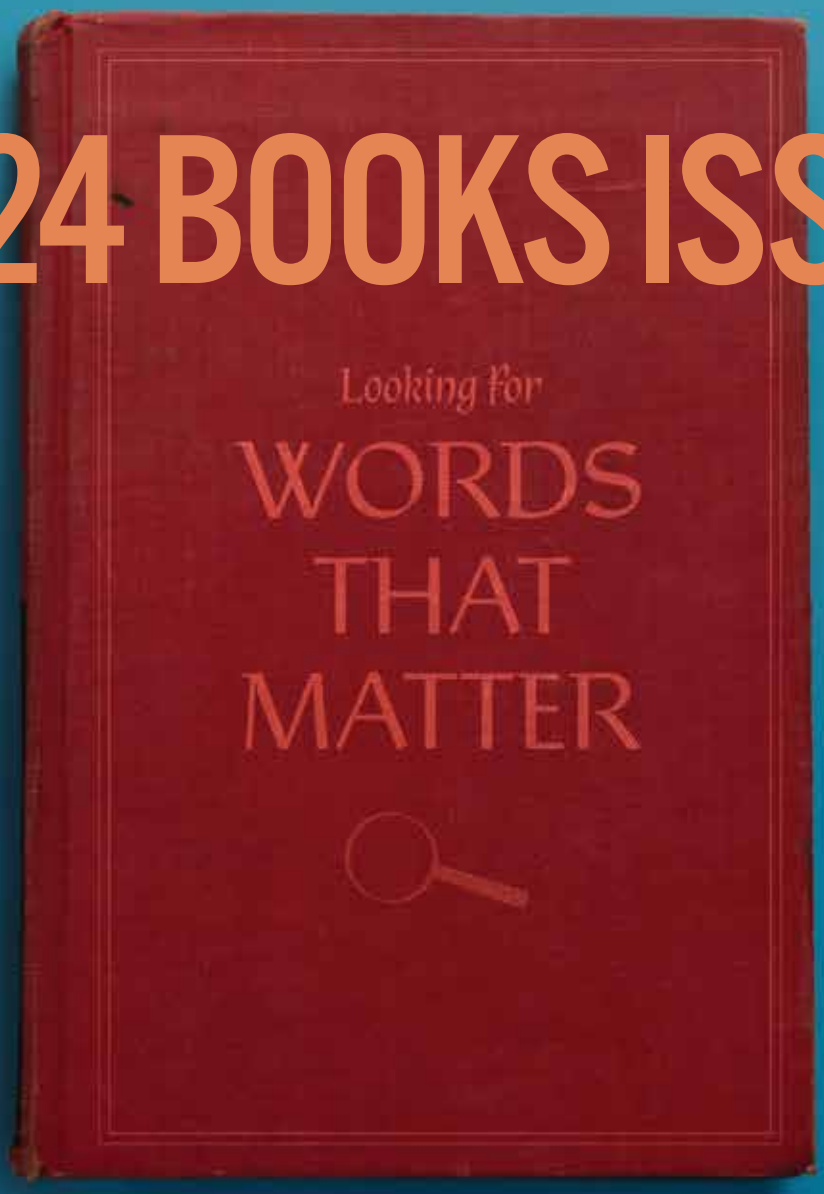
CANADIAN MENNONITE

NOVEMBER 2024

2024 BOOKS ISSUE



An unorthodox offering

Will Braun

Fight Night is the most recent book by Miriam Toews, arguably the most gifted Mennonite writer of our time. I eagerly re-read it recently.

The 2021 novel takes the form of a letter from nine-year-old Swiv to her absent father. Swiv lives in Toronto with her pregnant, "basket case," actor mom ("Leave the drama on the stage, Mom!"); her unborn sibling, Gord, and a zany grandmother who loves the Raptors and speaks a "secret language" when talking to friends back in the Manitoba town of "escaped Russians" from which she comes.

We see life, death and diuretic close calls through the head and heart of a girl who's been kicked out of school and spends much of her time with Grandma. We flow with Swiv's stream of quirky consciousness as she puts on Grandma's compression socks, silently cheers on Gord, desperately wishes the adults in her life wouldn't talk in public about bowel movements ("Why can't we just do things normally!"), and keeps close tabs on the nitro spray as Grandma has too much fun on a touchingly chaotic trip to visit relatives in Fresno, California.

"To be alive means full body contact with the absurd," says Grandma.

Fight Night is heartbreakingly hilarious. The tender fears of a kid whose family has been shaped by the suicides of her aunt and grandpa mix with the wacky antics of the little three-generation family. It is the laugh-out-loud humour of those who know suffering. It's a funny story about fighting for survival.

"We're all so clumsy in our grief," Grandma says.

In what feels like a tribute to Grandma, who shares the first name of Toews's mom, Toews quotes John Steinbeck in the epigraph: "An odd thing is that sadness does not necessarily become greater with age."

The delightful Swiv made me recall and like my nine-year-old self—trying hard to put together the puzzle of reality without all the pieces, and not immune to big worries.

While *Fight Night* is not Sunday-morning material, when I first read it, I came to the unexpected conclusion that Miriam Toews has vital insight about God and faith to offer the Mennonite church (as well as having much to offer broader audiences).

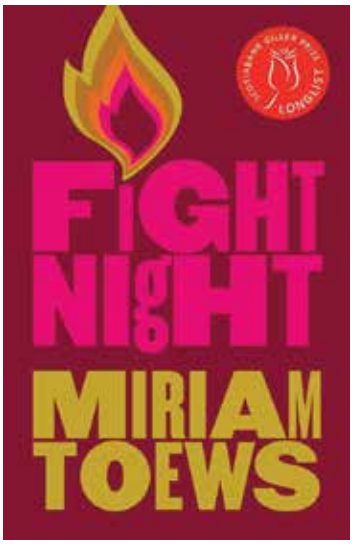
After Grandma says, "To be alive means full body contact with the absurd," she goes on, thus: "You might say that God is an absurd concept but faith in God's goodness … I find joy in that. I find it inspiring. Oba! I'm rambling…."

Grandma, who is "part Christian and part secular existentialist," tells a story of unanswered prayer, adjusted prayer, re-adjusted prayer, never feeling forsaken, peace that is inside but hard to locate, not being able to read the Bible without hearing "authoritarian old men's voices," all that was taken by such men, the resulting "fight for access to God," "*the steadfast love of the Lord*" and old German hymns.

All this as recounted by a girl whose closest reference point to biblical writings are the lyrics of Beyoncé.

As in *Women Talking*, Toews's previous novel, the characters broach faith more squarely than many church services I've attended.

Toews has written about the suicides of her dad and sister, and how church authorities viciously compounded the related suffering (*Fight Night* goes there too). Like many others, Toews is understandably distant from the formal church—in 2019, I told the *New York Times*, for better or worse, that Toews was "just too removed" to be a representative spokesperson of the larger



Mennonite whole. She is also deeply, indelibly part of the Mennonite circle.

More than that, she has offered us so much. Without assuming Toews shares the views of her characters, I think she is both far from the centre, and very near.

While *Fight Night* will be too raw and spicy for some Mennonites, they are the ones—particularly the "escaped Russian" sort—who potentially understand Toews in ways others cannot.

Without cheaply appropriating the most famous Mennonite for the ends of a particular corner of Mennonitism, I do believe our community, understood as narrowly or broadly as you wish, is better for her gifts.

We're hiring. As noted previously, Tobi Thiessen will be leaving the publisher role next year. The deadline to apply for that 0.8 FTE position is November 15.

We're also hiring people to handle social media work and to serve as Eastern Canada correspondent. Both are part-time, one-year positions. Applications are due by November 15. For full job descriptions, see canadianmennonite.org/employment.

NOVEMBER 2024 / VOL. 28, NO. 13

CM Contents

10 **In prayer with old monks**
With silence and prayer on the decline in our world, Troy Watson takes a group from his church on retreat at a dying monastery in Upstate New York.
Photo: Troy Watson

20 **If all the earth**
Madalene Arias talks to children's author Aimee Reid about animals, an inspired walk and a book about being known and loved thoroughly.
Photo: Supplied

27 **Plaque commemorates Montreal River COs**
Fifty people made the two-day trip to the eastern shore of Lake Superior to honour those who served there as conscientious objectors.
Photo: Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

About the cover Photo: Namukolo Siyumbwa/Pexels, adapted by Anne Boese
See masthead on page 47.

What in the world

Haitian blesses pets

At an annual Blessing of Animals at a New Hampshire church, Rev. Jean Beniste, a Haitian immigrant, invited parishioners to bring their pets forward: "I am not going to eat them . . . I will bless them," he said in good-natured resistance to Donald Trump's claim that Haitian immigrants in Ohio ate neighbourhood pets. *Source: RNS*

Photo: St. Paul's Church

Climate resolve?

Eighteen percent of Canadians polled by Angus Reid said they would be willing to pay at least two percent more for goods shipped from overseas if that meant related carbon emissions would be reduced or offset. Thirty-six percent are not willing to pay anything extra to reduce emissions.

Image: jgmorard Flickr/CreativeCommons

Arms conflict of interest

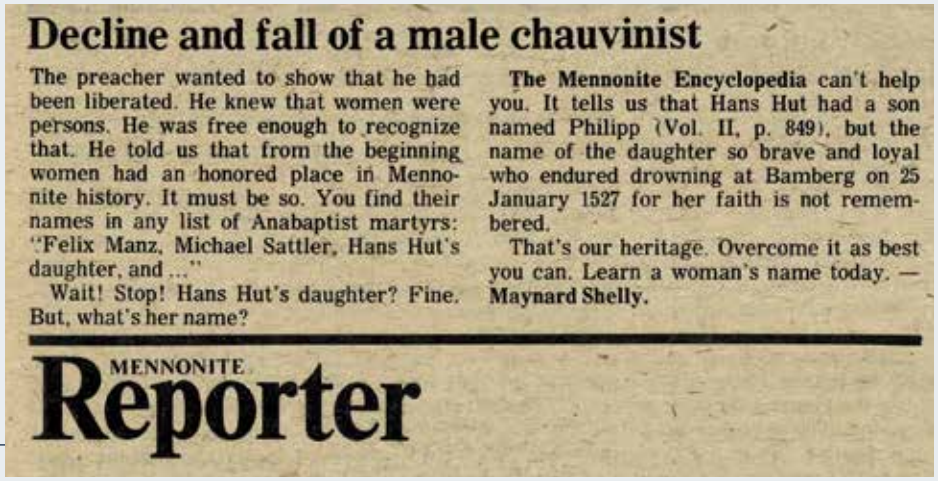
A survey of articles about the push for increased defence spending among NATO nations found that 53 of 60 articles in the *Toronto Star, Globe & Mail* and *National Post* quoted experts affiliated either with the military or organizations that receive donations from arms companies. Only once was the connection explicitly disclosed. *Source: The Maple*

Photo: National Defence

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

50 YEARS AGO

MENNONITE REPORTER, NOVEMBER 11, 1974



Decline and fall of a male chauvinist

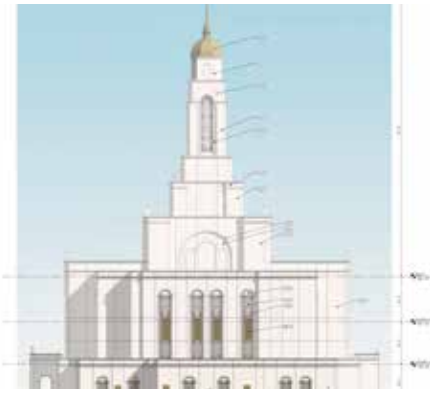
The preacher wanted to show that he had been liberated. He knew that women were persons. He was free enough to recognize that. He told us that from the beginning women had an honored place in Mennonite history. It must be so. You find their names in any list of Anabaptist martyrs: "Felix Manz, Michael Sattler, Hans Hut's daughter, and ..."

Wait! Stop! Hans Hut's daughter? Fine. But, what's her name?

The Mennonite Encyclopedia can't help you. It tells us that Hans Hut had a son named Philipp (Vol. II, p. 849), but the name of the daughter so brave and loyal who endured drowning at Bamberg on 25 January 1527 for her faith is not remembered.

That's our heritage. Overcome it as best you can. Learn a woman's name today. — **Maynard Shelly.**

MENNONITE Reporter



Mormons go big in Vegas

A Mormon temple to be built outside Las Vegas has drawn complaints from neighbours who say its size and lights will change their dark sky environment. Despite complaints, city council approved the 70,000-square-foot, 20-storey tall temple that will be larger than Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. *Source: Deseret News, AP*

Credit: Las Vegas City Council

Mennonite at synod

Anne-Cathy Graber of France served as the Mennonite World Conference representative at the Catholic Synod on Synodality in Rome in October. It marked the first time Mennonites have been invited to participate in a major Vatican gathering of this type. *Source: MWC*

Photo: Supplied by MWC

Islanders oppose church sale

When the people of Portugal Cove South, Newfoundland, heard Catholic authorities were selling their little church, they changed the locks and put up a sign reading, "Our church is NOT for sale." The planned sale is part of the broader church's legal obligations to raise money to settle abuse claims. *Source: Globe & Mail*

Photo: areseedy/Flickr CeativeCommons

Love trains our hearts to see God in the human "other."

–Mennonite World Conference pastoral letter for October 7

A moment from yesterday

The advent of the gas-powered engine brought new possibilities. Here, a Model T Ford owned by Cornelius M. Driedger (leaning against the car) of Osler, Saskatchewan, is used to power a circular saw for cutting logs. The photo was taken between 1917 and 1925.

Text: Conrad Stoesz

Photo: Leo Driedger photo collection/ Mennonite Heritage Archives

MAID Mennonite Archival Image Database

archives.mhsc.ca

CM Readers Write

Good people hurt by MCC

I am writing this letter in support of the individuals who wrote and signed the open letter to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and in support of the former and current MCC service workers and staff who have been and continue to be hurt by MCC. I personally know of former MCC staff and service workers who have been terminated in a way that, in my opinion, did not allow for due process, discussion, opportunity for understanding, or for questions to be asked and answered.

I began working with MCC part-time in 1996 as the Refugee Sponsorship Program Coordinator. This led to full-time work within various MCC programs: Indigenous Neighbours, Peace, Generations at Risk (HIV/AIDS), IVEP, SALT and Human Resources. In the last role, my responsibilities included interviewing and processing applications from folks applying to volunteer locally and internationally as service workers or country representatives.

I travelled in numerous provinces and states across North America over 14 years. I also had the opportunity to visit international HIV/AIDS partners in Kenya, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. During my last four years with MCC Alberta, I was a part of the leadership team and was acting executive director.

Many of my visits with workers serving internationally included conversations about their struggles due to a lack of connection and healthy/helpful communication with MCC human resources (HR) and leadership staff who were responsible for their support and well-being.

