Ethiopian cohort (partnership with Meserete Kristos Seminary)

MATPS.....Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies

MDiv.....Master of Divinity

GCSGraduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction

GCTSGraduate Certificate in Theological Studies

* Candidates who have six or fewer credits left to complete toward their degree

➤ Candidates who completed part or all of their degree or certificate at a distance



➤ **Addiskidan Getachew Abreham**, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; *MATGA Ethiopia*. Addiskidan plans to continue serving in Addis Ababa as Director of the Great Commission Ministry of

Athletes in Action. She also serves in her community as a counselor and gospel singer, and in her home congregation — Anointed Word of God Church — as a Bible study leader.



➤ **Endaweke Tsegaw Balkew**, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; *MATGA Ethiopia*. Endaweke plans to continue serving as Assistant Professor of Law at Dire Dawa University and in the Meserete Kristos Church, teaching peace in these roles as well as in his community. He also wants to pursue a PhD in theology and peace. His home congregation is Meserete Kristos Church of Dire Dawa.



*➤ **Israel Tesfaye Berhe**, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; *MATGA Ethiopia*. Israel plans to continue as Lead Pastor of West Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church.



➤ **Deborah J. Coates**, Albany, Oregon; *GCTS*. Deb's home congregation is Portland (Oregon) Mennonite Church.

(continued on p. 4)

I have gone through an experience of growth at AMBS, with its integrated teaching of theology, peace, leadership and research by renowned professors. — Endaweke Tsegaw Balkew



The five graduates in the second MATGA Ethiopia cohort (l. to r.): Dirriba Amenu Sori, Aschalew Assefa Fikadu, Israel Tesfaye Berhe, Endaweke Tsegaw Balkew and Addiskidan Getachew Abreham. (Photo provided)



The MATGA Ethiopia graduates pose with AMBS Teaching Faculty who represented AMBS at the Commencement Service (l. to r.): Joe Liechty, PhD, Visiting Professor of Peace Studies; Sori; Berhe; Abreham; Drew Strait, PhD, Associate Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins and MATGA Program Director; Balkew and Fikadu. (Photo provided)



The members of the Class of 2024 who were present for the April 27 Commencement Service.

(continued from p. 3)



*> **Alaina Dobkowski**, Grand Rapids, Michigan; *MDiv: Pastoral Ministry*. Alaina plans to continue serving as Pastor of Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship and working with anti-racism organizing and education.



*> **Misgana Alemayehu Eshete**, Asebe Teferi/Chiro, Ethiopia; *MACF*. Misgana plans to further her education in counseling. Her home congregation is Meserete Kristos Church in Asebe Teferi/Chiro; locally, she has attended Pleasant View Church in Goshen, Indiana.



*> **Aschalew Assefa Fikadu**, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; *MATGA Ethiopia*. Aschalew is serving as Pastor at Bethel Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church and hopes to carry on the gospel work with his denomination in the future. He would like to pursue a PhD in peace studies.



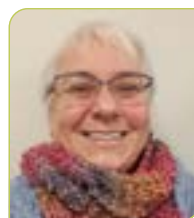
*> **Isaiah Friesen**, Saint Paul, Minnesota; *MDiv: Theological Studies: Peace Studies*. Isaiah plans to seek work in ministry, higher education or the non-profit sector in Minnesota. His home congregations are First Mennonite Church of Beatrice (Nebraska) and Paoli (Indiana) Mennonite Fellowship; locally, he has attended and served as an intern at Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana, and Belmont Mennonite Church in Elkhart.

In my favorite course, Earthkeeping, Malinda [Berry] facilitated really amazing learning opportunities among an incredibly international and intercultural group of both online and in-person students.

— Isaiah Friesen



William David Funk, Elkhart, Indiana; *MDiv: Theological Studies: History, Theology and Ethics*. Billy will continue in pastoral ministry at Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen, Indiana.



*> **Colleen Avilla Geier**, upstate New York and South Bend, Indiana; *GCTS*. Colleen plans to continue teaching Sign Language Interpreting at Goshen (Indiana) College and to continue her studies in a master's program at AMBS. She also serves on the board of and as a volunteer for Luvability Ministries — an organization in Niles, Michigan, for adults living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her home congregation is St. Peter's United Church of Christ in South Bend.



*> **Elia Gisselle Guity**, West Palm Beach, Florida; *GCTS*. Gisselle is combining her Master of Social Work, her AMBS studies and her 15 years of experience as a therapist to serve her community through

Studying at AMBS provided a solid foundation for my journey into ministry, and the encouragement I received continues to inspire me in my calling. — Gisselle Guity

pastoral counseling and church planting. In Florida, she is part of Centro Adoración Refugio Eterno in Palm Springs; locally, she has attended College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana.



Janeth Magiri, Mugumu-Serengeti, Mara Region, Tanzania; *MACF*. Janeth plans to do a one-year Optional Practical Training assignment in the United States and then return to Tanzania.



*> **Carrie A. Mast**, Bluffton, Ohio; *GCTS*. Carrie plans to continue serving as Associate Pastor of First Mennonite Church in Bluffton.

“Choosing courses that supported my work in the church meant that I was able to immediately apply what I was learning in my studies to my church work. — Carrie Mast



> **Matthew Peterson**, Columbiana, Ohio; *MDiv: Pastoral Ministry*. Matthew plans to continue serving as Pastor of Midway Mennonite Church in Columbiana.



*> **Christina Rhebergen**, Vandalia, Michigan; *GCSD*. Christina has started the company Present Spiritual Direction to help people explore

My courses not only provided me with information, tools and resources, but also created environments that took the student as seriously as the studies. — Christina Rhebergen

and grow in faith through spiritual direction and other practices. Her home congregation is Church of the Savior CRC (Christian Reformed Church) in South Bend, Indiana. She is the first student to complete this new certificate program.



> **Betelehem Zeleke Roba**, Mojo, Oromia, Ethiopia; *MATGA*. Betelehem plans to continue preaching the gospel of peace in her ministry as a preacher. She currently works as a Medical Laboratory

Technologist at the Mayo Clinic Hospital in Minnesota. In the future, she would like to work for peace in Ethiopia. Her home congregation is Mojo Meserete Kristos Church.

Coming to AMBS has been a window of opportunity opened to the world of theology and peace studies. Definitely, I am leaving AMBS a changed man, grown and equipped to serve beyond what used to be my comfort zone. — Ndunge Sefu



Ndunge A. Sefu, Table View, Cape Town, South Africa; *MATPS*. Ndunge is ready to enter whatever door the Lord may open for him as a theologian and peacemaker, whether it be in pastoral ministry or a

Christian agency or organization. His home congregations are Paroisse Missionnaire de Kintambo (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Table View Baptist Church of Cape Town. Locally, he attends Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart.

(continued on p. 6)

Graduates receive awards

AMBS Teaching Faculty members presented awards to selected candidates for graduation at the Dean's Luncheon on April 26. This year's recipients:

- **Endaweke Tsegaw Balkew**: Award for Excellence in Missional Leadership
- **Alaina Dobkowski**: Award for Excellence in Biblical Interpretation
- **Isaiah Friesen**: Award for Excellence in Theological Studies

- **Talashia Keim Yoder**: Award for Excellence in Christian Formation

All graduates received two issues of *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* from the Institute of Mennonite Studies; access to a religion database from the AMBS Library; a \$100 gift certificate from the Church Leadership Center to go toward registration for a lifelong learning event of their choice in 2025; and an Admissions Application fee waiver to share with a prospective student. •

(continued from p. 5)



*> **Sue Short**, Archbold, Ohio; *MDiv: Pastoral Ministry*. Sue plans to continue serving on the pastoral ministry team at Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold.



> **Dirriba Amenu Sori**, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; *MATGA Ethiopia*. Dirriba hopes to apply his seminary experiences in his ministry as Regional Director for Meserete Kristos congregations in the eastern part of

Ethiopia. He also plans to pursue a PhD in church leadership or peace studies. His home congregation is Meserete Kristos Church of Dire Dawa.

Chaplaincy Certification through the Association of Professional Chaplains. Her home congregation is Washington (Iowa) Mennonite Church.



Talashia Keim Yoder, Goshen, Indiana; *MACF*. Talashia plans to continue as Pastor of Christian Formation and Worship at College Mennonite Church in Goshen and as Theater Director at Bethany

Christian Schools in Goshen. She also creates intergenerational seasonal resources for Mennonite Church USA and writes for Building Faith, a website ministry of Mennonite Early Childhood Network.



* **Jonathon Wesley Zirkle**, Knightstown and Goshen, Indiana; *MACF*. Jon feels called to support the spiritual lives and holistic wellness of men through involvement with Mennonite Men and beyond,

and plans to offer individual spiritual direction. He serves as Director of Bushelcraft Farm in Elkhart and works with Wood-Land-Lakes, a nonprofit land trust in Indiana. His home congregations are Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen and Southside Fellowship in Elkhart.