In many ways, my work with different MCC programs, particularly with local and international partners, strengthened my commitment to MCC. But, over time, it became increasingly difficult for me to feel good about sending folks to an international placement when I was not sure that they would receive appropriate care and support from North American and international MCC HR and leadership.

I found myself wanting to warn applicants about the abuse and neglect that returning or terminated volunteers had spoken to me about. On a few occasions, I did warn people. I encouraged service workers to stay connected with us at MCC Alberta during their term, although very few of them did, as they were told only to communicate with MCC staff who had direct oversight of them. I encouraged applicants to surround themselves virtually and on-site with a support system they could trust.

On too many occasions, we received calls at the office from supporters or family members of service workers who wanted to know why their loved one had been fired by MCC. Or the terminated service workers themselves would visit our office, and it was only then that we would learn about their termination.

Without fail, we would connect with the appropriate HR staff responsible for the terminated volunteers and ask what had happened, and why they were terminated. Not once were we given adequate answers, and, often, we were given no answers at all. In those instances, MCC HR staff and leadership cited confidentiality and privacy issues. Fair enough not to tell us, but I believe withholding that information from those terminated is, at best, unprofessional, and, at worst, cruel.

Too many good people who believed deeply in the vision and mission of MCC gave their time, sacrificed their financial stability, and trusted in an organization whose values, mission and vision aligned with the deepest part of their faith, only to be left hurt, devastated and alone as they tried to pick up the pieces of their sense of self and purpose.

It is easy to weep as I read on MCC's website: "MCC values just relationships. MCC seeks to live and serve justly and peacefully in each relationship, incorporating listening and learning, accountability and mutuality, transparency, and integrity."

I am deeply disappointed by the silence of MCC HR and leadership to the petition and open letter: there has not been an adequate response to either. I am navigating conversations with MCC constituents and supporters who are wondering what is going on at MCC. They are asking me why MCC is not addressing the open letter.

I have tried to handle those conversations carefully, but I find myself being more truthful than diplomatic. MCC has yet to meet and talk to the individuals who wrote the open letter and started the petition. They have yet to meet or talk to many of the former staff and volunteers I know personally, to explain the circumstances around their terminations. They have not responded adequately to the 1450-plus people who have signed and commented on the petition.

We are all calling on MCC to live up to the values it states so clearly on its website and in its communications with donors.

– Kim Thiessen, Winnipeg

Peace and HR

Reading the comments and stories of Mennonite Central Committee workers who have had their employment ended without cause can feel troubling for those of us who have experienced this terrible practice in faith-based organizations. There are too many stories like this, stories of incredible wounding in our faith community.

What I haven't heard discussed is the financial cost associated with these terminations. Whether a faith-based institution uses money donated toward their good work or a faith-based financial institution uses profits from members'

loans and deposits to cover consultants' fees, legal costs and severance packages, or, worse, to degrade those they once had a relationship with, the substantial costs are covered by donors and members.

Legal costs can also be high for individuals who have been terminated.

I think financial payouts that silence workers come at a deep cost to the trust that was built with the employee and are also a misuse of funds.

We can and must do better. We are people of God's peace. There is no faith, compassion or integrity in the wounding of others. Ever.

– Joy Wagler, New Hamburg, Ontario (Steinmann Mennonite Church)

✉ Questioning an olive branch to conservatives

In his editorial, "An olive branch to conservatives," (September 2024), Will Braun offers his own experience of engaging with conservatives who leave our denomination, often due to issues of sexuality and gender. While his intention to extend grace and peace is commendable, there's an important dimension missing from this conversation—an exploration of power and how it operates within these dynamics.

First, I want to say that I deeply appreciate the existence of *Canadian Mennonite* and the transparency it has shown, particularly in its reporting practices around sensitive issues. I also value its openness to constructive feedback. My critique is not directed at Will personally, nor is it a challenge to the integrity of anyone involved. My aim is to add nuance to the discussion, grounded in a commitment to the well-being of all people.

In the editorial, Will writes that, "In an age of division, listening is a constructive response." Will acknowledges his particular interest in conservative voices. While listening is undoubtedly valuable in many contexts, it is not inherently constructive in every situation: as a self-identified cisgender, heterosexual white man, Will can listen to these voices without risking additional harm, but voices that come from positions of privilege can inadvertently retraumatize those who have historically been marginalized.

Asking someone to listen to views that deny their humanity or the humanity of their loved ones is not a neutral request. Are conservative voices truly unheard in these conversations, or are we witnessing a reaction to a perceived loss of privilege they once held?

Framing conservatives as a marginalized group may oversimplify the reality. There's a significant difference between feeling excluded due to a theological disagreement and being excluded because of one's gender, sexuality, race or other aspects of identity that are not a matter of choice. This distinction is crucial when discussing exclusion and the power dynamics involved.

The editorial makes a comparison between churches and businesses or NGOs, suggesting we become stronger by learning from those who leave. While there is merit to this in theory, the voices and experiences of LGBTQ Mennonites must be part of any learning process, as they represent communities that have historically been disempowered. Power and privilege play a role here, and the lessons we learn should not come at the expense of those who have already been marginalized.

We also need to carefully examine the concept of diversity, distinguishing between diversity of opinion and diversity related to social location—such as race, gender or sexual orientation. We can learn across differences of social location if there is openness and trust. While theological diversity can also enrich a community, we must also recognize that certain perspectives, particularly those that devalue the humanity of others, can cause harm. It's essential to approach this with sensitivity to the impact of these beliefs on marginalized communities.

Finally, when we consider the vision of sharing communion together, as Will does, we must be sensitive to the deep hurt this can cause. For those who only see theological diversity, communion might be a beautiful act of unity. For others, taking communion with people who deny their humanity based on gender or sexuality is deeply painful. Extending an olive branch must be done with care, recognizing the stakes are different for those who face harm.

Ultimately, I agree with Will that we are all beloved children of God, interconnected with one another and with creation. Our wellbeing is intertwined. At the same time, we exist within systems shaped by power. A preferential option for those who are marginalized is necessary for our ethics, as it reflects the justice and equity central to God's kingdom. Rather than amplifying voices that call for a return to traditional theologies, let us affirm the belovedness of all people, particularly those who have historically been excluded.

– Kimberly Penner, pastor, Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario

We intend to consider related questions further in the magazine over time, examining the pros and cons of different approaches. – Eds.

Be in Touch

• Send letters to letters@canadianmennonite.org. Our new mailing address is on the back cover..

Listening to good people

I agree with the author of "Leaving a church that left" (September 2024) when he talks about the quality of character of the good people at Maple View Mennonite.

I'm a gay man who spent the first 48 years of my life trying to be straight in obedience to personal beliefs about obedience to God, formed in that culture. I've spent tens of thousands of dollars on therapies, conferences and books. I attended support groups weekly. I maintained celibacy.

By age 48, my shame and self-hatred were killing me. I needed to come out to save my life.

I can't throw stones at Maple View's theology, because I held the same beliefs. However, when Maple View left, I felt personally rejected by people I loved. I hated the word homophobic when I shared Maple View's beliefs, but I think it is the appropriate term for pre-judging someone's words and deciding they aren't worth hearing.

This is not the path to peace.

It is important to listen to those you disagree with. Jesus modeled that courage in his engagement with the religious right of his day.

– John Martin-Holmes, Guelph, Ontario

Reevaluating priorities

Recently Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) B.C. received a windfall of millions ("Kingdom windfall," June 2024), with those assets managed by HyLand Properties. Wholly owned by MCCBC, HyLand manages these, and other, assets, making related investment decisions.

MCCBC says the money is to be used for the donors' intentions of helping the "poorest of the poor," with profits going to MCC, while the HyLand website shows investment in middle-class housing and co-funded housing for university students.

MCCBC has become a property owner involved in real estate development. Since when is student housing consistent with helping the poorest of the poor?

More transparency, openness and constituency involvement in these decisions is needed.

– Henry Neufeld, Delta, B.C.
(Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship)

Corrections: *In the October issue (page 34), we said an unnamed Russian pastor in a book we mentioned was executed by the Germans. In fact, it was the Soviets.*

The "Moment from yesterday" in the October issue mistakenly referred to a 1996 bus trip to Colorado. The correct date is 1966.

Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Bennett—James Patrick, (b. Aug. 7, 2024), to Sheldon & Angela, Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, Alta.

Baptisms

Jacob Friesen-Stoesz—Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man., Sept. 8, 2024.
Esme Ginter—Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man., Sept. 8, 2024.
Shelby Penner—Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man., Sept. 8, 2024.
Abby Rempel—Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man., Sept. 8, 2024.
Nick Rempel—Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man., Sept. 8, 2024.
Denyse Haight—Brussels Mennonite Fellowship, Brussels, Ont., Sept 15, 2024.
Fred Haight—Brussels Mennonite Fellowship, Brussels, Ont., Sept 15, 2024.
Jacob Dyck—Springstein Mennonite Church, Springstein, Man. Sept. 29, 2024.
Elia Koslowsky-Wiebe—Springstein Mennonnite Church, Springstein, Man Sept. 29, 2024.
Seth Bergen—Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont., June 2, 2024.
Michael Goodwin—Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont., June 2, 2024.
Emmy Nordstrom Higdon—Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont., June 2, 2024.
Seth Nordstrom—Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont., June 2, 2024.

Weddings

Bedard/Kroeker—Satchel Bedard and Anna Kroeker, Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, Sept. 7, 2024, Winkler, Man.
Friesen/Kroeker—Liam Friesen and Jordan Kroeker, Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, July 27, 2024, Altona, Man.

Deaths

Bauman—Clare, 88 (b. March 5, 1937; d. Sept. 6, 2024), Elmira Mennonite Church, Elmira, Ont.
Derksen—Aaron, 92 (b. Nov. 12,1931; d. June 23, 2024), Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, Alta.
Dyck—Merla, 89 (b. March 26, 1935; Sept. 14, 2024), Rosthern Mennonite Church, Rosthern, Sask.
Enns—Elsie (nee Tiessen), 90 (b. June 6, 1934; d. Aug. 28, 2024), Springstein Mennonite Church, Springstein, Man.
Martin—Curtis, 90 (b. June 20, 1945; d. Sept. 11, 2024), St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, St. Jacobs, Ont.
Regehr—Elsbeth (nee Wiebe), 95 (b. Feb. 4, 1929; d. Aug. 31, 2024), First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Growing into the future

Ann L. Schultz

Over the past year, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada has been leaning into its strategic plan, "Growing into the Future," a plan that honours the five strategic priorities set in 2022. The plan is anchored in MCEC's identity statement—*transformed, inspired* and *called*—and includes four specific goals to be enacted over the next few years.

Both the process and the realizing of goals have been energizing and exciting, yet for me as interim leader, "Growing into the Future" has become a state of being or a mindset I bring to our collective work as I work with MCEC staff and witness the ministry of MCEC congregations.

The parable of the sower illustrates this. In Matthew 6:8, Jesus teaches his disciples that to produce *"a crop, a hundred, 60 or 30 times what was sown,"* seed must be placed in good soil.

Seeds contain possibility and will expand and grow in the right conditions. While some have felt that the church has been in dormancy the last few years, this has not been my experience as a church leader. Despite the changes we have felt, particularly with the post-pandemic realities, I have witnessed "seeds" move from dormancy to growth.

Reading congregational annual reports shows how MCEC congregations are "growing into the future." This initiative grew out of the strategic plan where we invited congregations to share five years of their annual reports. Forty-eight out of 108 congregations responded to this invitation. This sharing allows us to better understand how we may best support our pastors and their congregations as they live in this unknown season.

We discovered that many congregations are "growing into the future" in thoughtful and intentional ways. Numerous congregations have done visioning work in recent years, responding to the new realities following the pandemic. This visioning has also led some churches to adapt congregational structures that are smaller and more adaptable to the changing landscape of the church and its programming.

Another finding was the desire of congregations to discern how they might best use their facilities, specifically through the lens of peace and justice. This has led to collaborations with other congregations and external partners who together think creatively about how to best steward land and facilities.

I have also heard affirmations and challenges for us as a regional church about how we may best "grow into the future." These have occurred at our annual church gatherings and in various conversations at regional and national levels with individuals and congregations. These interactions have instilled in me additional hope and understanding for the church of today and tomorrow.

During this season of change, it is clear that MCEC congregations remain rooted in their faith in God and are rooting their ministry in the good soil of the spirit of peace, discipleship and reconciliation, the essentials of Anabaptism. I am energized by the creativity, collaboration and compassion I have witnessed in the church over the past two years.

May God continue to work in us, and among as we grow into the future.

Ann L. Schultz is the interim executive team leader of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

PHOTO: WARREN/UNSPLASH

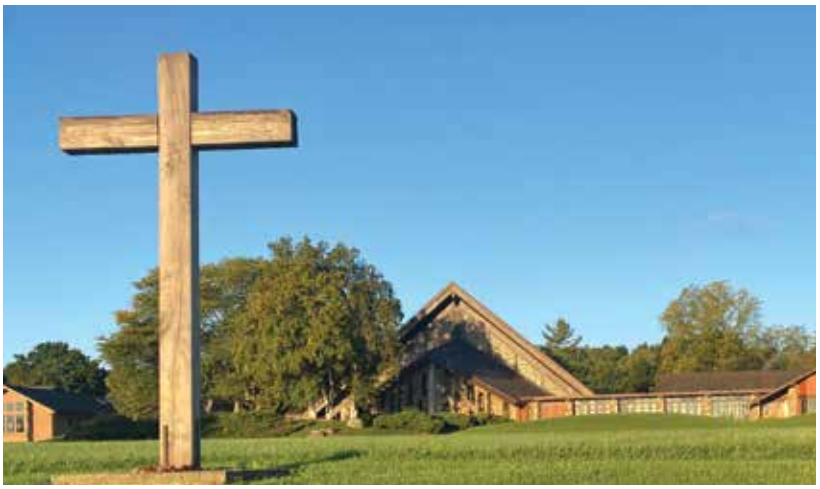
In prayer with old monks

Troy Watson

I'm taking a group from our church on a spiritual retreat this weekend. I've gone on many personal retreats to the Abbey of the Genesee, a Trappist monastery in New York, but this is my first time leading a group retreat there.

I decided to do this for several reasons.

First, the monastery likely won't be around much longer. During my visit in 2023, I was shocked at how much the monastery had changed. The sense of community the monks fostered among strangers is gone: since the pandemic, they no longer house guests in the same buildings. The biggest change, however, was the decreased number of monks and the diminished vibrancy of those who remained. An Abbey staff member explained that most of the elderly monks were either passing away or too feeble to regularly attend services. Because few men are choosing monasticism, the Abbey will probably close in a few years.



This made me reflect on the fleeting existence of everything, including good and godly things. Nothing lasts forever. Accepting this brings sorrow, but it also makes me better appreciate the people and things in my life. We don't know how long we will be able to enjoy our family, friendships, health, churches or current forms of democracy.

As Ecclesiastes teaches, there's a time and season to resist the decline and death of things, groups and institutions we value; and there's a time to accept their inevitable end, while appreciating the time they have left.

Although Genesee isn't what it used to be, and the people I'm bringing along probably won't experience the vibrancy I've experienced in the past, there likely are only a few years left to experience Genesee at all.

If others can experience a fraction of the healing I've experienced there, it will be worth it.

The second reason for this retreat is for people from my church to experience the monastic rhythm at Genesee. In a world where silence and prayer are in decline— according to Pew Research, 73 percent of white Christians in America rarely or never pray—it's powerful and counter-cultural to spend time with monks who have dedicated their entire lives to prayer.

Coincidentally, while I was writing this, someone sent me lyrics to a new Coldplay song titled, "We Pray." A new survey reveals more Christians are interested in prayer than in church. There is clearly still a desire for connection with God. So why are we praying less?

Often, the reason many Christians don't pray is that they don't know how, or they've become disillusioned with the ways they've been taught to pray. For some, meditation has replaced prayer. I believe in the benefits of meditation, but it's not a substitute for prayer. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." Prayer is essential, but knowing how to pray is complicated.

This is where monks can help. I once asked a monk at Genesee how to pray. He said, "Prayer is entering the space within you where Christ already resides and is waiting to commune with you." This resonated with me. I've shared the monk's words with others, but I usually get blank stares in response. One friend, a professor, replied, "Sure, whatever that means."

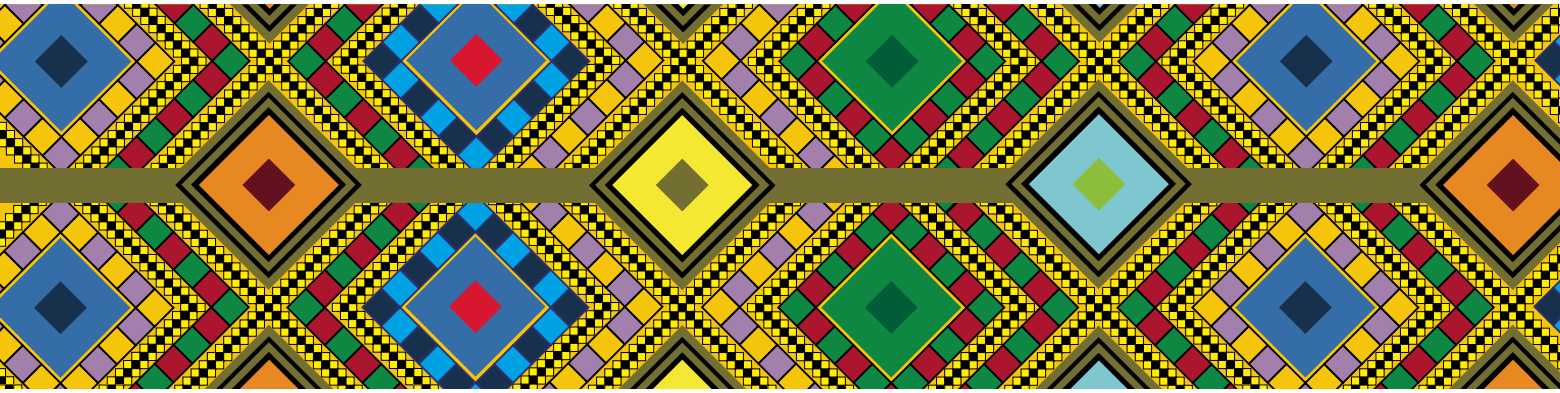
A monk from the 17th century, Brother Lawrence, wrote, "There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God."

I wish everyone could experience this, though I'm not sure every personality type is capable of this level of spiritual sensitivity, openness, connection and intimacy with the divine. I will say this: prayer is rooted in desire. If you desire connection and communion with God, make it a priority and intentionally fan the flame of this desire—something will happen.

This is what I'm hoping for on our retreat—that the monks' devotion to communion with God will be contagious and will enliven our faith. That we will encounter God's presence anew. This is what I hope all of us experience in our prayer lives.

Troy Watson is a pastor at Avon Church in Stratford, Ontario.

PHOTO: HENRI MOLENHUIS



Long live books!

By Barbara Nkala

All I ever remembered from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" were the lines:

Water water everywhere,
But not a drop to drink!

The rest was a dreary drag as the mariner watched companions die from thirst surrounded by salty sea water.

I remembered this poem when I was invited to work at Longman Zimbabwe as a commissioning editor for humanities. I was ecstatic, dancing and singing, "Books books everywhere, to consume words to my fill." Unlike the mariner, I would thrive, surrounded by books!

Books are delightful! Spectacular! Life-changing! Let me here share a few books that have transformed my life positively.

The first is the Bible, a library wrapped in one. The Bible contains life-changing prose, poetry, political satire, enchanting history, war stories and unbelievable drama. Yet, all the stories are real and true.

Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps* was so impactful that it changed the way I thought and acted. Whenever I was faced with a serious decision, I learned to stop and ponder: what would Jesus do?

When I was studying leadership and management, one of the prescribed books was Stephen R. Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. I enjoyed it tremendously, but the second chapter, "Begin With the End in Mind," made a lasting impression on me as I pondered what my personal vision and mission statement would be if I was going to leave a legacy.

I have been mentored not only by living legends in my church and community but by various biographies and autobiographies of Mandela, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi, among many others. What role models!

I have mentored and evangelized many young people in my country by giving them some of these life-changing books. When I was quiet and shy in my younger days, on birthdays and for Christmas, I would give devotional books.

A classic example of how I've used books as I mentor young people in my small community was when I met with young Jackie. His mother was a manual labourer who wanted success for her children. During cell group, she shared how poor her son Jackie's grades were at school. Jackie was in grade 4. I took Jackie to my library. Once he was introduced to books, he could not stop reading. He visited twice or even thrice a week to change books. By the end of the year, it was wonderful to hear his mother say how much his work had improved. Jackie moved from the bottom of the class to the top five. In high school, he obtained a scholarship and went on to train in information technology

When I think of books, I also think of the books I have written (mainly in my mother tongue, Ndebele) that have been used in schools. It is a pleasure to hear comments such as, "You wrote that one for me. I totally identify and have gleaned nuggets on how Gugu persevered and achieved."

I also think about how to encourage others to write books. I have worried that my language would die if young people did not write books in it. We are an oral traditions people, passing knowledge and information by word of mouth. There is danger of distortion when things are not written down. So, over the last few years, I have been encouraging young people to write by sponsoring literary competitions for novels, plays, short stories, children's literature and poetry. There was even one literary competition for Covid-19 stories. It has been a tremendous joy to watch young people write beautiful works in Ndebele, and they are not stopping.

Long live books!

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

DEEPER COMMUNION

CINDY WALLACE

The colour of prayer

Cindy Wallace

For my birthday last month, I asked for markers.

Since then, I've spent several hours in my soft front-room chair, copying out verses from the Psalms in a large, empty sketchbook I've had for years, illuminating the letters like a not-very-talented medieval scribe. I meditate on the words as the texture of the paper, the hues of the inks and the angles of the letters draw me into something like presence. I am finding a place to breathe in the company of Christ.

This isn't a new practice for me. I first did it as a teenager. In fact, I have those prayer journals in a box in my basement—spiral-bound sketchbooks at least 25 years old. My family went through some truly hard times in those years, and I made it through with glittery gel pens, copying out verses, scrawling out my longings, laying out my heart before God. I was (and am) deeply earnest, deeply empathetic, moved by every close and far-off pain. I needed to find rest, and in that simple practice, filling pages with pretty letters, sitting with promises of God's protection and presence, I did.

I'm looking for that rest again these days.

A few months ago, I wrote about embracing joy, and I do, or try to. I try to embrace gratitude, as well. Each night, usually with my eight-year-old at my elbow, I write a few lines in a five-year journal. Pilgram loves to hear what happened this day a year ago, or two. The journal highlights our small delights: birds visiting the yard, temperature anomalies, delicious meals, visits from friends, delightful unplanned phrases voiced by the kids.

But the world is also so full of pain. I'm thinking of Palestine. I'm thinking of the grappling in this magazine's very pages—which represent real human lives—with harm caused by our own beloved institutions. I'm thinking about long COVID and climate catastrophe and colonization. I'm thinking about the way most people (including me!) pretend these threats away until, or unless, we *can't*. How much I grieve over our mass refusals to work for a world in which everyone can safely breathe.

In other words, I am living a life that is chock-full of joy and chock-full of lament. One of the only ways I know how to make sense of this *both/and* is prayer. And when my heart is so full that my mind spins, one of the best ways I know how to pray is on paper, not just with my words but with words of the scriptures, and not just with words but with colour.

I need this practice to slow me down.

I need this practice to tether me to the ancient wisdom of the sacred text: "*Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*"

I have many thoughts on theologies of prayer: is prayer to change God's mind or to change ours? Is prayer an obligation or a gift? What exactly is an answered prayer, and *can* a prayer be unanswered?

If you come for coffee and bring up the topic, I'll probably end up talking to you about Julian of Norwich and quantum mechanics, the spooky particles at a distance connecting our very atoms with divine energies of love.

But heady ramblings, as delightful as they are, don't ground me in the concrete mystery of God the way a set of markers and a sketchbook does. Sometimes I need to get out of my head and into my body, even (especially?) in spiritual practice. How about you, friends? How are you practicing prayer these days?

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

Pervasive

At risk of a precarious analogy, I recently likened my prayer life to my phone. My phone is always on me, it's interactive, and I always hope there's someone on the other end.

With my phone, what has struck me recently is how much calling someone actually makes me apprehensive. (Do other Young Millennials or Gen Z feel me?) It's odd, considering what phones were originally for. But I'm from a generation of texters, finding expression and value in words and screens. Reading Cindy's words today, I find the analogy continues to unfold.

These days, I liken my prayer practice to the almighty text, in a good way

"How was class?"

"On your way home?"

"Miss you; love you."

These are everyday messages that pervade my life—texts I send and receive that remind me I'm connected to many I don't see. As I commute, work and wade through life, texts come and go.

I realize that I pray like I use my phone. It's rare for me to sit down and "formally" chat for an extended period, but moment to moment, the connection is never far—a word here, a word there, connecting me to things beyond.

Justin Sun is a student at Vancouver School of Theology/Vancouver Coastal Health.

Attention

Cindy's reflections call to mind a Mary Oliver poem, "The real prayers are not the words, but the attention that comes first."

I work in words: speaking, writing, thinking, texting. But so often my words become muddled, trapping me in my head. Like Cindy, I need prayer to live in my body. Practices of attention help me to pray in this way.

Once a week, I try to take myself on an "artist's date." Setting out on bike or foot, I allow (invite) myself to pause whenever something catches my attention: a bumblebee landing on goldenrod, the scalloped edges of an oak leaf, a pigeon scratching for crumbs.

With a pen and paintbrush in hand, my sight changes. The pigeon's feathers catch the sun and become a dance of iridescence. I notice the orange pollen clinging to the bee's thread-like legs. My thoughts quiet and my breathing slows. The tension in my shoulder releases. Attention creates a spaciousness that feels to me like God.

I don't always find this spaciousness. But when I do, it increases my capacity to offer sacred attention to other parts of life, recognizing beauty and refusing to look away from violence. The attention comes first.

Anika Reynar works in Boston as a facilitator and mediator in environmental disputes.

Commendation

My daughter sometimes tells me that many young adults of her generation are ambivalent about having kids. *How could we ever bring children into a world as terrible as this?*

This is a common refrain. I try to remind her that our media context is algorithmically engineered to make us afraid and anxious, that the terrible things will always float to the top of our screens and our consciousnesses. I try to remind her that the world has always been a beautiful and terrible place, that our time is not so unique as we sometimes imagine. I urge her to consciously seek out that which is beautiful and good and true.

How do we pray in this beautiful and terrible world? Cindy asks such an important question. It's one I struggle with.

How to pray? The Psalms, certainly. The Lord's Prayer: *"Give us this day … Lead us not into temptation … Thy kingdom come."*

I've also come to appreciate some of the words from morning prayers in The Book of Common Prayer. *"Let us commend the world, to which Christ came, to the mercy and protection of God this day."* The mercy and protection of this beautiful and terrible world is surely (and ultimately) a God-sized task alone.

Ryan Dueck is pastor at Lethbridge (Alberta) Mennonite Church.

CM

2024 BOOKS ISSUE

Take up and read!

These words came to the early church father, Augustine. Understanding this as a command from God, he opened the Bible, read Romans 13:13, and his life was never the same.

A verse that has directed my life as a writer is Jeremiah 15:19, which includes: "If you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman."

While God speaks to us through the Bible, we also benefit from reading other "worthy, not worthless words." As Irish poet Pádraig Ó Tuama says in an interview (page 15), "We are constantly looking for words that matter." We talked with Mennonite writer Aimee Reid, (page 20) who recalled a reader saying they had never experienced such love from a book as that in one of Reid's books for children. We also offer a wide selection of books—history, poetry, theology, church life, devotional, topical—recommended by many contributors for you to . . . take up and read!

Looking for WORDS THAT MATTER

Canadian Mennonite *talks with peacemaker poet Pádraig Ó Tuama.*

Interview by Susan Fish

Pádraig Ó Tuama is a theologian, poet and the author of several books including the forthcoming Kitchen Hymns *(2025) and* 44 Poems on Being with Each Other *(2025). He is a member and former leader of Corrymeela, Northern Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation organization.*

He grew up Irish-Catholic near Cork, Ireland. Canadian Mennonite *approached Ó Tuama as someone who has brought peacemaking and literature together.*

Pádraig Ó Tuama spoke with Susan Fish by telephone on September 4. The following are excerpts of their conversation.

Some people just aren't into poetry. What do you say to them?

First of all, nobody has to find poetry interesting. I would never try to convince anybody to find an interest in poetry. If it's not interesting, go to where your interests are. Find things that stimulate your thought.

But we are constantly looking for words that matter.

I was at a Mumford and Sons gig in Belfast a few years ago. Their lyrics are dense and thoughtful, with long sentences and long words. Almost everybody around me was singing all the lyrics back, and no one was stumbling and stuttering. There's something beautiful about the way memorization occurs most easily when you remember it with tunes, and about having something in your body that you're singing back. It can be useful to remind people that we're always learning lyrics: whatever the song on the radio that you love, by the end of hearing it a few times over the course of a week or two, you feel a secret sense of pleasure about the fact that you know all the words and you might even hum it to yourself.

In many ways, poetry is everywhere, whether or not that's formal.

But often what happens is people are interested in poetry, but they perhaps have not been entirely sure how to be interested in poetry, or maybe they had some examinations in school that they didn't enjoy doing that have given them a lasting bad taste.

I don't love all poems, and I don't love all the poems of the poets that I love.

I want to jump to the connections between poetry and conflict resolution, because you have worked in both areas. Where is the overlap for you?