“As a church leader and pastor, I have gained experience in many areas that are fundamental for my ministry. — Dirriba Amenu Sori



*> **Megan Patrice Wiebersch**, Des Moines, Iowa; *MDiv: Chaplaincy*. Megan plans to continue in a chaplain residency program through August and then work towards Board of

Seminary encouraged me to understand my embedded theology and beliefs that continue to impact my life, along with ways my deliberative theology continues to be life-giving. — Megan Wiebersch

The Class of 2024

Graduates by degree

- 4 MA in Christian Formation
- 6 MA: Theology and Global Anabaptism (see also p. 2)
- 1 MA: Theology and Peace Studies
- 6 Master of Divinity
- 1* Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction
- 4 Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies

* First graduate to earn this certificate; the program began in 2022.

Graduates by ministry

- 9 serving in pastoral ministry roles
- 5 pursuing or seeking to pursue further graduate studies
- 4 serving in a church organization or institution
- 4 serving in mission or evangelism

- 3 serving in education
 - 2 offering spiritual direction
 - 2 seeking work in a ministry, education or nonprofit setting
 - 1 seeking chaplaincy certification
 - 1 creating resources for worship and faith formation
 - 1 serving in an Optional Practical Training assignment
 - 1 working with anti-racism organizing and education
 - 1 working in farming and land trust management
 - 1 working in the medical field
- (Some graduates are involved in multiple roles.)

Graduates by demographic

- 13 women
- 9 men
- 4 countries represented — Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania, United States

- 16 graduates who completed part or all of their seminary studies at a distance
- 5 graduates who lived on campus for at least part of their studies
- 8 graduates who previously earned graduate degrees from other schools
- 11 graduates affiliated with Mennonite Church USA
- 6 graduates affiliated with the Meserete Kristos Church (Ethiopian Mennonite Church)
- 8 (one each) graduates affiliated with the Baptist Church, Brethren in Christ U.S., Christian Reformed Church, Evana Network, LMC – A Fellowship of Anabaptist Churches, Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo, United Church of Christ and a nondenominational church

(Some graduates are connected with multiple denominations.)

Faculty teach in-person courses in Ethiopia



(Credit: Dirriba Amenu Sorfi)

In May and June, 30 Ethiopian students in AMBS's **Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism** (MATGA) program met at **Meserete Kristos Seminary** (MKS: Ethiopian Mennonite Seminary) in Bishoftu/Debre Zeit to take courses in person as part of their studies.

Courses included the MATGA Seminar with **Drew Strait**, PhD; Introduction to Peace Studies and Nonviolence with **Joe Liechty**, PhD; Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture with **Paul Keim**, PhD, and **Yimenu Adimass Belaya**, PhD candidate and MKS Academic Dean; and Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations with **Jacqueline Hoover**, MA.

The MATGA Ethiopia is a customized degree program created in 2019 by MKS and AMBS leaders to educate leaders for the Meserete Kristos (MK) Church – with an emphasis on peace studies. Students take both online semester-long courses and in-person intensive courses adapted for the Ethiopian context and taught by AMBS professors.

Additionally, Strait led a workshop May 9–11 at West Dire Dawa MK Church on Christian leadership and challenging polarization and violent extremism with the gospel of peace. It was organized by the MK Eastern Region Office for Pastors and Leaders Training in collaboration with AMBS. •
— *Annette Brill Bergstresser*

Above left: More than 80 leaders of churches and home cells in the MK Eastern Region attended Drew Strait's workshop. Above right: Strait (at right) teaches with the aid of interpreter Birihanu Tesema Yimer.

(Photo provided)

Anabaptist Witness | April 2024 Mission and Peace in Ethiopia

The articles in *Anabaptist Witness* 11.1 – guest edited by **Henok T. Mekonin**, MA, and **James R. Krabill**, PhD, Interim Managing Editor – appear in two sections. The first focuses on mission and peace efforts in the broader context of the Ethiopian nation, and the second focuses on **Meserete Kristos Church** (MKC) history and perspectives. Most of the writers are Ethiopian Mennonites. The editors hope the pieces will contribute to the sharing of gifts for mutual growth among Anabaptist-Mennonite churches across the globe,

also in the lead-up to the **2028 Mennonite World Conference Assembly** in Ethiopia.

Proceeds from the print edition – available on Amazon – will support MKC programs. The free online version will be available in November. Learn more and buy a print copy at anabaptistwitness.org.

AW is a publication of AMBS, Mennonite Central Committee (U.S. and Canada), Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Mission Network. •

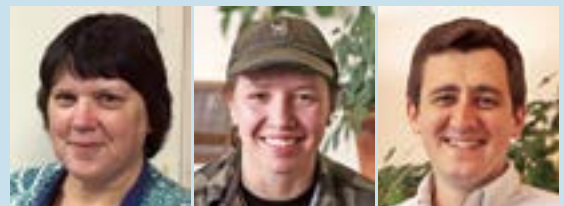


(l. to r.): Pastor Kebede Bekere, consultant and MKC member, and Pastor Desalegn Abebe, MKC President, pose with the issue.

Employee transitions

The AMBS learning community has marked the following transitions in 2024 (pictured l. to r.):

- **Linda Metzler** ended her time as Caterer in Residence in late March after 20 years of service.
- **Kaylena Chupp** of New Paris, Indiana, began as Caterer in Residence on March 19.
- **Grant Miller** (MDiv 2019) of Kalamazoo, Michigan, began May 15 as half-time Development Associate, working remotely.



Are you a lay leader or church participant?

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- Women and Power in the Church
- Funding Congregational Ministry after COVID-19
- Seeking Repair with Indigenous Communities

ambs.ca/plt

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sional Bible study, intercultural competence, trauma-informed caregiving, nonviolent communication, and more.

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- Resisting Christian Nationalism with the Gospel of Peace
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- Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication

ambs.ca/short-courses

Pastors & Leaders 2025

Annual conference to resource church leaders: Feb. 17–20

ambs.ca/pastors-and-leaders



(Credit: David Fisher Fast)
Jackie Wyse-Rhodes, PhD, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible, enjoys exploring Scripture with groups.

Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program

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ambs.ca/upcoming-courses

"Trinity House" now available for retreat use

A distinctive cloverleaf-shaped house on the edge of the AMBS campus is now available to the public for use as a daytime retreat space. Formerly known as "Poustinia House," it was the home of **Clarence Bauman**, a former professor of ethics at AMBS, and **Alice Bauman**, his spouse. Clarence designed the space to be a hermitage — a place "set apart" for solitude, contemplation and prayer in the tradition of Russian spirituality. ("Poustinia" is Russian for "desert.") For more information and current rates, see ambs.ca/trinity.

(Credit: Rachel A. Fonseca, Janeen Bertsche Johnson)



When Rita Dahl was a child, the bottom third of the family's kitchen door was her canvas. The top sections were for her older sisters to draw on.

"We were products of the Depression and we couldn't buy a lot of paper, so our mother let us draw on the kitchen door," she said. "We used chalk that the teacher had thrown out, the little stubs, and . . . drew pictures every day. Then we washed the door off and the next day we did it again."

Growing up in Fiske, Saskatchewan, Dahl, 92, went on to study art in Emma Lake, and continued creating while raising four kids with her husband, Ralph, a doctor from Edmonton. She was a teacher for 10 years and was actively involved in church choirs and Sunday school. She saved colourful inserts and envelopes for collages, and over the years gave away most of her artwork.

When her husband of 66 years died in 2023, and Dahl was "in a bit of a slump," her eldest daughter found a picture of a striped giraffe under her mother's bed and told Dahl she should do something with it. Dahl returned to painting, and the story of Giselle the giraffe was born.

"I know about discrimination, I know about non-acceptance, rejections, intolerance," said Dahl. When teaching grades 1 and 2 she saw that "kids can be quite cruel." She decided to write out of that experience. "Write about what you know," Dahl told herself.

In the 28-page, self-published book *Giselle Goes to School*, Giselle doesn't fit in because of her stripes. After trying to cover them up, she meets other giraffes with different colours and learns to celebrate difference.

"Mom has done all of the artwork, either with fingerpainting, watercolours, markers, crayons, collages, just everything," said Diane Summers, Dahl's daughter.

Dahl's son, who studied English, wrote the text to accompany Dahl's 14 illustrations. All of the book's artwork is made out of recycled material, something Dahl



Ninety-two-year-old artist publishes children's book

By Katie Doke Sawatzky

attributes to living through the Depression. "We keep everything," she said.

Some of the pages feature paper from a calendar mailed to her from a man in Korea, whom Dahl corresponded with in the '50s and '60s as part of her work with a women and missions group.

"[The calendar pages] are very beautiful, brilliant colours," said Summers. "She didn't want to throw them away."

Dahl, who now lives in Calgary, had a book signing at First Mennonite Church in November 2023, where she sold 66 books. She's also sold books to people at her living complex. Sales from the first 200 books raised \$600 for Mennonite Central Committee and other charities.