I'm interested in language, and language that's precise and modest, speaking to what it knows, as well as language that explores mystery. All of those things are true for the experience of conflict as well as in poetry.

Often much can be achieved by realizing we disagree about different things. So much is about modesty of language and leaving space for the blank space, which is to say: *can you recall all the things you don't know?*

That's one of the things that a poem's presentation on the page does. If you wanted to be more economical with ink

PHOTO: IOANN MARK KUZNIETSOV/UNSPLASH

and paper, you could fill it all up, but the emptiness on the page is a reminder about the fact that all language, spoken and written, is informed by everything we don't know, everything that perhaps is unsayable. That can be a helpful reminder.

Some say Mennonites tend not to say what they mean out of a desire to keep the peace. You have talked elsewhere about the importance of naming, but here you're also talking about leaving that space for what is unknown. What would you say to people who hope to hold that fragile peace by not naming?

Avoidance of conflict shows up in very subtle ways, and no matter how subtle it is, it usually comes with enormous drawbacks. Of course, there's obvious situations where somebody might be bereaved, and you decide not to talk about the fact that they parked in the wrong space. But in terms of anything lurking underneath, it's worthwhile talking about.

Why else are we hearing advertisements for therapy? There's so much that needs to be said.

I'm not an advocate for just letting it all spill out, because sometimes you can say things that are terrible, things that are impossible to unsay. However, there are ways of saying things you thought you'd never be able to say, and then the other person might go, "I'm so relieved." It's worthwhile improving your skills and trying to say something that needs to be said.

Often people in conflict will not present themselves as using an avoidance tactic. It presents as some other reason—it's the wrong time, or it's been too long or it's been too quick.

I think there needs to be the question: *what am I holding onto and what do I need to say*?

Even if you [say]*: I don't think I'm going to say this to this person, but if I were to say it, what would I say?* that at least can help you get in contact with your desire of what you wish to say, because that desire is driving you one way or another.

How does the average person do this kind of work?

We're all doing conflict reconciliation work with ourselves and with whoever else with whom we live. I'm always interested in asking people: *what are you already using that's working?*

It can be imagined that the whole idea of conflict resolution is that you don't have conflict, but of course you do. The point is to have a positive experience of conflict in a way we can come away knowing it was fruitful because we understand what the [other] thinks, what's negotiable and what's not negotiable.

Rather than repeating whatever argument you've been making with yourself at 6 a.m. in the shower every day, and starting up your day with rage in an imagined conversation, you find yourself with the capacity to try to say some of the things you think might be fruitful to ask, as well as to come into contact with what it is you don't know.

Often the imagined arguments I have are ones where I am giving the showdown, and those are very immature fantasies. They're satisfying, but ultimately what you're hoping for in a fruitful conflict resolution is to come away [with awareness of what you] didn't know. Then [when there can be] the possibility of people who are open to those experiences coming together, something interesting can happen.

It's eight years since the decision was made within Mennonite Church Canada for discernment to happen at a congregational level about LGBTQ inclusion. The hope was that it would allow different communities to coexist, but, in some places, what ended up happening was that congregations left because they

PHOTO: SUPPLIED BY BLUE FLOWER ARTS

But doubts and loves
dig up the world
like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
where the ruined
house once stood

didn't feel comfortable affiliating with churches that read the Bible differently. You've talked about bringing a poem to a mediation to help frame the divisive issues in the room. I'm curious: if you were working with this denomination, is there a poem you would prescribe to help reframe the division?
Not in general, without knowing the people in the argument. For me, it's about asking multiple questions and then seeing what underlying things occur, and then from that, asking questions about whether there's a poem that speaks to that condition.

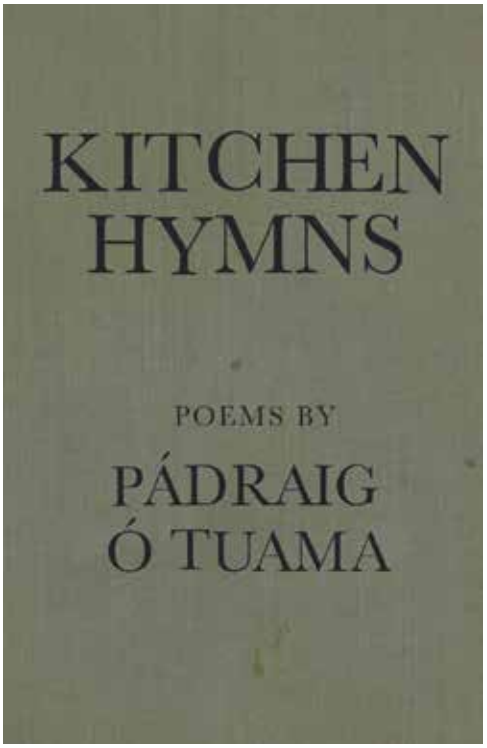
The general comments that I have are that it's rare that conflict occurs in a way where power rests evenly. Often, we have multiple demonstrations of power happening in multiple parties, and then multiple demonstrations of victimhood happening in different parties.

It is helpful for us all to recognize—and we know it—how appealing it is to be the victim, especially these days. If you can prove in any situation that your boss or your employee or your neighbour or your congregational leader or the liberals or the conservatives is [the problem], [it can be] a trump card to say, *I don't have to ask any more questions about holding myself to account or bearing the consequences that I chose to bear.* There are actual victims in the world, actual persecutions, actual terrorists … [but there is also] a certain performative manifestation of victimhood.

But even the conversation about power is not always one that is named in the church.
I find it so interesting that most religious texts have an enormous amount to say about power, and yet most religious congregations spend enormous amounts of time avoiding the possibility of speaking about power. How ironic.

How does kindness get disentangled from weakness in a world where people see themselves as victims and don't acknowledge their power?
In mediated conflicts, what you're hoping for is that one of those parties says, "Here's my own misgivings about the point of view I've adopted," or "Here's my own shame about behaviour that we've exhibited. I'm committed to our ideology, but actually I'm ashamed of how we conducted ourselves."

All those are demonstrations of a vulnerability which can open up the possibility of collaboration or the possibility of surprise.



I was at an interreligious conference two years ago where everybody was speaking, not of how the Christians and the Muslims or how the Buddhists and Jains [were relating], but about what was happening internally within those religious groups. All about the conservative and liberal and traditions within each of those different ideologies.

Inter- and intra-dynamics are so powerful. Often what's happening is that you are exhibiting publicly the private anxiety of that group, and you're doing it in a negative way. Ultimately, we're looking for somebody who's risky enough to say, "Actually our group doesn't agree together on this, and here's something that we're fighting about."

Making public what we don't quite agree about amongst ourselves [can mean] your employment or belonging will be questionable. To me, those are all demonstrations of vulnerability and power and weakness and a strange openness to the unknown.

[Often] in conflict, I'm being asked to enter in [in a way] which would require me to actually change my mind, and I don't want to. And often there's a fear that if I change my mind about this, the following things will happen.

That [fear] prevents people from changing their mind. Often those fears are found to be groundless in the aftermath.

One of the things that struck me in your new poetry collection, *Kitchen Hymns,* was the repetition of the title "Do You Believe in God?" in multiple poems.
"Do you believe in God?" is a question we used to get [when] Protestant missionaries came down from the north of Ireland to Cork, a town that was 95 percent Catholic. It demonstrated a certain evangelical mindset that was closed up in itself.

Who decides what that means? Who even decides what belief means? It's like asking me if I believe in time!

One of the things that interests me in that question is the word *you*. It lurks there quietly. If you take the embodiment of being human seriously, the answer to an abstract question can only be [discovered] in material reality, which is why most of the poems in the book that respond to the question pay attention to the body. [The section in the book] opens with a poem that that says that "believe" is a poor verb. Ultimately, I suppose I'm interested in replacing that. I'm not sure what else. Maybe living, maybe embodiment.

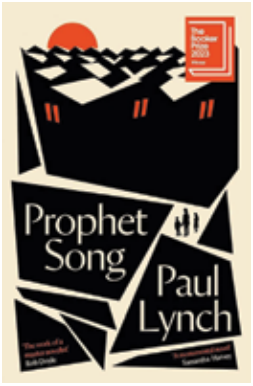
You've said you're "not . . .an insider [to faith]," so your answer to the question "Do you believe in God?" seems to be no, but in your poems, you're saying yes to something. I'm wondering, what's the yes and no?
I'm in the room next to belief. That isn't quite a yes or no. By saying I'm not a believer, really what I'm indicating is that I'm not affiliating myself with a group. That's different than saying I don't believe in God. I know I'm playing with words, but it's important because one of the devices in having these titles over and over in a typeface of the same size as the typeface of the body of the poem is to recognize that under that question there are a hundred questions, that all us who are in and outside of belief have a hundred different answers to those questions, and for them all to be consolidated under one question is usually to the diminishment of human encounter, and to the diminishment of intelligence.

One final question. You've talked about curating spaces of dialogue where people whose deep concern arising out of their faith and their social conscience can come to a deeper sense of belonging with each other. What does a magazine like *Canadian Mennonite* need in order to be a place like that?
I don't know if it can do it, [but] I think it's worthwhile trying. None of us have the methodology for making sure that matters of deep polarization and division can be addressed clearly in dialogue. We try, we try, and it falls apart, and then sometimes the unexpected happens.

There are conditions that you can set up, certain safeties, and one of them, of course, is that you're not going to platform hate. At the same time, we recognize that hate or rage are in all of us, and how is it that we can pay attention to all of this?

Thank you for your time.
My pleasure. ●

Book REVIEWS

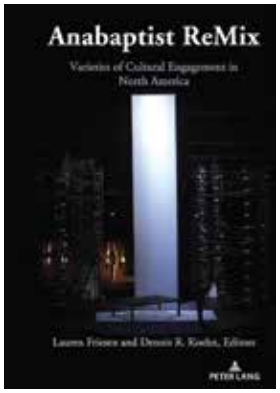


Prophet Song

I don't think I've read a book that articulates as brilliantly as Paul Lynch's *Prophet Song* (winner of the 2023 Booker Prize) what a woman experiences during the darkness of political tyranny—a husband "disappeared," a son caught up in the conflict, and her effort to keep her family together as well as care for a parent.

It's a dystopian novel set in Ireland, but it feels both historical and contemporary. I kept thinking of women in our Mennonite past and in many places today. The tiny emotional shifts Lynch captures seem entirely true, and the prose is poetic, intimate and urgent.

– *Dora Dueck, author of four books of fiction, and, most recently,* Return Stroke: Essays & Memoir



Anabaptist ReMix

This summer I've been reading *Anabaptist ReMix: Varieties of Cultural Engagement in North America*, edited by Lauren Friesen and Dennis R. Koehn. If you are wondering what Anabaptists are thinking about, this book is sure to get your mind doing jumping jacks. The topics are wide-ranging, from race, disability and gender, to farming, literature, health care and music. It includes writing from up-and-coming scholars like Katie Graber and Maxwell Kennel as well as writers with long track records.

How are people in the Anabaptist tradition shaped by culture, and how do they shape it? The theme of healing and justice in the face of violence is sung in many different keys. I thoroughly enjoyed this thoughtful book.

– *Carol Penner, director of Theological Studies, Conrad Grebel University College*

Q

Luther Blissett's novel *Q* is an epic historical fiction action thriller set in the crucible of the Radical Reformation. The narrator is an action hero with varied mysterious identities who connects with Anabaptist historical figures.

At the outset, he is a captain in the peasants' army, working closely with Thomas Müntzer. In the next stage, he's a key leader in the siege of Münster, and, finally, a shady businessman in Venice.

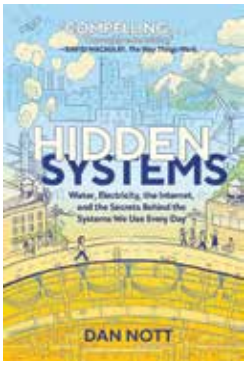
The other protagonist is Q, a spy under the employ of Cardinal Carafe, whose clandestine operations provide intelligence to Rome. The novel makes gritty connections between the politics, economics and social upheaval of the time and the theological debate in which it was cloaked.

– *Fred Martin, director of development, Conrad Grebel University College*

Art and Faith

As an artist, I found that the book *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making* by Makoto Fujimura put into words what I could not verbalize regarding the artistry of God. This book has reframed the ways I interact with art-making and brought me into the depths of its intention as an approach to worship. I recommend this book for whoever has an artful heart, mind and soul.

– Christen Kong, Toronto, Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church

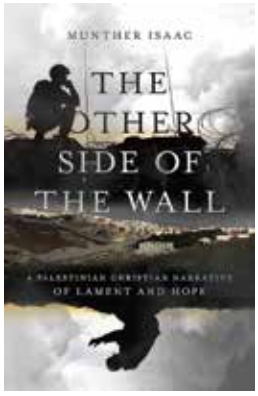


Hidden Systems

Dan Nott's graphic novel *Hidden Systems: Water, Electricity, the Internet, and the Secrets Behind the Systems We Use Every Day* will appeal to both graphic novel lovers and those who want to understand how and why our world works as it does.

The book is written clearly, easy enough for young readers to understand and full of facts that older readers may not know or may have forgotten. Best of all, it is written with hope and an eye to our future as we reimagine how these systems can change to become more efficient and equitable. Insightful, challenging and entertaining.

– Laura Wiebe, Calgary, Trinity Mennonite Church



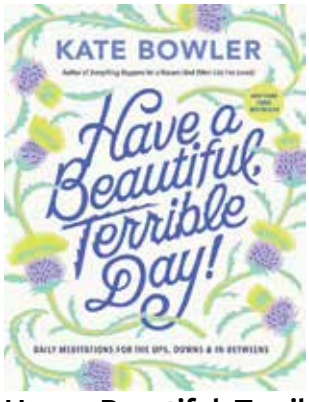
The Other Side of the Wall

In *The Other Side of the Wall*, Munther Isaac makes a passionate plea to the Western church for justice in the Palestinian people's struggle for their land.

What are the roots of the conflict? Whose land is it, really? What is Zionism, and what is its impact on this region?

Isaac challenges Christian Zionism's understanding of biblical prophecy and its belief that the present state of Israel was promised to the Jewish people as an eternal inheritance. He finds courage and hope in the Beatitudes and challenges Christians to move beyond a focus on personal salvation to seek Christ's justice.

– Marvin Baergen, Regina, Grace Mennonite Church



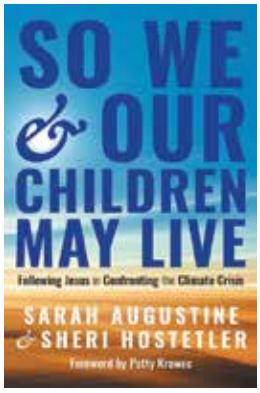
Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day

Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day!: Daily Meditations for the Ups, Downs, and In-between, by Kate Bowler, is a book of meditations for the wary, the weary, and the heart-sore. In short, for all of us.

Bowler eschews pat answers. With humour, candour and gentleness, Bowler addresses a range of difficult human experiences while simultaneously drawing our gaze to the God who is with us. Just as the title suggests, her book holds together two truths: our world contains heartache, *and* God's grace shimmers in the dailiness of our lives. We are broken, *and* we are beloved. With fresh imagery, Bowler's words offer genuine solace to our "hummingbird hearts."

The words offer relief that is like being in the company of a longstanding friend who enters with you into your less-than-lovely moments and holds your hand while you wait for the dawn.

– Aimee Reid, Hamilton, Hamilton Mennonite Church



So We & Our Children May Live

So We & Our Children May Live: Following Jesus in Confronting the Climate Crisis is a thought-provoking exploration of the underlying systems that have brought us to ecological overreach. Sarah Augustine and Sheri Hostetler combine theological insight with a deep call to action, challenging readers to confront the legacy of colonialism and capitalism.

Their writing is clear and compelling, drawing from personal experiences and scriptural reflections. The book not only educates but also invites readers into the work of reparation and solidarity with those most negatively impacted by climate change—Indigenous communities.

An eye-opening resource for those committed to future generations and the longevity of the planet.

– Mollee Moua, Kitchener, Ontario, First Hmong Mennonite Church

If all the EARTH. . .

Children's author connects kids with God's love

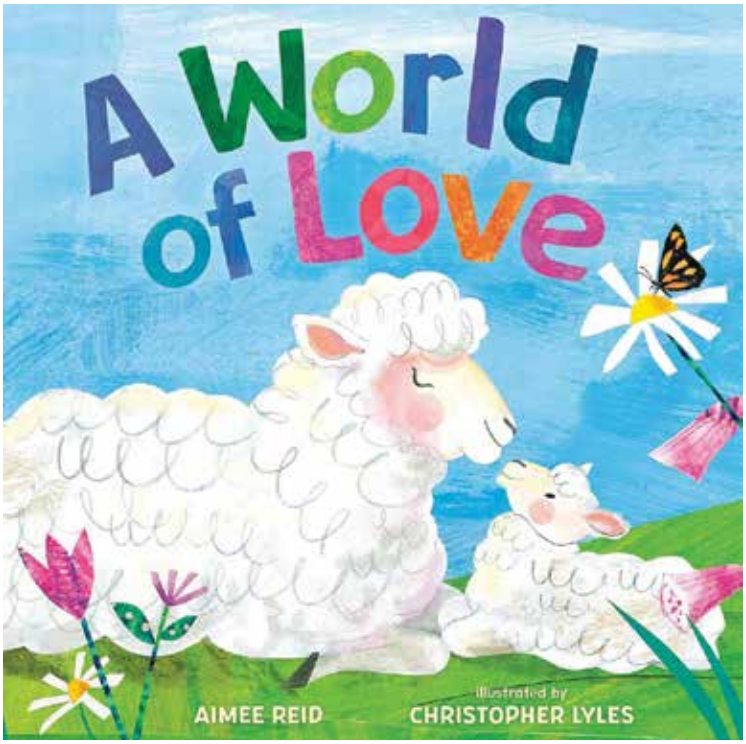
By Madalene Arias

Nature has always been a source of inspiration for Mennonite children's author Aimee Reid.

Several years ago, she took her dog for a walk while camping at Valens Lake Conservation Area in Hamilton, Ontario. She returned with a phrase in her mind:

If all the earth were forests green and you were the nest.

"I wrote it down because I had the inkling that this might be the beginning of something," says Reid, who attends Hamilton Mennonite in Hamilton, Ontario.



What came next for Reid were images of animals. She pondered the different ways that various species care for their young and began searching for parallels between animal parents and human parents.

Aimee Reid

As an animal lover—she describes her dog, Sadie, as her writing companion—this was the fun part for Reid.

"Mountain goats will often stay a little bit below their young, so that if they stumble, they're there for them," she says. "Emperor penguin dads keep their chicks in a little pouch by their feet."

Reid would eventually compile these and other examples into *A World of Love* (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2024) with illustrations from Christopher Lyles.

Through short lines of text and tender brushstrokes of pinks, greens and blues, the book invites young readers to pastures, jungles and oceans to explore the vastness of unconditional love.

"That sense of being known and loved thoroughly is something I hope children will experience somehow through reading the book," says Reid, who also found inspiration in Psalm 139.

In her writing process, Reid tries to put herself in the mindset of a child. Writing for children means working with an economy of words, which in turn means finding ways to distill the story without losing its message.

But her book is also for adults. At a large festival, a woman approached Reid with tears in her eyes and told her that she had never experienced such love from a book.

"I was really moved by that, and I hope that in some way she was sensing God's universal love for us." Reid says, "Mr. Rogers used to pray, 'Let some words that I say be yours.' That's a prayer that really resonates with me as I do my work."

Writing in this genre also means connecting with her experiences as a mother. Reid has three children aged 22, 19 and 17. They are the first readers of her drafts and have become adept at highlighting the parts that they like and the parts that need to be developed.

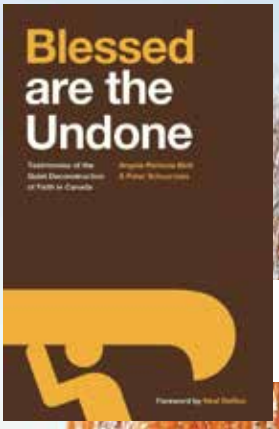
She has published five other children's books, including *The Story of Mr. Rogers and His Neighborhood.*

Just as she wants her own children to know that they are loved, they are valued, they are wanted and they have a special place in the world, Reid wants all children who read her work to draw the same understanding. The book concludes: "If all the earth and for all time, when near or when apart, I'll cherish you, my child, my child, for you are in my heart."

PHOTO: SUPPLIED; OPPOSITE, ERIK MCLEAN/UNSPLASH.

Picture this: A man and a woman take all their savings to purchase a new house in a new development. They begin making it a home. . . . They invest themselves deeply in every aspect until the house becomes part of their identity. One day some municipal officials come to the door, looking grave. They say they have discovered a serious sinkhole in the area, and this house is close to the centre of it. The officials say that insurance will cover their losses, and the man and woman are offered a fresh start in a new neighbourhood. But they refuse to part with their home, for it is familiar and precious to them, and they cannot face the tragedy of this loss. They live in denial, assuming that the officials must be wrong about the sinkhole. A few nights later, without warning, the ground opens, and the house swiftly collapses into the underground hole. The couple dies in the implosion; the home becomes their tomb. . . .

Deconstruction can be understood in deeply theological terms: it can be seen as letting go, dying to the old self, the old house, the old church. . . .This letting go is simultaneously a grabbing onto union with Christ, living into the death and resurrection of Christ in your baptism. . . [S]uch de- and reconstruction is basic Christian spiritual formation.



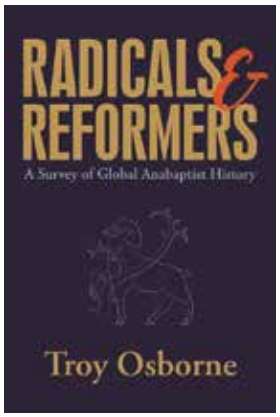
Excerpted from *Blessed are the Undone: Testimonies of the Quiet Deconstruction of Faith in Canada* by Angela Reitsma Bick and Peter Schuurman (New Leaf, 2024). See blessedundone.ca. Used with permission.

A complicated, honest, 500-YEAR STORY

Radicals and Reformers: A Survey of Global Anabaptist History. By Troy Osborne. Herald Press, 2024.

Reviewed by Gareth Brandt

This book by Troy Osborne is the first since Cornelius J. Dyck's *An Introduction to Mennonite History* in 1967 (revised in 1981) to attempt to capture the entire sweep of Mennonite history through the centuries. The 1990s saw a number of Anabaptist history texts that focused on 16th century Anabaptist origins, while a more popular and less detailed history was written by John Roth in 2006.



A broad survey such as Osborne's was long overdue, and the timing is appropriate with the upcoming 500th anniversary of Anabaptist origins.

It might have been nice to have this history told from a perspective other than that of a white male of northern European descent, but I appreciate the efforts made in this newest volume to be more representative in telling the story. Notably, Osborne includes stories of women and by women in each century of the survey.

A chapter each is dedicated to the expanding stories of Anabaptism in the non-Western cultures of Africa, Latin America and Asia. It is a rendering for our time.

Osborne also corrects what many North American scholars (myself included) have tended to do—end the European story with the migrations to the Americas.

Osborne states his purpose at the beginning and end of the book: to tell a complicated story in an honest way, including both positive and critical elements of all the various theological and cultural streams that have developed over five centuries. Not an easy task. I applaud his efforts. He has largely succeeded.

He writes with both sensitivity and awareness. I agree with other reviewers who have called the book "tightly written," "well-balanced," "an integration of faith and practice," "expansive and inclusive," and "compelling and sometimes provocative."

Osborne manages to squeeze 500 years of theologically, culturally and geographically complicated material into 350 pages. While the book is liberally sprinkled with pictures and maps, its length seems tad heavy.

The book is well-balanced, telling many varied stories that honour the people in them without being denigrating, patronizing or glossy. It is indeed compelling and provocative. ●

Gareth Brandt lives in Abbotsford, B.C. His own book Radical Roots: A Collection of Paintings, Stories and Poems Celebrating the 500 years of Anabaptist Origin was published this fall by Masthof. *The above review is adapted from Gareth Brandt's blog (garethbrandt.wordpress.com). Used with permission*

Flyover Church: How Jesus' Ministry in Rural Places is Good News Everywhere
By Brad Roth, Herald Press, 2024

Brad Roth was raised in the rural U.S. and trained on the east coast before serving in rural congregations in other countries and now in the U.S. Midwest. In writing about pastoring in those contexts, Roth writes with realism and lyricism that never veers into rose-tinted idealism.

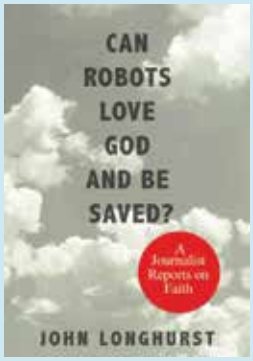
Though the book is aimed at middle America, Roth makes several references to Canada, and pastors from rural Canada are among those he consulted for the book.

Roth dispels the notion that the rural church is necessarily dwindling. He talks about the plain truths of pastoring in less populous areas, and he notes the joys and challenges of working in small communities that function like parishes. I think of a friend who just began pastoring a rural church: this book is for him. For those in seminary, this book offers a candid look at a viable and fascinating ministry option.

The book is also for me in my urban context, because much of what makes a good rural church makes a good church anywhere. It also reminds those of us in urban centres not to simply gloss over—or fly over—the important heartlands of our continent.

– Susan Fish

PHOTO: (OPPOSITE) CAIO/PEXELS



Can Robots Love God and Be Saved: A Journalist Reports on Faith

By John Longhurst, CMU Press, 2024

I was hesitant to tackle this book because of its title, which made me think the book was 272 pages on artificial intelligence from a theological perspective. It is not. Instead, it is a sampling of John Longhurst's weekly faith columns in the *Winnipeg Free Press* over the past 20 years.

As Longhurst, who attends River East Church in Winnipeg, says, the 118 pieces in the book "ask all sorts of questions—the kinds you might not ask in most churches or other places of worship."

I found myself reading one piece, then another, then just one more. Longhurst says, "My goal has always been to gently raise interesting and provocative issues and then invite readers to ponder and reflect on them—and do so in a way that is generally positive and inclusive and encourages readers to explore deeper into various subjects."

Topics include Remembrance Day poppies, Reconciliation with Indigenous neighbours, medical assistance in dying and baseball as a road to God. The collection would make fascinating conversation starters for an adult Sunday school class or a family dinner discussion.

The title essay reminds us that though God may be eternal, the questions we ask about God and faith are always changing, and always in need of people—like Longhurst—who can ask them and talk with people who provide insight and direction.

– SF

Preaching Sex: On love, intimacy, power, abuse

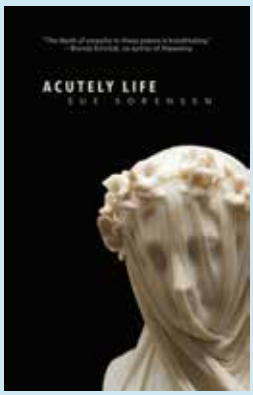
By Gary Harder with Lydia Neufeld Harder, Gelassenheit Press, 2024

I'm afraid not enough people will read this book. Gary Harder, who died just as this book was released, was a pastor with a pastor's heart. This collection of sermons, saved from decades of ministry, shows his deep wrestling with the intersection of love, intimacy, power and abuse. Harder—occasionally together with his wife, Lydia Neufeld Harder—does not shy away from naming abuses of power and better ways of being, but he also plays with language and life and love in a way that fits the subject matter so well.

The collection functions as a book of essays—many of the sermons preached on Valentine's Day or at weddings—that can be dipped in and out of, offering wisdom that is perennial and life-giving.

The book exemplifies all that sermons can be.

– SF



Acutely Life

By Sue Sorensen, At Bay Press, 2024

This is the first book of poetry from Sue Sorensen, who teaches English at Canadian Mennonite University. The poems have a dimension of lament to them, but they are also thoughtful and playful. Many of the poems are written as conversations with other art, artists, writers and thinkers.

Throughout, Sorensen navigates grief and loss. The title poem, which evokes the poets Dante and Herbert, includes the lines:

Saved at your centre, the saviour's quick spark
sparks a flame of peace deep within you both
You both and all in all us. Acutely life: life in all its aspects, freely given.
Given free, giv'n to all, our gift of breath.

– SF

Reconnected

By Carlos Whittaker, Nelson Books, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2024

My dad was an information technology specialist and often the smartest person in the room, but he didn't like it when we looked up answers in the middle of a conversation, because he said it killed the discussion. In this book, Carlos Whittaker, an Afro-Hispanic influencer and worship leader, sees a notification of how much he uses his phone each day (a little less than my average usage) and suddenly decides he will put his phone and all other screens away for seven weeks, two of which he passes at a Benedictine monastery in California and two of which he spends living with an Amish family in Mount Hope, Ohio.

While seven weeks does not sound like long enough, a sense of withdrawal sets in quickly, and Whittaker realizes not only how much he relied on his phone to fill in the blanks in his life, but that the experiment is less about disconnecting from technology and more about connecting with God through prayer, spiritual disciplines and by giving attention to the natural world.

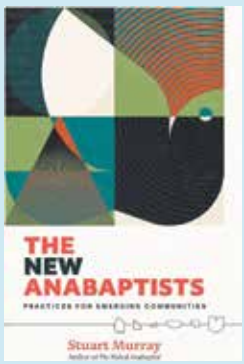
He writes of the exact situation my dad disliked: "How many times are you in a conversation where somebody wonders something, only to stop their wondering in about three seconds flat because they can look it up on their phone? We. Don't. Wonder. Anymore. And because we don't wonder anymore, you know what else we've lost? Wonder. As in the awe-and-wonder type of wonder."