Dahl said it's important that the arts are encouraged, because "people like me

who are not skilled at many things thrive on the arts." It also builds up confidence and "helps children to feel good about themselves," she said.

"She's worked all her life with art and [has] never been recognized," said Summers. She said it is a way to recognize her mom as well as other seniors or people with disabilities who have a passion that can be shared with others.

Dahl said one thing about using your imagination is that it spills into other parts of life. "I decorate my meals. My radishes become roses, and everything looks nice," she said. "I think there's a place for beauty." ●

Giselle Goes to School can be ordered by contacting ritadahl26@gmail.com.



People from Windsor Mennonite Fellowship join a rally in support of safe consumption sites at their MPP's office.

Windsor church addresses toxic drug crisis

By Madalene Arias

Rielly McLaren says the grief caused by toxic drug deaths feels staggering and palpable in his community. McLaren, who pastors Windsor Mennonite Fellowship, also serves as chaplain to men transitioning into new communities after completing prison sentences. The toxic drug crisis has hit both those communities.

McLaren was one of five clergy from Windsor, Timmins, Sudbury and Barrie, Ontario, who wrote a May 10 open letter to the government of Ontario urging funding of the safe consumption sites currently awaiting funding in their cities. Applications for funding were submitted 15 to 32 months ago. The letter calls for urgent action in the face of crisis.

“We counsel the grieving, lead the funerals and guide the prayer services amid deaths from toxic drugs,” the clergy members write. “We’ve come to know this crisis affects the housed and unhoused, the rural and the urban, the young and the old. We are all touched by it. As people of faith, we know we are at our best when we focus on loving and supporting the most vulnerable among us. It’s clear to us that people who use drugs are vulnerable during this toxic drug crisis and that harm reduction is love.”

The federal government reports 42,494 opioid toxicity-related deaths between 2016 and 2023. In 2023, approximately

22 Canadians died every day from toxic opioids. The main culprit is fentanyl, an extremely potent synthetic opioid that illicit drug manufacturers use to make their drugs more addictive.

Last October, after a shooting incident



Rielly McLaren

near a community health centre in Toronto, the Ontario government initiated a safety review process of all safe consumption sites. With the review underway, review of funding applications for new sites was suspended.

This affected SafePoint, Windsor’s first and only safe consumption site. SafePoint, which Windsor Mennonite is connected to in various ways, opened in April 2023, relying on funds from the municipality and community. The provincial review meant no provincial funds were provided. The centre was forced to close at the end of December due to lack of funds.

“They’re not operating in good faith,” says McLaren of the province. “They just pulled the plug based on something that happened in Toronto. We’re not Toronto.”

“There’s no sign of the safety review being completed,” says McLaren. He says the whole process has lacked transparency. The open letter says that since October, the Ministry of Health has “not offered timelines, answers or details of this review.”

At Windsor Mennonite Fellowship (WMF), the toxic drug crisis is not only a question of advocacy. When SafePoint announced its closure, people from the church joined the community in a vigil outside of the closed facility.

On a Sunday in June, McLaren invited members of the local health unit to attend the church for a service dedicated to learning about the opioid crisis. A medical professional even provided them with training on the use of Naloxone—a nasal spray that can reverse an opioid overdose and provide a window of time to

seek support from a medical practitioner.

Windsor's local health unit recently reported that 68 percent of overdose deaths in the city occurred in private residences, challenging the public's conflation of homelessness with opioid addiction.

McLaren says that whether an overdose happens within or outside the walls of the church, the folks at WMF, which is equipped with a Naloxone kit, are prepared.

At least five families at WMF have lost loved ones to opioid overdoses. Rick, who prefers not to use his last name or his daughter's name for privacy reasons, is

her younger sisters very much, and they adored her. "She had a laugh that would just permeate a room," says Rick.

In the years leading up to her death, she became more withdrawn from family. They saw less of her at gatherings.

Eventually cocaine laced with fentanyl killed her.

Though Rick and his wife did not attend WMF at the time of the death, they knew McLaren. He came to be with them at their home when they learned of their daughter's death.

Eventually, the couple started attending WMF and McLaren devoted a service to the grieving couple. He provided each

of them with prayer shawls and invited them to sit cross-legged on the floor as the entire congregation prayed over them.

"It was such a moving thing," Rick says with obvious emotion in his voice.

"I have found Windsor Mennonite is wonderfully positive, inclusive, supportive. There's no judgment," he says.

He also remembers WMF being well represented at the vigil when SafePoint closed. People brought roses for those who had died from overdose, and flowers to give to friends and families grieving their loved ones.

At the time of publication, 129 faith leaders from various Christian denominations in Ontario have added their names to the open letter. McLaren hopes more will join.

"To me, that is the work of the church—to help in a time of a public health emergency, to create a very specific community of care," says McLaren.

"People who use drugs are beloved by God," the letter reads. ●



MCI welcomes new principal

Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) in Gretna, Manitoba, has appointed Londa Backlund as its new principal, effective July 15.

According to an MCI release, Backlund holds undergraduate degrees from Providence College and the University of Manitoba, and a graduate degree in organizational leadership from Grace Christian University.

Previously, she taught English, math and science at MacGregor Collegiate Institute and Linden Christian School. Backlund has also demonstrated leadership as a soccer coach and in various church ministry roles.

MCI board chair Jonathan Regehr said, "The Search Committee and board were very impressed with Londa's clear dedication to Christian education and her strong relational approach." ●

— Staff



A rally in support of safe injection sites at Queen's Park in Toronto on May 28.

one such person. He lost his 35-year-old daughter from a previous marriage. She worked as a nurse in Detroit while living in Windsor.

Speaking by phone from his home two years to the day since his daughter's death, Rick says his daughter became involved with people who pushed illicit drugs and ended up developing an addiction to opioids.

She was a fun-loving woman who loved

Alberta event explores wild hope for creation

By Margaret Kruger-Harder

Don't get "stuck in rage or paralyzed by fear," said Joanne Moyer. "[Be] defiantly hopeful, despite the odds."

Moyer, associate professor at The King's University in Edmonton, was presenting at a Mennonite Church Alberta event called "Wild Hope for God's Garden." The May 28-29 event was held at First Mennonite Church in Calgary. Approximately 25 people attended.

Referring to various scripture passages, Moyer showed how all parts of creation are included in God's desire for reconciliation. "Love for God and care for God's creation are closely intertwined," she said.

Moyer advised attendees to learn about their local environments, focusing on watersheds. She explained that knowledge of the local environment and our relationship to it helps us "connect to our place" and "live well in it." Through evaluation of our ecological footprint and information about human-driven changes to Earth's systems, Moyer raised awareness of the imperative for action.

We are in a "moment of time in which we must act," she said. "People cannot thrive if the ecological systems they depend on are not thriving." We need to act "for human justice, to honour God, and for the sake of creatures themselves." Moyer suggested reducing food waste, teaching, advocating, learning and working together in countercultural communities of faith.

Attendee Debbie Bledsoe, pastor of First Mennonite Church in Edmonton, finds hope in "the power of the individual to make a difference." As a queer and neurodivergent woman, Bledsoe worried about not being able to contribute to the climate movement. However, stories in the book *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the*



Leng Thang (left to right), Tim Wiebe-Neufeld, Bill Christieson and Elizabeth Wall at the Griffith Woods Natural Environment Park, as part of an MC Alberta creation event.

Climate Crisis, one of resources at the sessions, changed Debbie's outlook. She was encouraged by the power of people of all kinds whose faith and experiences led them to action. Stories of their success gives Bledsoe hope that marginalized people can and do make change in the world. She shared that, "people acting together, with purpose, especially marginalized peoples, brings me hope amid despair."

Liesel Retzlaff and Charlene Lauzier, young adults and co-chairs of the Creation Care Working Group in Alberta, described the hope they find in connecting with others who care. Lauzier finds hope, in part, from the support their working group receives from other regions. "Seeing what they've been able to accomplish" helps us believe we will be an "influence to make a difference in Alberta, though we are younger." Retzlaff adds that leaders in the church provide encouragement and make them feel seen.

The network of support encourages Retzlaff and Lauzier to initiate

opportunities for conversations in Alberta about the need for creation care. "There are people out there already wanting to do things and we can meet them in that place," said Retzlaff.

In the final session, Moyer shared Sandy Plett's story of driving through a blizzard as a young girl. Plett serves as Mennonite Church Canada's climate action coordinator. Since the way ahead was difficult to see, Plett's mother opened the car door for a visual of the edge of the road so they could keep going. Plett uses this story as an example of moving forward in difficult circumstances. "You know where you are going but you don't know how you are going to get there," reflected Moyer.

"Hope and spiritual resilience," along with community, undergird us, Moyer said. She encouraged those in attendance to continually find ways that are within each of our control to care for the "good gifts our Creator put on Earth." ●

Tokyo Anabaptist Centre a hub of activity

By Amy Rinner Waddell

The Tokyo Anabaptist Centre has been a busy—and sometimes dusty—place this year, reports Gerald Neufeld, Canadian church worker in Japan. Neufeld and his wife, Rie, who serve as relationship catalysts with Mennonite Church Canada, hosted workdays with volunteers at the end of December as part of a renovation of the Centre. While only partially moved in, they regularly travelled an hour and a half to do work such as scraping old wallpaper in preparation for painting.