At first, I found Whittaker self-centred and performative, but as his mindset shifts in the book, I appreciated his honesty in showing what a screen-driven life does to a human being, and how living in the real world is restorative.

After his digital detox, Whittaker picks up his devices reluctantly—in such a way that they serve him rather than the other way around.

The book includes a near-death experience and an account of a black man on a bicycle getting lost on his way to the tractor store in Amish country. This is an entertaining read, but there's also much more than meets the eye.

– SF



The New Anabaptists

By Stuart Murray with contributions by Alexandra Ellish, Karen Sethuraman, Juliet Kilpin, Herald Press, 2024

A sequel to *The Naked Anabaptist*, this book began at a 2020 meeting of U.K. Anabaptists who examined what they called common practices of Anabaptists. In their context, where culture is more likely to be Celtic than German or Swiss, they tried to discern distinctives from early Anabaptists and the early church. Among the claims of the book is that tithing is not biblical.

I sometimes found the book a bit heavy-handed and splitting hairs until I got to the final three chapters. Murray recognized that his name and past sales record could get a book deal and sell books, but that he also didn't want to be yet another middle-aged white man describing the future of a diverse church. He therefore wisely includes the voices of three dynamic female leaders of Anabaptist-related ministries in the U.K. For me, those chapters were the highlight, as was the ongoing challenge to consider the growing global Anabaptist community.

– SF

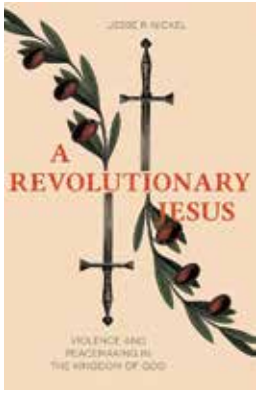
Book suggestions
FOR FALL STUDY AND READING

By Arlyn Friesen Epp, CommonWord

As the days grow shorter in our northern clime and we settle into fall rhythms, it's a wonderful time to carve out a space with a good book. Often even better is a book that can be shared in a reading group or church study. CommonWord has many options that you may buy or borrow for the home or church setting. Here is a short list of recent Mennonite-authored titles that would be great for a reading group to consider together:

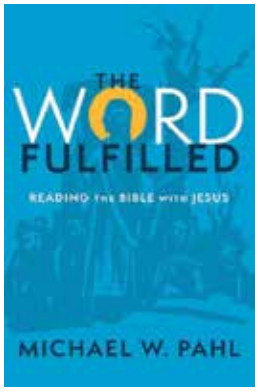
Radical Roots

By Gareth Brandt, Masthof Press, 2024.
Brandt, through paintings, short stories and poetry, assesses the Anabaptist movement—what it is, and why it matters. An 83-page, accessible and engaging introduction to the early Anabaptists that is both educational and inspirational. Although not a curriculum, the short features make it simple to orient a group discussion.
commonword.ca/go/4046



A Revolutionary Jesus

By Jesse Nickel, 1517 Media, 2024.
This book is about Jesus' perspective on violence, the ways this was demonstrated in his ministry, and its implications for Jesus' followers. In contrast to a prevailing view that an "eschatological violence" would accompany God's deliverance, Jesus' vision for God's reign is nonviolent, in its inauguration and character. Let this study provoke a commitment of active peacemaking in your group!
commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/27987

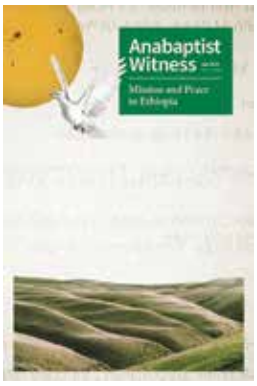


The Word Fulfilled

By Michael Pahl, Herald Press, 2024.
Jesus' teachings and way of life were significantly shaped by his reading of the Jewish scriptures. In turn, Pahl argues, we can better read our Bibles today if we explore how Jesus engaged the scriptures. Step back into Jesus' context and into the synagogues and family kitchens of his day and encounter afresh the Word of God. This book comes with a study guide.
commonword.ca/go/3820

New Moves: A Theological Odyssey

By J. Denny Weaver, Cascadia Publishing House, 2023.
Written for lay readers as well as interested theologians, this memoir displays how a theological career develops and a new theological doctrine emerges. The author's key theological move was to reject and then pose an alternative to the satisfaction atonement image, the dominant motif among Christian traditions for nearly 900 years. Drew Hart has said that Weaver's memoir is "A must-read for the pews and the classroom that ultimately should lead us to the streets."
commonword.ca/go/4062



Mission and Peace in Ethiopia

Edited by Henok T. Mekonin and James R. Krabill, Anabaptist Witness Journal, April 2024.
An important set of articles that focus primarily on mission and peace efforts in the broader context of Ethiopia and secondarily on the specific history and perspectives of the Meserte Kristos Church (MKC). These essays were collected for mutual growth among Anabaptist/Mennonite churches across the globe, especially in preparation for the 2028 Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Ethiopia.
commonword.ca/go/3948

PHOTO: (OPPOSITE) POPPYTHOMASHILL/PEXELS

MennoMedia

Flyover Church

Christ is present and at work in rural communities. How do we lead from that reality?

The tensions unleashed over the past few years, which led to skepticism, breakdowns of trust, and declining church attendance, continue to linger in our churches. The temptation to operate from a scarcity mindset is stronger than ever. Yet God's loving, redemptive work is happening in all places—no matter how small or far-flung.

Love, Auntie

You are welcome here anytime.

In *Love, Auntie*, Shantell Hinton Hill, aka Reverend Auntie, offers testimonies to loved ones who have been led to believe they do not belong. Sit alongside the wisdom-bearing of Black women, lovingly known as Aunties, as they carve out space for doubts, questions, and spiritual expression that honours intersecting identities of race, gender, and class. Aunties always know how to turn mess into miracles.

Comfort & Joy

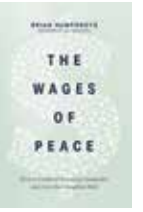
Slow down and connect to what matters this holiday season.

This Advent and Christmas season, take time to find the sacred among the ordinary. In *Comfort and Joy*, authors Sherah-Leigh Gerber and Gwen Lantz offer a unique blend of thoughtful reflections and inspiring spiritual practices. Find ways to connect with favourite traditions and creative impetus for forming new ones. Slow down and savour this meaningful and holy journey through Christmas.

The Me I Was Made to Be

Your kids are talking about identity. Are you part of the conversation?

In this engaging and disarming book that speaks to readers across the theological spectrum, Christie Penner Worden invites grownups along to imagine a more Jesus-centred narrative for the sake of kids who are no longer buying what the church is selling. Walk with these kids as they learn both who they are and whose they are.



The Wages of Peace

It's getting harder and harder to get by. The Wages of Peace offers an empathetic, informed perspective on today's economy and the difficulty of getting by. Reporting from his work in community development, Brian Humphreys unpacks the core needs of low-income households, starting with living-wage jobs. He offers practical steps for how the church can address complex socioeconomic challenges. It's time to dismantle inequality and work for an equitable peace.

Plaque commemorates Montreal River COs

By Barb Draper

A group gathers at the site of the Montreal River alternative service camp on September 28.

Descendants of conscientious objectors (COs) gathered around a new plaque to permanently mark the location of the Montreal River Alternative Service Camp. More than 50 people made the two-day bus trip to Montreal River, 120 kilometres north of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, on the shore of Lake Superior, to participate in this Sept. 28, 2024, event acknowledging the first alternative service camp during the Second World War.

This event and the official unveiling of the plaque that took place at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario, two days before were organized by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario (MHSO).

Although it was open for less than two years, Montreal River served as a model for over 50 camps across Canada where COs did civilian work instead of going to war.

For many Mennonite and Amish farm boys, their experience at this camp broadened their worldview and gave them lifelong friendships, as well as made them think about their beliefs about serving others. Long-term friendships across denominations and the examination of pacifist beliefs had a major impact on churches.

One of those impacts was greater inter-Mennonite cooperation. Darrell Frey, author of *Called to be a Soldier: Experiences of COs at Alternative Service Camps During WWII* (2014), commented at the plaque installation that the success of the New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale was partly due to friendships forged at Montreal River.

This first camp was also an important step in the negotiation between COs and the Canadian government. In late 1940, an agreement was reached that COs could work in non-military, alternative service camps instead of doing four months of military training. On July 16, 1941, the first group of 53 men arrived in Montreal River to work at extending the Trans-Canada Highway. The COs cleared rocks and trees and shovelled gravel, leaving a positive impression on the government.

Although the buildings from the camp have disappeared and the men who served there are no longer living, the plaque is a permanent reminder of those who served there and what it means to be a conscientious objector to war.

The plaque unveiling was led by representatives of the Ontario Heritage Trust, under whose guidance the plaque was created. Many thanks to the owners of Twilight Resort, who allowed the plaque installation on their property, and to Laureen Harder-Gissing, chair of MHSO, and other MHSO members for organizing the two events.

PHOTO: ROY DRAPER

Unity makes church

The following is adapted from a presentation given at the Letters to a Future Church Conference at Columbia Bible College, May 21–22, 2024.

By Jesse Nickel

Compromise feels like a curse word these days.

Opinions are deeply entrenched. Distinctions between "us" and "them" are sharply defined. There is less tolerance for anything other than unanimity on certain issues: "If you're not for us, you're against us." Many are unwilling to voice dissenting or even nuanced opinions, lest they be written off as "one of those people." Constructive dialogue is increasingly a relic of a bygone era.

Even as I consider naming examples, I hesitate, conscious of what those might reveal about my perspective or social posture, and what impact that might have on readers who see things differently than me.

What's more, this widespread increase in disunity and polarization has been reflected in the church. The mindset of "us vs. them" is not just "out there"—it is very much "in here."

But I want to make the case that disunity in the church is a big deal—a bigger deal than many Christians seem to think. Unity is integral to both the identity and the mission of the church. As theologian David Fitch states, "We must first become the place the world can recognize as beyond enemies. We must first deal with our own antagonisms. Once freed, we can then enter the world in peace, opening up space for Christ to work."

The disunity and polarization that permeates the world is lamentable and problematic for all kinds of reasons. But it has also created an opportunity. When the church recognizes that unity does not mean unanimity, but that we are held together by something—by someone—that transcends any barrier that might stand between us, we have the opportunity to be an embodiment of God's reconciling power. Our unity is evidence that the powers of hostility and hatred no longer hold us in their grip.

The church must not succumb to division, hostility, and "othering" within ourselves, for to do so is to reject what Jesus has accomplished through his blood, and to turn our backs on our calling.

In the first half of Ephesians 2, Paul's

PHOTO: KSENIACHERNAYA/PEXELS

attention is on the reconciliation effected by Christ between human beings and God—transformation from death to life—but there is another aspect of this gospel, the focus of Ephesians 2: 11–22, one that many Christians attend to less often. In these verses, the reconciliation takes place between formerly hostile groups of human beings.

This is not an add-on to the gospel proclaimed in the first 10 verses of the chapter—it *is* the gospel, the good news of what has been accomplished by God in and through Jesus. Through the death of Jesus, peace was made—not the peace of a ceasefire, but the peace of šālôm: the peace of the age to come; the peace that produces flourishing, abundant life.

The "gospel of peace" laid out in Ephesians 2 is the basis upon which Paul grounds the exhortative second half of the epistle. This gospel demands an active, embodied response; it is to be put into practice. Whatever else they do, the recipients of Paul's words are to strive to live in a way that is "worthy" of what God has done in and through the Messiah Jesus.

This is not empty moralizing. They are no longer to live the way they have been because they now know the Messiah Jesus, and the fullness of life in him.

Further, this gospel is to be embodied in the community it has birthed. The people of God in Jesus must reflect the character of Jesus in their relationships with one another, with the goal of preserving what has been given to them: the unity that is the result of Jesus's reconciliatory, peace-making death.

And yet, Paul's exhortation in verse 3—"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"—suggests that human actions and attitudes are not without significance. In her commentary on this passage, Lynn H. Cohick says, "While [believers] do not create unity on their own strength, they can by their own willfulness destroy it."

We must prioritize our unity.

When we become polarized in our disagreements, we do so out of a desire to be faithful to the gospel, but the New Testament teaches us that it is in our unity that we are truly the church.

This is not to say that there is no place for disagreement. But there needs to be careful consideration of how we process such disagreement; the decision to go our separate ways, disengage and call into question the faith of those with whom we disagree must be taken very seriously.

When we are divided, disunified and hostile, when we undercut, snipe at and write off one another, we betray Jesus' victory. We fail to "walk worthy of our calling."

What does this look like? In Romans 14:19, Paul exhorts the believers to "pursue the things that make for peace and the building up of one another." In Ephesians 4:2, he calls his readers to embody humility, gentleness, patience, and to bear with one another in love, characteristics of Jesus himself. Our unity will be "kept" insofar as our relationships with one another are characterized by the same mindset that we see in the Messiah Jesus (Philippians 2:5).

The cruciform nature of these actions reminds us that this will not always (or even usually) be easy; as Michael Gorman states in the book *Becoming the Gospel*, "Sustaining shalom—the church's first task—requires the same kind of cruciform love . . . that created the church. Without forbearing, forgiving love, there is no hope for peace."

But, as Mennonite World Conference general secretary César García says, "We cannot force or manufacture unity. It is a gift of the Spirit that we receive.'

This calls us to remember that the One who unifies us is stronger than anything that once divided us or made us hostile to one another. Just as Jesus is the origin of our unity, so too is Jesus the location of our unity and the means of preserving our unity.

May it be so.

Jesse Nickel teaches biblical studies at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, B.C. He is the author of the new book, A Revolutionary Jesus: Violence and Peacemaking in the Kingdom of God (*Fortress Press, 2024*).

News briefs

CMU sees enrollment jump

Nearly 40 percent more first-year students enrolled at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) for the 2024-25 school year compared with the previous year. Overall enrolment across graduate and undergraduate programs is up 10 percent.

According to CMU president, Cheryl Pauls, the increases are a recovery from "enrolment dip" during the pandemic, but also due to the new Social Work program, renewal of longstanding programs and high-school visits by CMU reps.

There are 694 students (630 full-time equivalents) attending CMU.

Source: PembinaValleyOnline

Human-powered and partially hand-crafted technology displayed outside the Wiederkehr workshop.

The blessed tool

By Andre Wiederkehr

As a kid, I took apart discarded electronics and built little robots. I attempted many times to build an ornithopter—a toy aircraft that flies by flapping its wings. In high school, I took up woodworking and metalworking and dabbled in 3D animation. I have many sketches of things I've dreamed of building.

One might say I have a fascination with technology.

"Technology" is often used as shorthand for electronics, but, of course, the term reaches wider than that. Technology is the application of knowledge for practical goals. It's everywhere, supporting pretty much every physical aspect of our human lives. It's a way of expanding our power beyond what our bodies can do.

While some might say that the way I and my family live today is "anti-technology"—using human power to grow our food, for example—I don't see it that way. Over time, I've moved beyond simple attraction to technology. Now, rather than turning away from technology, I'm trying to engage it more deeply and carefully.

The average Canadian's life is supported by complex systems of uncounted technologies and tools. Most of the time, however, we pay other people to use such tools for us. I'm trying to bring those backstage technologies out onto the stage of my life where I can see how they work and what unintended consequences accompany them.

How has the food I eat today been grown, stored, brought to me and prepared? What kind of energy am I using to get around? What is my house made of? How is it maintained? How is it heated and powered? What things do I use to play, relax, celebrate and worship?

My daily life is now filled with tools: a froe, cone wrench, billhook, eye hoe, wheel hoe, rocket stove, shaving horse, treadle thresher, beetle, side hatchet, hässja, corn sheller, solar dehydrator, cant hook and many more.

Sifting our culture

How do people choose what technologies to use?

Stepping back from the question, the word "choose" may sound like an odd choice because, often, we operate on autopilot, simply copying what has been passed down to us and what everyone around us is doing, rather than consciously choosing. We may not even realize or acknowledge we have options.

The August "Deeper Communion" column in these pages challenged readers to actively "sift our culture," discerning what gives life and what gives death. I would emphasize that this includes sifting

PHOTO: ANDRE WIEDERKEHR

our culture's technological choices. We might ask:

Does a certain technology make my life more fulfilling, more fully human, more in the image of God?

Does it express love and care for my neighbour all the way through its production, use and end of service?

Since technology is a way to extend the efficacy of our will in the world, is the world blessed by having my will extended through this technology?

Someone in my church once suggested that most questions need "responses," not answers. That leaves room for ongoing change in my choices, and room for others to have different, also valid, responses.

Here are some ideas I use to guide my responses to technological questions. I want to use technology that is:

At an appropriate scale—big enough to meet my needs yet small enough to stay local.

Powered by renewable energy (sun, wind, food, biomass) in non-industrial ways. How much and what kind of energy is used to make and operate the technology?

Made from local materials and contributing to a system that facilitates meeting a need locally. Moving stuff around comes with additional ecological costs.

Made from materials that are produced justly and that are cycled back to their sources after the technology is no longer useful to me.

Replicable and scalable. Could lots of people do it this way, or does it depend on some rare resource or unusual level of ability?

Working toward meaningfully different, more loving systems, rather than just a mitigation of harm within current systems.

When I have a need for which I don't see a way to do all of the above well, I ask: is there conventional material or technology being wasted somewhere that I can scavenge?

Inconsistency and intention

I also know I'm somewhat inconsistent, even within these intentional choices.

I like a lot of the tools I mentioned earlier. They represent instances in which I've worked on putting these values into practice.

Although I do some blacksmithing in our woodstove, I use an angle grinder and arc welder—both conventional industrial technologies. This mix of technologies lets me make human-powered gardening tools.

Doing all my bike maintenance, I can see I'm using highly machined parts that come from . . . I don't know where. This lets me travel under my own power.

Homemade solar cooker (centre) and dehydrators.

I obtain used clothes (sometimes discarded) and mend them heavily, but they're still ordinary factory-made clothes.

Over time, I hope that more of these areas of my life will join into a pattern of care and sustenance for me *and the rest of creation*. It's a journey. I want to let problems bother me enough that I keep changing, but not so much that I get bogged down.

I expect I'll accept the most compromise in relation to technologies that support connection to the broader culture, such as transport and telecommunication.

Tech and us

That's a lot about me; what about us, the church?

For Mennonites, the question of what technologies to use in daily life has often been an area of serious discernment, debate and division. In contrast to more technologically conservative groups of Anabaptists, our particular branch dictates no communal practices or limits around technology.

While I admire a community that makes a shared choice to limit which technologies they will use, I also see dangers. I appreciate the lack of dictates so we can all figure out our "responses" rather than sticking to "answers" we may internally disagree with. Yet I think the church has a role to play in helping people ask the questions, getting conversation going and providing support for those who are looking for options outside the mainstream.

Un-development

While organizations like Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) promote appropriate technology in the Global South, here in Canada, we tend to think we have no need for training in solar cooking or hand-powered conservation agriculture.

What is the trajectory of our "development" work, though? Is the goal to bring everyone up to our standard of consumption? Even aside from the issue of continuous growth, which Zach Rempel considered in the August issue of this magazine, do projections for a "green" tech conversion take into account a move to global equality of consumption?

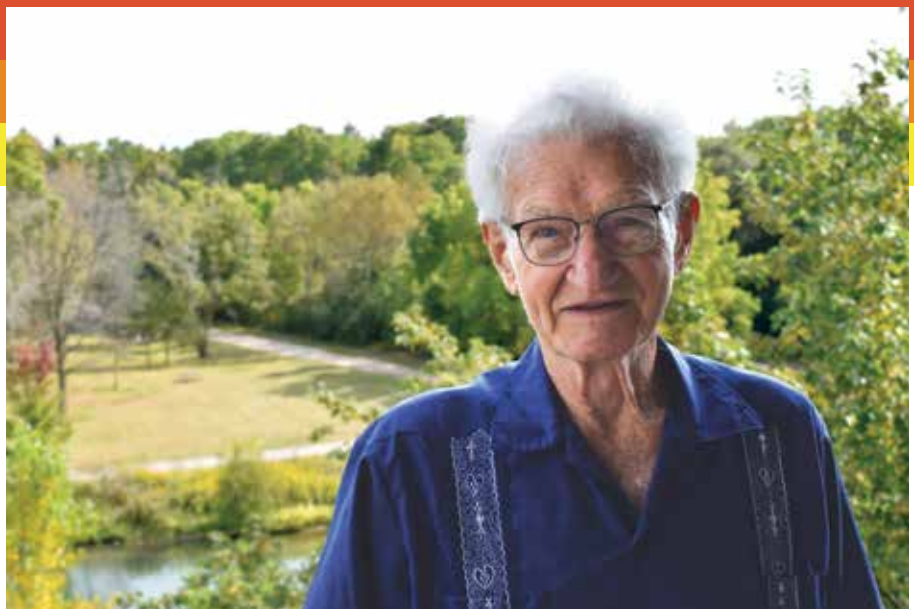
If people of relative global privilege (like me) want liberation from participation in colonialism, perpetual growth and industrial destruction of creation, what exactly is the plan?

Could MCC facilitate a mission to help us "undevelop"? I dream of people from other cultures, both abroad and Indigenous here, teaching people like me about appropriate technologies and skills for living in balance with the earth and our neighbours. Perhaps part of the work of anti-racism and decolonization is appreciating the practical good that is present in non-colonial cultures. I'd love to have someone teach me how to dehull millet with a mortar and pestle.

Andre Wiederkehr is part of a household of subsistence farmers near Mildmay, Ontario. He can be reached at rumithan@gmail.com

PHOTO: ANDRE WIEDERKEHR

LIFE IN THE 80s



It's the world

An interview with John Peters

By Susan Fish

John Peters, 89, is a retired sociology professor from Waterloo, Ontario, where he lives with his wife, Violet, and attends Waterloo North Mennonite Church. He and his late wife, Lorraine, were missionaries in Brazil with Evangelized Field Missions (now Crossworld) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He has an extensive history with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) globally, and taught courses at colleges in Ethiopia and Lithuania.

What's your earliest memory of church?

What we in the evangelical world called conversion, at age 12. We lived in Abbotsford, British Columbia, on a strawberry farm. The local Nazarene church had a campaign, and Chief Whitefeather, a First Nations person, urged us to follow Jesus. I hesitated for a while because I knew God wanted my life, and I just wanted to get the benefits.

Then we moved to northern British Columbia, where I got dunked under the water in the Skeena River at age 16, baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

What's your best memory of church?

Waterloo North Mennonite Church. Now. I've learned that the church has a deep, profound function. It's an accepting community, and they listen. There's community, there's solidarity.

I also have about 15 different experiences throughout my life where God has definitely touched and moved me under God's will. I track them.

God brings the hurting church to my mind, because it's the world. It's also close to my family. My dad came to Canada from Russia in 1925, but his brother was shot by the Stalin government. I've been fortunate enough to go back through Mennonite Central Committee and IVCF. In 1991, there were four IVCF staff in Kazakhstan and IVCF didn't know how to get money to them, so I went there with three thousand American dollars hidden in my shoes.

What is your most difficult memory in church?

In graduate school in the '60s, we went to a strong Bible-believing church where they preached good sermons. But we were very uncomfortable when we learned they had moved out of the city to the countryside to avoid racial integration. We joined a small Presbyterian church with Black and white members, and that was our home.

Who's been most influential in your life?

I would say Hans and Ago Bürki, and Wilbur Sutherland of IVCF. Sutherland was concerned about people after graduation, and he brought Bürki to Canada for a summer program. Then Bürki invited people from around the world to come to Rasa, Switzerland, for 19 days. Lorraine and I went twice. We had deep spiritual

PHOTO: SUSAN FISH

teaching and such an exposure to the world outside North America.

Also Tom Yoder Neufeld, with whom I get together at least once a year. He's a humble person who listens well. Certainly, also, my first wife, Lorraine, and now, my wife Violet.

What is your favourite book or Bible passage or poem or song?
My life verse is Colossians 3:15—"May the peace of God rule in your life." It's longstanding, been there throughout my life.

What's the best thing about getting older?
There's so much to look back on, but a rich experience right now is going on wagon rides with The Mennonite Story. For one hour as we're traveling along, I get to tell tourists from around the world the good news of the love and grace of God. I look forward to that with delight! I describe the way of living of the Old Order Mennonite farms we pass, and I describe our modern church.

What is hard about being older?
I am not in sync with the values and goals of society and the political systems around me. Advertisements are fabricated for the sole purpose of my buying the product, but my material needs are so minor.

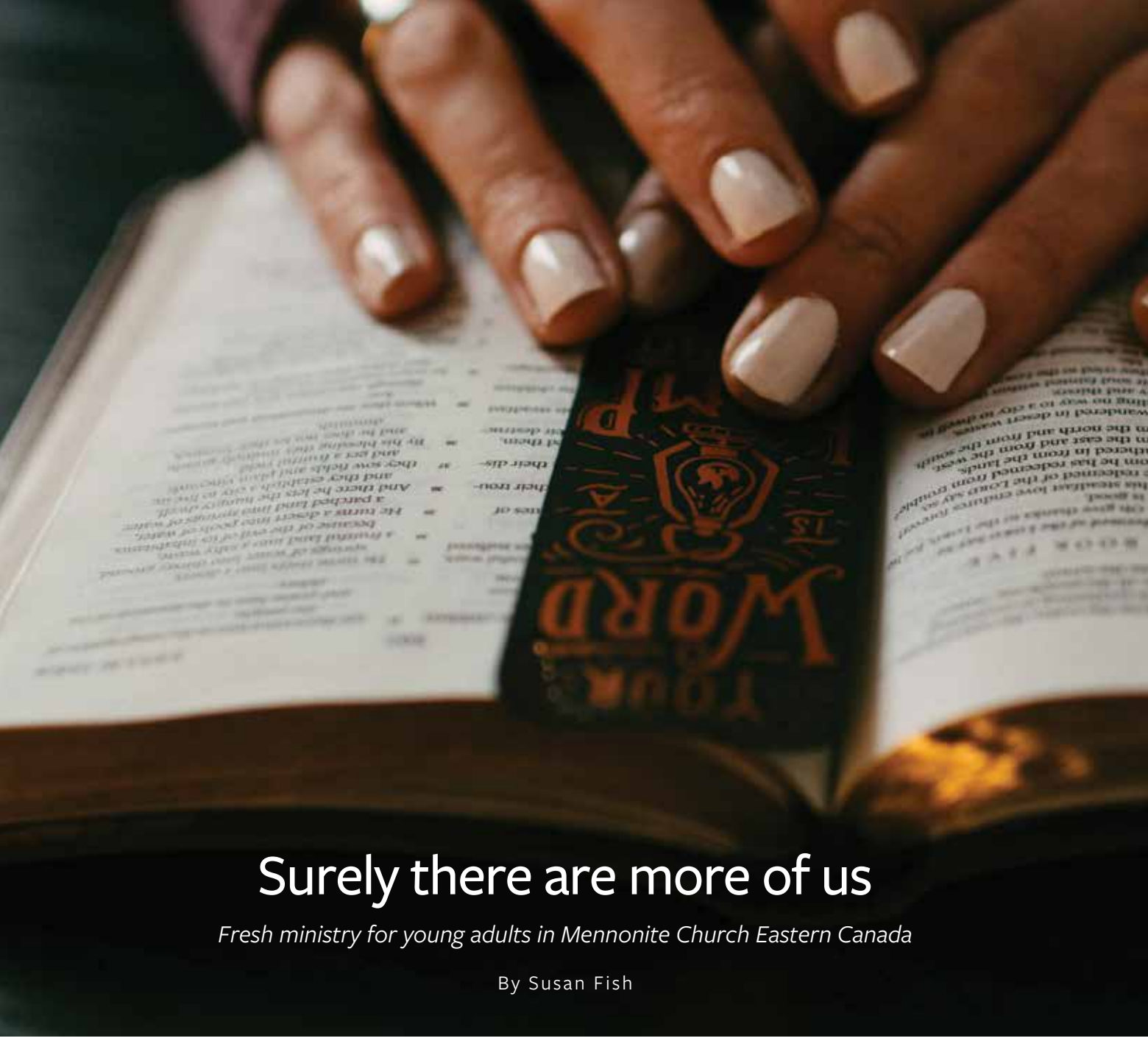
What do younger people not know about getting older?
The concerns at later life are about health. One of the difficulties of the aging process for me is that of hearing. I can't fully communicate with everybody anymore: I can't always hear the sermon, and sometimes I purposely withdraw.

A related concern for us in Western society is: do I have enough money that, in the event of some catastrophe, I will have sufficient finances?

What do you wish someone had told you about getting older?
That the family of God is made up of all kinds of people. There was a time when we evangelicals were looking for the truth, and we felt we had it, but we thought that [other denominations] didn't quite have it. That's crazy. I respect the whole variety now.

Where I live, there's a beloved Christian Reformed couple just across the hall, and one step down is Sister Barbara of Notre Dame. We have good Christian fellowship. We all need to grow into that—a reforming, a conversion. There's more for me to learn.

If you were going to preach one sermon, what would it be?
We have a triune God of amazing love we will never comprehend, but at the same time we can be exposed to it and can appropriate that love. My continual prayer would be: this day, the people I meet with, may that love, that gentleness, that kindness speak to them.



Surely there are more of us

Fresh ministry for young adults in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

By Susan Fish

"If I'm here, surely there are more of us, and one of us just needs to start it."