“Most of the rooms still needed to be finished with putty on the drywall, and painted,” reported Neufeld in an email. “Working with volunteers, we ended up with thick putty on the drywall which meant that with the sanding, there was a fair amount of putty dust created, which went everywhere. Once that was done, we could finally clean up and paint rooms.” The Neufeld family continued to fix up rooms, paint, buy furniture and deal with termites, all while hosting guests, as they prepared to move in last December.

The building had been built by mission workers as a guest house and study centre in 1966. Before the Neufelds moved to Japan in 2021, the house sat vacant for some years and needed upgrading for earthquake resistance. They lived temporarily at the Yayoidai Church guesthouse while the main renovations were done.

The Anabaptist Centre sits next door to the Honancho Christian Church, a Mennonite congregation. “The Centre is primarily a guest house and base for our work with the Tokyo Area Fellowship of Mennonite Churches (TAFMC),” says Neufeld. “We are hoping to build connections with the local community as well as become a meeting place for people from the Tokyo area churches.” Neufeld is looking forward to connecting with people at the Centre through board game nights. “In this digital age where people spend a lot of time on phones and



Volunteers prime a wall as part of renovations to the Tokyo Anabaptist Centre. .

computers, I’m hoping this could be a way for people to spend time together face to face,” he says.

Future plans for the Centre are to use it as a place to host gatherings, hold faith study sessions, connect with the local community and use as a base from which to coordinate support services in case of earthquakes.

The Neufelds work intentionally with both the TAFMC, a group of five small area congregations, and MC Canada. Each group contributes finances and other resources. Jeanette Hanson of MC

Canada’s International Witness program helped shape a covenant between the two groups to encourage mutual sharing. Donations can be made at mennonitechurch.ca/japan or by contacting finance@mennonitechurch.ca.

Gerald Neufeld previously pastored the Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship in Surrey, B.C. He continues to connect with that congregation through regular online preaching. Currently the Neufelds attend a different Tokyo church each week. ●

Community found in the kitchen

Handmade recipe book transcends time and place

By Fionnuala Braun

In 1989, my grandmother, Lorraine Braun, began creating a cookbook for my mother, Maurya. For three decades, she handwrote recipes of foods that were significant in our family or the Mennonite community. This recipe book is a central memory from my childhood.

The book's pages are covered with the ketchup we used to make rib sauce or smattered with oil from sitting open next to the *rollkuchen* deep fryer.

The book tells the story of our family, but it also tells a larger historical story. Through a collection of recipes that can be traced from the Netherlands to Russia, following a pattern of flight and persecution, it provides an account of the displacement of Mennonites.

Handwritten recipe books and the practice of recipe sharing were, and continue to be, a way for Mennonite families to find a sense of identity that was not rooted in a geographical location.

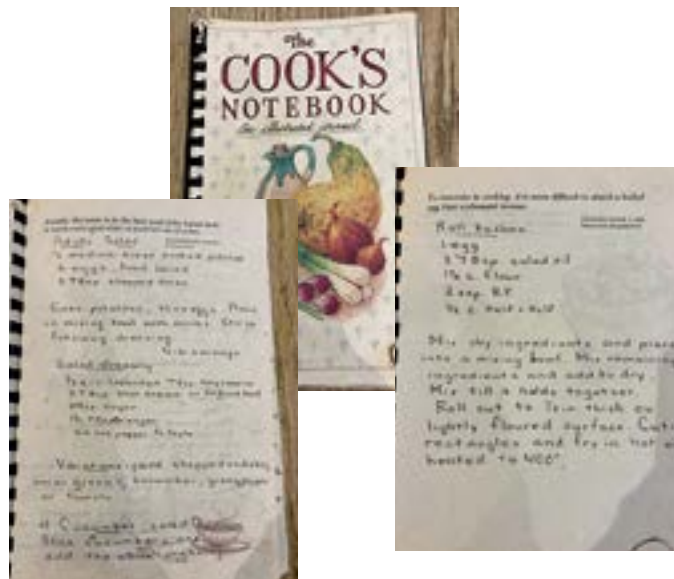
These recipes taught young community members like me about the importance

of remembrance and tradition. They also helped us to learn that Mennonites

colonist and eventual immigrant to Canada, was called to fight for the Russian White Army. Unwilling to compromise his pacifist beliefs, he deserted and fled back to his farm. Officials searched his land for days while he hid in a haystack, his family bringing him food and news when they could. At one point, officers stabbed the haystack with pitchforks, looking for him. His survival and subsequent escape to Canada were nothing short of miraculous. But his experience traumatized him. His story was shared by aunts and uncles, but he would never speak about it directly.

Still, it looms large in my own understanding of Mennonite history. I can imagine the terror. I can also imagine how ostracized my family and others

like them must have felt. They moved from one place to another, and in every country, they were labelled undesirable. When my mother's family fled to Canada, they brought with them only what they could carry. A significant portion of this was memory—memory of the places they had been and the homes they had tried



Well-loved recipes for salad and rollkuchen.

value memory because of their complex history of displacement, persecution and the search for a safe home.

When I ask my mother about trauma and displacement, she recalls a story that signifies the depth of the brutality our family experienced because of our pacifism. Her grandfather, a Mennonite

to create.

The cabbage rolls and watermelon salad I remember eating as a child became part of our family's cuisine because their forebears harvested the fresh ingredients for them from their Russian farmland. Even simple dishes like potato salad with a vinegar base carry German influence—the home they were forced to leave before coming to Russia. The result is my mother's cookbook.

Conversations about migration and expulsion, my mother recollects, often occurred in the kitchen. These conversations, and the act of cooking food while speaking about her ancestors, is what gave her a sense of the fluidity of Mennonite identity. She says that while “[Mennonites] didn't have a homeland anymore...[they] still knew who [they] were,” in large part because they were able to carry their experiences through the ways they cooked.

Passing on recipes provided an opportunity to tell stories that often stirred up traumatic memories. While making *rollkuchen*, she might have discussed her family's migration from Germany. Eating watermelon salad on a hot summer day brought up questions about farming in Russia. The first time I heard the story about my great-grandfather hiding in the haystack to escape the White Army was around a kitchen table. I remember my grandmother telling me similar stories when I was old enough to help prepare traditional foods. The kitchen became a safe space to discuss traumatic and complex issues in the formation of our family's identity.

For my mother, there is no one way to be Mennonite, but she has also never felt confused about what it means to be a Mennonite—a fact that she attributes to the rich tradition of recipe sharing in her home.

My mother's cookbook serves as a physical artifact that mirrors the experiences of refuge-seeking and homecoming that loomed large in the collective memory of her family. ●

Fionnuala Braun is a research officer in the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan.

NEWS BRIEFS

CoSA closure update

Last month, the Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) sites in Toronto, Hamilton and Kitchener were slated to close in June due to lack of funding. St. Leonard's Society Hamilton, a well-established organization supporting people as they leave prison, confirmed in early June they will partner with CoSA in Hamilton to reopen. No date has been announced for the reopening. Public and private funding are still needed to support the work of CoSA.

The coordinator of St. Leonard's is a former Mennonite Central Committee Ontario staff member and has been giving leadership to the work in Hamilton for over 20 years. *Source: CoSA Canada*

Updating GAMEO

The management board of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) has agreed to expand GAMEO's multilingual offerings. Current updates include new article categories allowing users to access articles based on the language of publication. GAMEO will open content submissions in any language and will integrate Google Translate options.

Jon Isaak, GAMEO board chair since 2020, announced his retirement. Bert Friesen is retiring as financial liaison but will continue as associate editor, focusing on building relationships with Hutterite communities. Aileen Friesen will take on the roles of board chair and finance liaison. *Source: GAMEO*

EMMC leaves MCC

The Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) has withdrawn as an official supporting member of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada due to MCC's decision to no longer require all staff to be celibate outside of heterosexual marriage. According to a report in *Anabaptist World*, interim EMMC executive director Terry Hiebert said the withdrawal is due to lack of congruence between MCC Canada's new position and the denomination's definition of marriage. MCC Canada board chair Ron Ratzlaff said MCC made the policy change to comply with Canadian laws. *Source: Anabaptist World*

Student receives scholarship

Canadian Mennonite University student Karissa Durant has been awarded a prestigious Canada Graduate Scholarship Master's award of \$17,500. Durant is working on a Master of Arts in Theological Studies. Receiving the Canada Graduate Scholarship will support the work she is doing on her thesis in critical community hermeneutics, for which she is exploring, “the call for unity in the church when we disagree.” Durant is a part of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. *Source: CMU*

Mennonites march to Washington

Mennonite Action, a grassroots group of Mennonite activists across the U.S. and Canada, will be hosting a peace march from Harrisonburg, Virginia, to Washington D.C. from July 18 to 28. During the 218-kilometre trip, marchers will promote peace using their bodies and voices, culminating in a two-day mobilization in Washington D.C., July 28-30, where they will call for a sustained ceasefire in Gaza. *Source: Mennonite Action*

Involuntary

Terminated MCC workers call for accountability and change

By Will Braun

“I still use it,” Anicka Fast says of the brownish knitted potholder she received at Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) orientation in Akron, Pennsylvania, in 2009. Fast and her husband John Clarke were en route to their first MCC assignment at the time.

Fast is grateful to the women who, for many years, offered those hand-crafted gestures of community support to participants in MCC orientations. She’s grateful even though she and Clarke were terminated without cause by MCC last year.

The abrupt end came while Fast and her family were in a time

of crisis following nearly three years in conflict-ridden Burkina Faso. Fast had just received a preliminary diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The couple are among seven people involuntarily terminated by MCC who wrote a June 11 open letter to “the global MCC constituency” calling for the organization to be held accountable to its peacebuilding principles in relation to treatment of its own workers. (tinyurl.com/stopmccabuse-full-letter)

Organizational culture

MCC is among the most prominent and storied Mennonite institutions. Many of its North American supporters volunteer in MCC thrift stores, faithfully attend relief sales, hang MCC calendars on their walls and entrust donations to the international relief, development and

peacebuilding organization. Last year, MCC Canada and MCC U.S., which operate in tandem, reported combined revenue of more than CDN\$160 million.

The concerns of the terminated workers raise questions about how MCC, and, by implication, other organizations, deal with internal conflicts and how the influence of human resources (HR) practices affect organizational culture.

Several people who have held leader-

Letter to constituents

The nine-page letter to MCC constituents details the experiences of the seven former workers and their serious allegations. They say they are speaking up because they care about MCC and believe constituents should know of their experiences.

The letter is linked to an online petition (tinyurl.com/stopmccabuse-petition) that had been signed by 652 people when this article was published.

Canadian Mennonite interviewed all seven people behind the letter, reviewed numerous related documents and spoke with two other people, both of whom were terminated without cause by MCC. The seven people interviewed served in five countries on two continents and were terminated—some with cause—between 2009 and 2024.

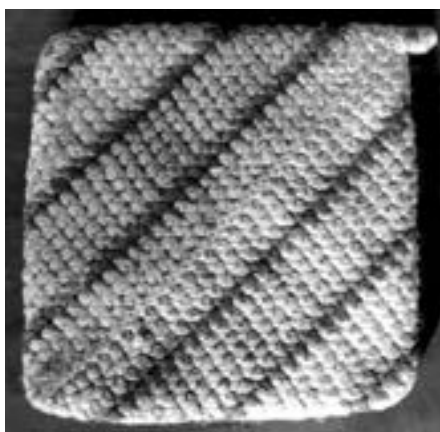
One common element among them was the feeling that when conflict arose within MCC, and when they asked questions, MCC did not respond with the degree of openness and care they expected. They were left feeling confused and ultimately betrayed by an organization they believed in and had sacrificed much for. Still, they express an enduring desire for the good of MCC.

Three of the people did not publish their names for fear of jeopardizing relationships or employment.

The other side

MCC did not make anyone available for an interview but provided a written statement it had previously sent to constituents who expressed concern about the termination of Fast and Clarke. The full statement is available at canadianmennonite.org/involuntary.

They were left feeling confused and ultimately betrayed by an organization they believed in.



A potholder Anicka Fast received at MCC orientation.

ship positions with MCC or related organizations are also raising concerns about MCC culture and/or the termination of Fast and Clarke.

The statement says, “MCC seeks to ensure the physical and mental health of all staff and partners, making it our highest priority.”

Following release of the June 11 open letter, MCC spokesperson Laura Kalmar expanded on MCC’s earlier statement, writing in an email to *Canadian Mennonite*, “MCC may hold a different view of the circumstances outlined by John and Anicka—as well as the others who signed the open letter—while, at the same time, endeavouring to be a listening, learning and growing organization.”

Kalmar further noted MCC’s “inability to discuss details of confidential HR matters, especially those currently under litigation.” Fast and Clarke are pursuing their concerns via the Quebec labour board, known as the Commission des Normes, de L’équité, de la Santé et de la Sécurité du Travail.

In a June 18 statement (mcc.org/our-stories/mcc-statement-response-open-letter-and-petition), MCC said, in relation to legal action and public discussion, “We will share the facts as we know them in a court of law at the appropriate time.”

Anicka Fast & John Clarke

Fast and Clarke, along with their two children, began an assignment with MCC in Burkina Faso in July 2020. They oversaw programming there, with a team of approximately 12. For part of the term, Fast was seconded on a part-time basis to Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite World Conference in addition to her MCC duties.

The couple had served with MCC in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2009 to 2012. Fast’s 2020 PhD dissertation focused on the history of Mennonite churches in DR Congo.

Speaking by video call from the Netherlands, where they now live, Fast and Clarke said they’re speaking up less for themselves than out of a broader concern for the organization.

Questions raised

The couple said that part way through their term in Burkina Faso, they raised questions with MCC HR staff in the U.S.

Clarke was concerned about the process by which job openings were designated as open to either local or international applicants. These were sensitive decisions and a “known issue” within MCC, according to Clarke.

“I named the problem and asked for guidance,” he said. Clarke had the impression his questions were unwelcome. Responses from HR staff were inadequate and unreasonably delayed in his view.

Tensions escalated in March 2023 when a particular HR process was handled in a way Clarke described as heavy-handed and non-restorative. Privacy policies prevent him from discussing specifics.

Fast and Clarke said they contacted HR directors hoping for resolution. “We can surely sit down and talk this through,” Fast thought, but repeated efforts proved frustrating.

It felt to Clarke that HR staff were “deflecting.”

The MCC area directors were supportive, but Fast

and Clarke said HR staff cut the area directors out of the process leaving the couple feeling “isolated.”

Turmoil in Burkina Faso

Meanwhile, two coup d’etats took place in the country in 2022. At staff devotional times, local colleagues shared stories of villages burned and family members forced to flee. The MCC team responded to an attempted abduction of a staff member’s child, the death of a project participant and people disappearing.

Facing turmoil in the country as well as what they experienced as the resistance of HR staff to address conflict, the couple brought their complaints in writing to the executive directors (EDs) of MCC Canada and MCC U.S.—Rick Cober Bauman and Ann Graber Hershberger, respectively—in accordance with MCC policy.

Three weeks later, though the EDs had not met with the couple, Graber Hershberger replied, saying the EDs had full confidence in the HR directors.

The EDs also turned down a second

request to meet with the couple.

“This can’t be happening,” Fast recalled thinking. “We’ll find another person who will understand. We’ll wake up from this.”

Deterioration

Conflict in the country worsened. “We had been hearing stories about genocide, ethnic cleansings, atrocities,” Clarke recalled. They prepared for the possibility of evacuating MCC personnel.

In July 2023, they went to the Netherlands, where Fast holds citizenship, for combined vacation time and stress leave.

There, psychological symptoms surfaced. “I became dysfunctional,” Fast said. “I could not think about going back. . . . I had hoped I would rest and recover and be able to go back to work, but something had shifted.”

MCC may hold a different view of the circumstances.

A psychologist said Fast appeared to have PTSD, which was formally diagnosed thereafter. “I had trouble accepting that,” Fast said.

The psychologist recommended Fast not return to Burkina Faso for at least six months.

“At that point, I still believed that MCC would be there for us,” Fast said.

The couple informed their supervisors and suggested a medical leave plan that would see them stay in the Netherlands, with Clarke working remotely and via travel to Burkina Faso. MCC wanted Fast and Clarke to relocate to another African country instead.

At the same time, the couple was trying to pursue the conflict resolution process related to earlier actions of HR staff.

Next level

Fast and Clarke wrote to Ron Ratzlaff, chair of the MCC Canada board, whom they knew and appreciated.

“We feel like we are isolated and have no one we can talk to for help,” they wrote.

“We are in a very difficult situation and are reaching out in desperation for your guidance and assistance, in as much as you can provide as chair of MCC Canada board.”

According to the couple, Ratzlaff’s reply was short and business-like. Policy, they were told, prevented board involvement. They were pointed back to the staff who were the source of their concerns.

While board members of an organization do not generally involve themselves in personnel matters, it is often within the purview of a board to ensure neutral third-party avenues for resolving serious conflicts. MCC policies are not public.

Ratzlaff copied his email reply, which included the couple’s detailed concerns with the ED, to the ED. Fast and Clarke had considered it confidential.

It felt to the couple like another dead end—like the process kept turning against them.

any MCC staff.

In the midst of a debilitating mental health crisis—Clarke was subsequently diagnosed with PTSD as well—with no home and two children dealing with their own stresses, Fast and Clarke were without a job and feeling a profound sense of “institutional betrayal,” as Clarke put it.

“MCC knew we were in a real crisis,” Fast said.

During the call, MCC emailed the couple a financial “separation package.” They were offered approximately \$160,000 plus unspecified moving and medical expenses if they signed a legal document by which they would give up all rights to recourse, grievance or complaint and would commit to never disclose details of the agreement or speak negatively about MCC.

Such agreements are common in the business world and some church organizations.

of the MCC Canada and U.S. boards, respectively, responded, expressing a willingness to engage in mediation and saying MCC would initiate a third-party investigation.

“Our heart is to engage with you in a spirit of reconciliation,” Perez and Ratzlaff wrote. “We commit to holding this process prayerfully and with care.”

Ratzlaff and Perez declined to comment for this article.

Labour board

In October 2023, Fast and Clarke each filed a formal complaint with the provincial labour board in Quebec, their home jurisdiction. Quebec labour law says a person can file a complaint if they have served two uninterrupted years and “[believe] they have not been dismissed for a good and sufficient cause.”

“We [had] been asking [MCC] since April [2023] to just sit down and talk with us, always assuming that things could easily be straightened out, and it was only after multiple failed attempts to get a hearing, and being fired, that we considered this legal channel,” Fast wrote in a December 7, 2023, email to *Canadian Mennonite*.

The couple informed MCC of this step, emphasizing that they still preferred to find resolution outside legal channels.

The labour board process includes a mediation option. MCC agreed to this, but when Fast and Clarke discovered that process would require them to commit not to speak publicly of the situation, they opted out.

“We do not think that secrecy about these events serves MCC, us, MCC’s partners or the broader Mennonite community, and [we] are determined to preserve our right to speak freely,” they said in an email.

A Quebec tribunal is expected to hear the couple’s case within eight to 14 months.

Fast and Clarke said they are seeking a measure of justice, not a significant financial award, the latter of which they say is highly unlikely in the labour board process.

‘This isn’t about demonizing anybody. We want to see MCC thrive and be its best self.’

The day after Ratzlaff’s email—August 25, 2023—a previously arranged call with senior MCC U.S. staff took place. Fast and Clarke understood the purpose was to discuss relocation and sick leave.

Instead, Fast and Clarke were terminated without cause, effective immediately.

“They didn’t even ask how we were doing,” Fast recalled.

‘Separation package’

MCC staff paused during the call to verify Fast and Clarke’s personal email addresses because the couple were immediately disconnected from MCC’s electronic system and Whatsapp groups. They say they were asked not to talk with

The agreement stated that if Fast and Clarke did not sign it, they would receive approximately \$118,000 less.

The couple said this felt like MCC was trying to pay them to be quiet instead of seeking to understand and work through the couple’s serious concerns. They felt that a confidential settlement was not the path to peace.

They did not sign.

Public recourse

On November 3, 2023, Fast and Clarke sent a letter of grievance to the MCC Canada and U.S. boards, copied to various church contacts, including *Canadian Mennonite*.

Ron Ratzlaff and Gilberto Perez, chairs

Investigation

Three months after Fast and Clark requested an independent investigation, a firm hired by MCC informed the couple they would investigate their complaints and send the report to MCC's HR department. It is common practice for third-party reports of this nature to go to the HR department of a business or organization.

After back-and-forth with the investigator, Fast and Clarke declined to participate because they felt the firm MCC selected was not focused on institutional accountability and justice for complainants, and because the investigator's report would go to the people at the centre of the couple's complaints—the HR department.

The investigation proceeded without them.

"HR are seen as the masters of the process [and] policies," Fast and Clarke said, echoing a concern of others interviewed by *Canadian Mennonite*. Many expressed concern that HR policies and procedures take precedence over a more relational and conciliatory approach.

MCC's June 18 statement reads: "MCC's HR staff are committed to engaging with respect and care. They are individuals of faith who are consummate professionals."

In its earlier statement to *Canadian Mennonite*, MCC said its third-party investigation will allow the organization to "continue to monitor and evaluate MCC's processes and policies, ensuring the ongoing health and safety of all MCC staff."

Possibility of mediation

The couple's continual request has been for "MCC to participate in a facilitated and restorative conversation." They said they can drop the labour board process at any point.

The original MCC statement says, in relation to Fast and Clarke, "We look forward to participating in a mediation process with the parties involved in the future."

Like others interviewed, Fast and Clarke said they want MCC to abide by the teachings on mediation, trauma

acknowledge the hurt expressed by these former MCC staff members and their families." In the June 18 statement, MCC says, "We want to respond with humility and compassion."

The statement says, "MCC takes all reports of complaints from employees seriously," noting its Speak Up service

by which employees or others can file complaints. "All reports are confidential," the statement reads. "[C]omplaints are received by a third party on their secure servers. The reports are then handed over to trained MCC HR staff and may be investigated by a neutral third party where appropriate."

In reference to cases in which staff on the ground disagree with MCC decisions, the statement says, "MCC seeks to find a resolution that is consistent with our policies and offers compassion to those engaged."

At the time of publishing, Fast and Clarke said MCC EDs were in conversation with them about a possible mediated meeting, something the couple have been seeking since their initial complaint to EDs nearly a year ago.

Other accounts

The accounts of the other five people behind the open letter are reflected to a considerable extent by the comment of a terminated worker who said that in his experience, MCC lacked a spirit of trying to work through difficulties. In the cases of these people, when

tensions, conflicts and cross-cultural misunderstandings arose, the ultimate result was that people in positions of less power were terminated.

Three themes were the sense that superiors did not "have the backs" of these workers, the avenues for recourse did not serve these workers well and that MCC did not adequately live up to its peacemaking principles in these situations.



MCC Calendar, 2024.

and addressing complaints that its own workers receive in their training.

"MCC prides itself in providing trauma healing," Clarke noted, yet their family has endured the acute and sustained effects of the ordeal.

MCC response

In response to impacts on families cited in the open letter, MCC said in an email to *Canadian Mennonite*, "We do

Kathryn & Dan Smith Derksen

The other people who put their name to the letter are Kathryn and Dan Smith Derksen of Seattle, Washington. Having served with MCC in Uganda from 2000 to 2003, the couple and their two children started what was to be a three-year term as peace workers in Chad in 2006. During a video interview they said their assignment was remote and challenging.

They described insufficient in-country orientation and very poor relations with their supervisor.

Speaking by video call, the couple described a failure on the part of MCC to provide adequate support or to deal proactively with the deterioration of relations with their supervisor. Senior staff did not respond adequately to the Smith Derksens' request for mediation.

Despite these troubles, the Smith Derksens valued their work and asked to extend their term. The partner organization and MCC signed an extension. Documents indicate MCC had concerns about the Smith Derksens and

conflictual relations, but still, MCC approved the extension.

Less than a month later, on May 25, 2009, the couple were involuntarily terminated.

The termination letter said the couple shared negative information about the partner with one of the partner's major funders. The Smith Derksens told *Canadian Mennonite* the accusation is false and that MCC could have cleared up the situation with a call to the funder.

The couple said they were not provided meaningful opportunity to defend themselves until an investigative committee review that took place well after their termination.

The couple have communication from a person connected to the funding organization cited in their termination letter, obtained after their termination, that they say supports their case. A revised termination letter, which excluded the

central allegation against them, was issued following the review process.

That review and investigation almost did not happen. Two and a half months after the Smith Derksens' termination, but prior to them initiating the grievance process, MCC informed the couple that a new grievance policy had been put in place. The committee review process was no longer included. MCC eventually agreed to allow the Smith Derksens to use the process stipulated in the policy that had been in place when they were terminated.

Following the process, MCC gave the couple USD\$10,000 and asked them not to speak about the conflict, though there was no legal requirement to remain silent.

The couple said they are speaking up

'MCC seeks to ensure the physical and mental health of all staff and partners.'

now in order to support families who continue to go through comparable experiences. While they do not seek further redress for themselves, they emphasized the lasting impacts they say the termination has had on their family.

Ripples

Given the stature of MCC and the interconnectedness of Mennonite organizations, the efforts of Fast, Clarke and the others to seek public accountability have created ripples.

The matter came up at the April meetings of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Executive Committee in Brazil.

Fast serves as secretary of the MWC Faith and Life Commission, a part-time position she also held during her MCC assignment. Speaking at the Brazil meeting—which Fast did not attend—MWC general secretary César García

noted that MCC had “unexpectedly terminated” Fast and Clarke’s assignment in August.

“MCC did not accuse Anicka or John of any misconduct,” García stated.

“MWC strongly supports Anicka’s ministry as MWC Faith and Life Commission Secretary. MWC continues to partner with MCC while continuing to encourage their process of resolution and healing in this situation.”

García clarified for *Canadian Mennonite* that these comments were his personal communication to that particular audience and do not constitute an official public statement from MWC.

MCC senior leaders, past and present, were in attendance.

In need of care

Others also provide a degree of backing for Fast and Clarke. Rod Hollinger-Janzen served as executive coordinator of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission from 2005 to the beginning of 2021. During this time, he was involved with Fast’s PhD work. It was “brilliant work,” he said, adding that she was loved by the people.

Previously, Hollinger-Janzen and his wife Linda served with MCC in Burkina Faso and with Mennonite Board of Missions in Benin. They visited Fast and Clarke in Burkina Faso.

During a video interview, Hollinger-Janzen said there is much he does not know about Fast and Clarke’s termination, but he is perplexed and troubled by what he does know. He questioned how people of the “calibre” of Fast and Clarke, who gave so much of themselves in a high-stress setting, could end up being terminated at a time when they most needed support.

“What happens to the trust in the community when things like this happen and seemingly they are not dealt with in a restorative way?” he asked.

“This isn’t about demonizing anybody,” Hollinger-Janzen added. “We care about MCC. We want to see MCC thrive and be its best self.”

Be nice

Tim Lind shares similar concerns and wishes. Lind served with MCC between

the late 1960s and 2014. He worked as Africa director, based in the U.S., for seven years in the '80s, and, along with his wife Suzanne, as country representatives for the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2007 to 2014.

Fast and Clarke served with MCC in DR Congo during that time. "We hired them," Lind said, noting that he and Suzanne got to know the couple well during that time and have stayed in touch since.

Speaking by video call from his home in Michigan, Lind said he has no "special knowledge" related to the termination of Fast and Clarke, and he notes that MCC has not given their version. Still, having heard Fast and Clarke's account, he is concerned.

Lind said MCC is known as an organization that has done ground-breaking work in conflict resolution and in dealing with trauma. The way they appear to have handled the situation of Clarke and Fast seems "oppositional to all of those principles that MCC itself has put forward," he said.

Lind acknowledged that while working with people is "complicated," it comes down to "what we learned in kindergarten about how to treat each other: be nice to each other." Referring to things MCC taught him during his service, he said the party with greater power has a responsibility to not use their power against others.

"You treat people as though you care about them," he said.

Lind noted a general shift toward "a very corporate model of governance" within various church-related organizations and said this does not always align with the values of those organizations.

In this case, Lind said of MCC, "if they have made a mistake, they need to correct it and then we go on. We expect that of MCC, and it makes them stronger."

Quiet loyalty

Abe Janzen worked for MCC for 30-plus years, in Bolivia and as director of MCC Alberta. He has no particular connection to the people behind the open letter and is no longer with MCC.

Janzen says MCC tends to expect a high degree of loyalty, and sometimes

that comes at the expense of an openness to questioning.

Janzen emphasizes that he continues to support MCC and is deeply grateful for the opportunities he has had with MCC.

As for involuntary termination, he says that in such cases resolution of relationships should be a priority.

Pastor Bananzaro

The termination of Fast and Clarke reverberated among Mennonites in Burkina Faso. Pastor Thioro Bananzaro is the chair of the Mennonite Church in Burkina Faso (*Eglise Evangélique Mennonite du Burkina Faso*) and the pastor of the church Fast and Clarke attended in Ouagadougou.

"With the whole national church, we do not have the right words to qualify what happened to this family," he wrote in an email to *Canadian Mennonite*, referring to Fast, Clarke and their kids.

He raised three concerns. First, the church was not informed of the reason for the termination.

Second, for Fast and Clarke to leave without properly informing their hosts—a scenario they were forced into—is a breach of culture. Pastor Bananzaro says, "most partners are silently thinking this way—a situation this family does not deserve."

Thirdly, he says the way the family was treated shows a "lack of love," especially given Fast's health concerns. "As a Christian community, we do not want this to be a bad testimony to [who we are as Mennonites] in the country," he said.

"Finally," he wrote, "we strongly recommend that MCC proceeds to repair the damages caused to this family."

Potholders and calendars

Like Anicka Fast, who values the women who knitted potholders for MCC workers, Kathryn Smith Derksen said during an interview, "I have two MCC calendars on my wall right now. I believe in the good that is MCC."

Notably, the March photo in the

calendar was taken by Clarke.

Clarke said he knows the couple's story will be hard for many MCC supporters to hear. He and Fast said repeatedly that they don't want their story to make people feel bad. Still, while noting that people spend lifetimes volunteering for MCC and donating, Clarke said he does not want a sense of the "unquestioned sacredness" of MCC to prevent people from requiring accountability of MCC leaders. He does not want the "beloved" organization to be turned into an "idol" that cannot be questioned.

The couple recalled an instance when MCC colleagues in Africa simply vanished from the MCC scene. They said no one, including themselves, said anything. That's the culture, Clarke said: "We don't ask. We don't talk about it." They recall thinking that the people who

**'I believe in the good
that is MCC.'**

were gone "must have done something terrible."

"There seems to be something deeply Mennonite about not questioning authority," Clarke said.

For Fast, speaking out feels like "touching this sacred, untouchable thing."

Having led a faith-based agency for 15 years, Hollinger-Janzen said, "organizations have to defend themselves; that just goes with the territory. At the same time, if an organization is not comfortable calling itself into question, that's also problematic."

Speaking about the concerns raised by Fast and Clarke, and echoing the sentiment of most of the people *Canadian Mennonite* interviewed for this article, Hollinger-Janzen said, "we want these problems to be dealt with in a good way so we can have a stronger MCC." ●

Seeing beauty and injustice

Cindy Wallace explores how writers wrestle with Simone Weil's challenging ethics

By Katie Doke Sawatzky

Since her death in 1943, Simone Weil's philosophy has impacted dozens of writers, thinkers and theologians. T.S. Eliot named her a saint. Simone de Beauvoir envied her spirit.

Now, in *The Literary Afterlives of Simone Weil: Feminism, Justice, and the Challenge of Religion*, Cindy Wallace examines how nine writers, including Adrienne Rich, Annie Dillard and the Mennonite poet Sarah Klassen, interact with the French philosopher and activist in their work. The book was released by Columbia University Press earlier this year.

Simone Weil's short life was admirable. She was a teacher of the Classics who sought solidarity with those who suffered by working in a factory. She later joined the anti-fascist resistance in the Spanish Civil War.

Raised as an agnostic by Jewish parents, Weil had mystical encounters with Christ in her late '20s. This informed her writing about Christ and the spiritual life. She died in England at 34, after contracting tuberculosis and refusing to eat more than those who were resisting Hitler's regime in France.

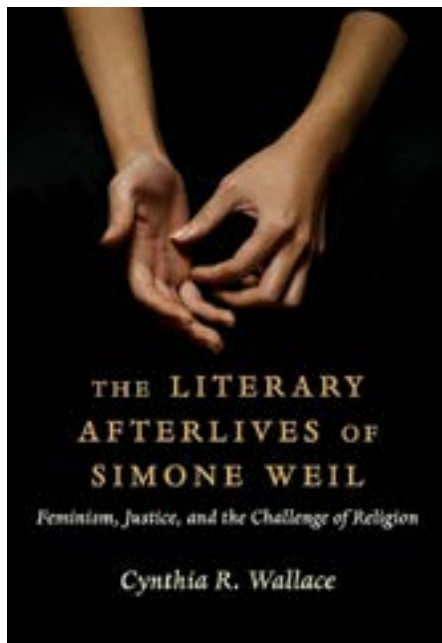
Wallace, who teaches English at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan and writes a column for *Canadian Mennonite*, shared what inspires her in Weil's work and why Weil can resonate with church communities as well as writers. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Which important ideas of Weil's do you focus on?

The first is her interest in attention as a contemplative discipline of openness. Weil argues that we pay attention to our homework, to works of art and poetry,

but we also pay attention in spiritual practice like prayer and in the ethical practice of focusing on someone who is really suffering.

The second is her moral seriousness. She's very concerned with justice. In



Weil's thought, her religious interest and her politics are integrated. Her fascination with Christ wasn't separate from her critique of colonization and she was one of the first Europeans to criticize European colonization openly.

The third thing is Weil's grappling with religion. She had mystical experiences yet she was so critical of the church as an institution. Weil is a good model of what it can look like to have a faith that's open to mystery and also refuses to be comfortable with what the church has gotten wrong.

As a Mennonite, what inspires you about Weil's work?

I'm attracted to the way that Weil refuses modes of "power over." It resonates with Mennonite theology that takes seriously Jesus' humility. I also think her integrity aligns with our interest in radical discipleship, where we think that Jesus meant what he said when he called people into action. That was the way she sought to live her life and the way she wrote her philosophy.

Also, as a Mennonite situated on Treaty 6 and Metis homeland, I have to appreciate Weil's critique of colonization, which I learn from because it cost her. She kept talking about it when nobody else was.

Your book examines literary art—poems, a novel, creative non-fiction—that is inspired by Weil's life and writing. What role can art play within the spiritual journey or a church community? Does Weil speak to this?

Weil argues that one of the ways we can love God is by appreciating beauty because all beauty comes from God. A lot of Mennonites I know have a deep appreciation for the land, seasons, nature, flower gardens, which is legitimate, but there's also this possibility in poetry, visual arts and in literature, which can sometimes feel intimidating and elitist.

Weil believed that all of the greatest beauty in the world ought to be accessible to all people and so she taught the Classics to wage workers in factories. She believed having a heart and life that was open to the beauty humans could make was dignifying and enlivening for every person. I think that's something we could think about as communities.

As Mennonites, we value simplicity

and I love it and I'm convicted by it, but beauty has a potential to wake us up to truth and goodness, which I believe, with Weil, comes from God.

What did you learn from this project?

Over and over again, in moments where there's no room to talk about religion in public life or what it looks like to choose self-sacrifice over comfort, to choose to take up our crosses and follow Jesus in

a literal way—different generations of writers find a conversation partner in Weil.

She doesn't give all the answers, but she is provocative and countercultural enough to makes us think, 'Oh maybe business as usual isn't the best way to live a full and fruitful life.' She's a conversation partner for questions about what it looks like to live a countercultural life that's still

open to beauty, goodness and joy.

It's easy to assume the countercultural struggle is a bit of a slog.

What I love about Weil is that she's really insistent that we see the world for how it really is. She never lets us pretend away injustice. But she's just as insistent that we see what's beautiful and that we see the goodness of friendship and community. ●



Doug Klassen in Ottawa on May 22.

Doug Klassen joins Gaza event in Ottawa

Doug Klassen, executive minister of Mennonite Church Canada, joined a Church leaders' pilgrimage through Ottawa on May 22. In addition to MC Canada, there were leaders from the Anglican, Evangelical Lutheran, and United churches, as well as KAIROS, which coordinated the event.

The leaders' pilgrimage marked the culmination of Gaza ceasefire pilgrimages that took place in 173 cities around the world during Lent. MC Canada congregations organized walks in all Regional Churches, often collaborating with ecumenical groups or local ministerial groups.

"This has been an important expression of solidarity by our constituency," said Jeanette Hanson, director of International Witness for MC Canada.

The May 22 pilgrimage originally conflicted with Klassen's participation in a planned delegation of three people to the Christ at the Checkpoint Conference hosted by Bethlehem Bible College, a partner of Mennonite Church Canada. At the point when tensions escalated between Israel and Iran, MC Canada leaders were questioning the viability of the trip, and then Air Canada cancelled the flights the group had booked.

Incoming Mennonite Church

Saskatchewan executive minister Len Rempel and Kathy Bergen, Palestine-Israel Network Coordinator in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, were meant to attend as well. Klassen says the trip has been postponed until fall.

"I was saddened by the cancelled flights to Christ at the Checkpoint, which means the postponement of the trip. This is an important time to be with Christians caught in the Israel-Hamas conflict," said Klassen. "At the same time, I'm grateful for the opportunity to join other church leaders in supporting the call for a ceasefire in Gaza." ●

CM CALENDAR Nationwide

Oct. 27: International Witness Sunday. Details and resources to come.

International

USA

July 25-28: Bridgefolk Retreat: Spiritual Practices for Peacemaking in Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota. Annual meeting of Mennonites and Catholics committed to peacemaking. More at bridgefolk.net

British Columbia

Aug. 3-5: North American Vietnamese Evangelical Fellowship Conference, Vietnamese Mennonite Church will be hosting at Sherbrooke Mennonite Church in Vancouver.

Aug. 10: Lao Church Worship and Celebration, 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Lao Church Hosting at Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church, Abbotsford.

Oct. 18-20: MCBC Ladies Retreat at Camp Squeah. Linda Todd guest speaker, details to come.

Nov. 1-3: MCBC Pastor/Family Retreat at Camp Squeah. Details to come.

Saskatchewan

July 28-Aug. 2 and Aug. 18-23: Shekinah Summer Camp is looking for volunteer cooks to work with the weekly convenor. If you can help for a day or two, contact Audrey Kampen, audrey@shekinahretreatcentre.org

Manitoba

June 21-Aug. 31: ICE: Moments, the photography of Klaus Hochheim at MHC Gallery, Winnipeg.

July 4: MCC Manitoba's annual golf tournament fundraiser, 9 a.m., Bridges Golf Course, Starbuck.

July 6: MCC Manitoba's Cycle Clear Lake, 7:30 a.m., Wasagaming Campground, Wasagaming.

Sept. 9: Activ8 is a new 8-month program for young adults combining a learning community, a service experience and the freedom to stay at home, work and save

for future study. Now accepting applicants. This pilot program is a partnership between MCM and Peace & Justice Initiatives. More at mennochurch.mb.ca/activ8

Ontario

July 6: Strawberry Thanksgiving and Communion. A dialogue and celebration addressing the complexities of Haldimand Tract lands. 10 a.m.- 1 p.m., Six Nations Polytechnic, Ohsweken.

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.

Aug. 25: Saengerfest: A centenary Mennonite song festival at 3 p.m., St. Matthews Lutheran Church, Kitchener.

Sept. 21: Toronto (GTA) Mennonite Festival at Willowgrove farm, Stouffville.

Sept 18: Walk with Grassy Narrows youth and community members in Toronto in solidarity on their path to achieve mercury justice and freedom. More at freegrassy.net

Oct. 21-25: MCC Learning Tour: Travelling Together Through Truth, engaging with First Nations communities and partners of MCC Ontario's Indigenous Neighbours program in Timmins.

Online

July 19: Mennonite World Conference hour of prayer, 14:00 UTC. Sign up at mwc-cmm.org

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.



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CM CLASSIFIEDS

Employment Opportunity

Bergthal Mennonite Church is looking for a part-time Pastor. We are located in rural Alberta outside of Didsbury. We are a small aging congregation, but we are a faithful one. We follow Anabaptist teachings and are Christ centered. To find out more about us, check out our website: Bergthalmennonitechurch.com. If this is something that interests you, please email one of the people on our search team:

Albert Goerzen: minnemo@outlook.com
Carolyn Ritchie: mugzie.ritchie@gmail.com
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FaithStory

Seeking God in a ‘thin place’

By Ainsley Dunn

my faith. Overall, I was spending less and less time involved with my church, making very little effort to explore my faith on my own, and this left me feeling quite isolated.

My faith journey began to grow again when I started to spend more time at Camp Valaqua, the Mennonite Church Alberta camp northwest of Calgary. I have been out at camp for church retreats and workdays my entire life, and I attended as a camper throughout my childhood. Camp has always been quite a magical place for me.

My mother consistently tells me how much more outgoing and confident I was after a week at camp.

I joined the staff team as a counselor in training (CIT) a few years ago and am now going into my third summer working at Valaqua.

Working with campers, pouring my energy into ensuring they have a safe and fun week, as well as building the contagious camp energy with my coworkers is so incredibly rewarding. Valaqua’s director, Jon Olfert, often talks about camp being a “thin place” for people, a space where God’s presence can be felt deeply. I feel that applies beautifully to my relationship with Valaqua. I have had many different conversations with my friends/coworkers and campers about faith. This has been incredibly valuable in broadening my perspective.

However, something I have begun to notice quite a bit is how much I feel and experience God in simple things. Things

like the way the sun reflects off of the river, singing at chapel and the feeling you get when sitting in silence with friends. And how, when I need a little extra support, suddenly the world looks a little bit more beautiful, there are birds, a family of deer, or the sun is warm on my skin. Which doesn’t necessarily erase whatever problem I am facing, but it helps to know that God is there.

The favourite way I have noticed God’s presence is in the relationships I have formed through working and living with the other staff as we challenge and support each other. I see God often in these people—how they treat others, how they look out for me, how they pour their time and energy into creating a safe and fun space, encouraging the other staff to take breaks, and genuinely demonstrating God’s love.

Due to the support and encouragement of these people, I have noticed myself becoming more confident, trusting myself to do hard things, trusting God’s timing and deepening my understanding of what it means to show God’s love. Camp has been incredibly formative in my understanding of my relationship with my faith, and I am immensely grateful to be a part of this community and place. ●

Ainsley Dunn is working at Camp Valaqua this summer as gardener and PIT crew director, guiding the discipleship program for older kids. She still attends Foothills Mennonite Church.

I grew up attending a relatively small Mennonite church—Foothills Mennonite in Calgary—with my family. My family was fairly involved in my church, and I grew up with a typical Mennonite faith. However, as I got older my church experience began to shift.

Our pastoral team underwent many changes, and because our congregation was fairly small, my youth group was also small. This meant it was somewhat inconsistent, although I did make fantastic friends through youth. My church has definitely played a large role in shaping my faith, and the group consists of some of the most kind, thoughtful and intentional people I know. I am so grateful to have grown up with or have met those people through my church.

As I grew up, I became less involved with my church, as many people experience through their teenage years and early adulthood. I became busy with school and extracurriculars. I did not prioritize being at church or even thinking about

Speak and act as those who will
be judged by a law that gives freedom.
For judgment is merciless for
the one who has shown no mercy.

BUT

MERCY

TRIUMPHS

OVER

JUDGMENT.

James 2:12-13

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