With those words in mind, Rachel Reid decided to reach out to all the churches in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) in hopes of starting a young adult network. Her home church—Hamilton Mennonite in Hamilton—doesn't have a lot of other young adults, and she found herself struggling to find a faith community that was affirming when she was a university student, so she decided to start a Bible study and reached out to see who else might be interested.

After connecting with young adults across the province, including some in areas where there is no Mennonite church, Reid proposed a Zoom Bible study. "[Online is] no one's first choice for a small group, but it makes it possible for us to connect." A stable group met on Sunday evenings throughout this past spring, disbanding for the summer while some worked at camps.

Reid says their group, Mennonite Young Adults, is aimed at "students and people in the mid- to late-20s chaos of moving and living in different places, who are maybe distant from our home churches."

Reid says of Mennonite Young Adults, "The goal is to be peaceful and inclusive. I want everyone to feel safe. I love having people disagree—those are some of my favourite conversations—but there's no room for those who make others unsafe. Conversations where people can talk about the Bible and faith, and be open to each others' paths with a spirit of curiosity, are meaningful."

This is important for the future of the

PHOTO: KELLY SIKKEMA/UNSPLASH

church, says Jane Schultz-Janzen, who heads Christian education at Shantz Mennonite in Baden, Ontario, and who took a providential car trip with Reid last winter, during which they discovered their mutual passion for young adult ministry. Schultz-Janzen has a son interested in connecting with other Mennonite young adults for social events but also says her motivation comes from the widespread desire for connection and belonging. "I want people to see that the church is a larger space and to get reacquainted in their love and interest in the church."

But there is also a need for the church to get reacquainted with young adults. Ann L. Schultz, interim executive team leader of MCEC, describes youth engagement as a "vital aspect of the church," and points to MCEC's recent "Youth Engagement in MCEC Churches" as part of MCEC's collective efforts to "discern how best to support youth and young adult ministry, viewing our regional office as a resource and support hub through our leadership and mission offices."

Reid says to churches, "Look back at the gospel and the roots of Mennonite history and see the young people and Jesus' radical calls to action." Reid adds, "You don't need to hold pub nights to draw young people in—though you might have to go out and protest with us—but find activities that are intergenerationally appealing. It's meaningful for young people to talk with older people because we are baby adults."

Reid also notes that sometimes in the essential focus on developing community within the church, outreach gets forgotten. "There's not a decline in faith among young people. They're just not so sure about the church. People of all backgrounds are hungering for community, belonging and especially meaning, because there's a lot that's superficial and frustrating and angering in the world. There's violence and impacts of colonialism and racism. People want justice and peace. They seek community because it's necessary for creating a livable, decolonized future. The more I learned about this, the more I thought, *that's the church*."

To classmates who studied cultural studies at McMaster University and who voice such longings, Reid would say, "You should check out the Mennonites." While these friends express uncertainty about institutional religion, they are interested in exploring Christian faith and the Mennonite church.

So far this is very much a volunteer-led, grassroots initiative. It is also not the only young adult initiative within MCEC.

Among others is Pastors in Exile (PiE), "a progressive and affirming community-based ministry that seeks to empower young adults as they explore and deepen the spiritual meaning of their lives, world, work and activism." Based in Kitchener, Ontario, PiE also works with Silver Lake Mennonite Camp in offering a Winter Camp for Grown-Ups, aimed at those in their 20s and 30s. Steph Chandler-Burns, pastor at PiE, says, "Many who come to PiE also go to church. They come to PiE to find community with people in a similar place who can reflect together how to live out the faith they also care about on Sunday mornings rather than just thinking about it." They add that Winter Camp for Grown-Ups is "a response to the highly anxious times in which we live, offering space to relax for a weekend with others who care deeply about faith and who need a place to care for themselves too."

Mennonite Young Adults is also creating space for young adults through worship nights, social events and weekly Bible study discussions, but Reid says, "My dreams for it are growing."

Reid's excitement is contagious. She has connected with a similar initiative in British Columbia, attending their gathering, and says she would love to hold annual conferences in person. Increasingly, too, Reid says, "It has become clear that this is my calling. It's been undeniable." ●

PHOTOS: (TOP TO BOTTOM) JANE SCHULTZ-JANZEN; CHRIS MONTGOMERY/UNSPLASH; AIMEE REID; SASHMERE/PEXELS; AIMEE REID.

News briefs

The Meeting House closes

The largest Anabaptist church in Canada is closing—and announcing a similar initiative with a new name.

The Meeting House (TMH), a Be In Christ (BIC, formerly Brethren in Christ) church with multiple sites in Ontario, announced closure of "public-facing ministries" on August 29. It opened a new ministry three days later.

The church faces three civil lawsuits and is unable to secure abuse insurance and employment liability coverage.

In December 2021, lead pastor Bruxy Cavey was put on leave after sexual abuse accusations. An independent investigation found he sexually abused a church member, abusing his power. He was forced to resign in March 2022.

The church hired third-party victims' advocate Melody Bissell that month. She received 38 reports of sexual misconduct involving four pastors.

Cavey was arrested in May 2022, with charges dropped this past July after delays violated his right to a timely trial. No determination of guilt or innocence was made. Two other charges were withdrawn in September, with the Crown saying there was "no reasonable prospect of conviction."

Cavey admits to "the sin of adultery" but denies other allegations.

Bissell resigned in 2023, later telling CBC that, while TMH at first showed a strong commitment to victims, eventually reports of misconduct had to go through TMH staff rather than straight to her.

Two TMH youth pastors were convicted of sexual misconduct in 2012 and 2014. Each served jail time.

According to the recent TMH statement, while no churches will operate "under the banner" of TMH, "new missional church communities will be launching in many locations across Ontario as part of a new initiative called the BIC Church Collective."

All locations are former TMH locations and lead clergy are former TMH staff. TMH will collect donations to support the Collective.

– CM Staff

Politics throttle Mennonite church relations with China

MC Canada release

A forty-year thaw in political relations between North America and China is freezing over again, throttling Mennonite church-to-church relationships that have been carefully nurtured.

In 1979, the presidents of Goshen College and the Sichuan Provincial Education Bureau signed their first exchange agreement, heralding a new era of connection between Chinese and North American Mennonites.

Mennonite schools, mission agencies and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) enjoyed academic and religious exchanges for the next forty years. Hundreds of Chinese and North American Mennonites became friends.

The Covid pandemic ended exchanges with North America.

Today, political news in North America routinely portrays China as a nation bent on world domination. The situation in China is similar; North America is blamed for everything that's wrong with the world.

Myrrl Byler, retired director of Mennonite Partners in China (MPC), recently visited China for a month.

Both registered and unregistered churches in China are experiencing increased tensions as officials clamp down on freedom to conduct worship and church activities. Byler's recent visit excluded attendance at church services or formal meetings with pastors. He worried such attention would alert officials and put his Chinese hosts at risk.

Byler said the Chinese public largely accepts the narrative they are given about the world stage, and that the U.S. is behind nearly every event or decision in the world with which it disagrees, whether that's the war between Russia-Ukraine or in the Middle East.

But with a population of 1.4 billion in China, the proportion of citizens who are not content represent a significant minority, said Byler. "The exodus out of China during the past few years is noticeable in other countries," he said.

Chinese people with money buy apartments and land in countries like Thailand and place their children in international schools. "In the past two years more than 100,000 Chinese have crossed into the U.S. illegally and sought political asylum, although the U.S. is now attempting to repatriate some of these persons to China," said Byler.

The exodus among the general population of Christians, including pastors, has been particularly significant, according to Byler. This leaves many Chinese congregations without adequate leadership.

He has heard from pastors about heightened fears of arrest and imprisonment, and pastors being stripped of their positions in church and placed under investigation. The strain of constant surveillance, increased presence and involvement of government officials in churches and seminaries, and concern about families and children takes a heavy toll.

As China increases its global footprint and influence, engagement with Chinese people also represents an opportunity for Mennonites worldwide.

Jeanette Hanson worked in China for many years and, since 2019, has continued to visit as director of Mennonite Church Canada's International Witness program.

"Mennonite pastors and churches in Southeast Asia and parts of Africa are interested in establishing ties to their brothers and sisters in China," said Hanson. Pastors from the Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia share discussions with church leaders from China on common concerns and for opportunities to assist each other economically.

Byler said that North American anger directed at ethnic Chinese immigrants is "an opportunity for our churches to be present, listening, supporting and advocating for those who have chosen to live in North America."

The legacy of First Mennonite Church, Kelowna

By Jake Thiessen

After 77 years, First Mennonite Church of Kelowna, B.C, has sold its building, distributing the proceeds to local, provincial, national and international charities.

The congregation was founded in 1947 and experienced significant growth in its early years due to Mennonite migration from other provinces and as post-war refugees arrived from Europe and the Soviet Union. In 1961, members seeking a less traditional approach to church formed a new church, Kelowna Gospel Fellowship.

By 1980, First Mennonite had outgrown its building and built a larger new sanctuary on the fringe of Kelowna's downtown, largely through volunteer labour. But by the year 2000, attendance had dropped from 200 to 60—mostly mature adults. By the time of the pandemic, attendance had declined to 20.

These members decided to pass the property on to another church. They decided to sell the property and to continue to worship together as a congregation in a rented facility with the help of a local pastoral care volunteer and a virtual pastor.

First Mennonite invited five local churches to submit an offer to purchase. The B.C. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, on behalf of a campus of Willow Park Church in Kelowna, purchased the land, building and contents for $3.7 million, taking possession May 1, 2023.

From the outset, members felt funds from the sale should be distributed to charities, in keeping with the direction of Menno Simons: "The evangelical faith is of such a nature it cannot be dormant, but spreads itself out in all kinds of righteousness and fruits of love—it clothes the naked, it feeds the hungry, it comforts the sorrowful."

Members submitted recommendations, and the final list of 36 charities and amounts was approved by the congregation.

Distribution of the Indigenous Reconciliation funds is pending further research and discussion.

They also note, "The decision to sell the property and the decision about the distribution of funds happened well before Mennonite Church B.C. decided on a new church plant in Kelowna. At the time there was no proposal from MCBC to reinvigorate the existing church."

First Mennonite's leaders say the congregation is pleased that the facility is again being used to its full capacity by a vibrant congregation.

Jake Thiessen is the chair of the Kelowna First Mennonite Legacy Fund Committee. This article was approved by the church's board.

News briefs

Winnipeg students celebrate heritage

To mark 150 years since Mennonites first arrived in Manitoba, as well as the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism, in November, students at Winnipeg Mennonite School's two campuses will explore the Peace Trail, a 55-kilometre path covering points of Mennonite historical significance in Manitoba. A Chortitza Oak sapling will be planted on campus and a Peace Pole will be installed, with additional activities also planned. *Source: WMS*

MDS housewarming

Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) provides quilted wall hangings and prayer shawls to people whose homes have been rebuilt or restored by MDS. The housewarming gifts are a symbol of compassion and coming home, and are presented at home dedications. Those who quilt, crochet or knit are invited to contribute completed pieces. For guidelines, see mds.org/housewarmer-project.

West Bank tour cancelled

A Palestine solidarity tour planned for November has been cancelled due to increased violence and instability in the region. The tour had been planned by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Manitoba, MCC in the Middle East and Mennonite Church Canada. A few people who had signed up for the tour still plan to attend a conference at the Sabeel theology centre, an event that was part of the original tour itinerary. *Source: MCC Manitoba*

Artwork on moosehide by Jessie Jannuska.

Pages of healing

An interview with Indigenous artist Jessie Jannuska

By Katie Doke Sawatzky

Jessie Jannuska's mixed-media comic "The Wolf and the Eagle in the Rain" tells stories of female strength, resiliency and healing through Indigenous spirituality.

The comic was displayed on pieces of unstretched canvas during the art exhibition, *Mending with Tradition* at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg during September and October. The exhibition included Dakota, Ojibway and settler art.

Jannuska, who graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree from Brandon University in 2018, is based in Winnipeg. She teaches workshops in beading, painting, sweetgrass baskets and crankie-making, and has created murals in Winnipeg schools and on the corner of Logan and Main.

During the exhibition, Jannuska offered speaking events for CMU students, something Sarah Hodges-Kolisnyk, director, MHC Gallery, says was important during September with the focus on Reconciliation with Indigenous neighbours. Jannuska also created and gave individualized portraits to select visitors at CMU's *Fall at CMU* market.

Canadian Mennonite asked Jannuska about her art. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

How do you describe this exhibition?
It's my first major solo exhibit in Winnipeg. It's taken two years. I put my heart and soul into it.

The comic features the life stories of

PHOTO: RYLAAN GIMBY.

two women: Debbie Huntinghawk and Julia Stoneman, who are friends of mine. The [book has] a third chapter that's not part of the show for space reasons.

I'm just telling the stories of their lives; I'm not giving my interpretation of it. These women have experienced extreme loss and grief. Also, cancer and addiction. Those things have all touched my life, so it became cathartic work for me.

Artwork from *Mending with Tradition* will be in your first book. What's it like thinking about the different mediums?
This was originally going to be a tiny book, but the women's stories are so powerful, it didn't feel like enough. I had worked with unstretched canvas before. I really like how you can paint on it, draw on it, bead it. But the fragility of the edges—they can come undone if you mishandle them; you have to treat them gently. The shadow it creates on the wall I find very beautiful. Each page is around two by three feet. I can capture such incredible detail. The pages are large, but they fold up.

I will scan the images once the three chapters are done, format them into a proper book and print it. I hope to donate [copies] to Winnipeg schools.

What motivates your work?
My BFA thesis was about the residential school experience on my family. That's really difficult work. It's important but I don't think I can make it anymore. I'll always remember what happened, but I want to make artwork about healing now. That's where I see the trajectory of my art career. Indigenous communities need healing. I want us to remember what's happened and move forward hopefully together.

What has been the reaction to your work at the MHC Gallery?
This healing work has been received so well. Elders, knowledge keepers, the ladies from the comic, people from the Brandon community who have portraits on the artwork—all came to the opening. The gallery and I invited Elder Frank Tacan to perform a naming ceremony for my stretched moosehide painting. I really like how I'm trying to work with community and include it in my contemporary art practice.

So many people of different walks of life are reading the comic and seeing themselves in it. People are appreciative of the healing aspect, Indigenous spirituality and sharing these women's stories.

***Sausage to save the world.** The 55th Annual Mennonite Central Committee Festival for World Relief, held in Abbotsford, B.C., on September 13 – 15 raised $946,000 for global food relief and direct assistance to displaced families in B.C. In addition to food, music, a marketplace and children's area supported by 500 staff and volunteers, the 8,000 attendees enjoyed activities such as The Great Borscht Cook-Off and Mennonite Family Feud.*

PHOTO: DALE KLIPPENSTEIN

Men's ministry considers its future

By Madalene Arias

Mennonite Men says its ministry may soon come to an end.

Don Neufeld, who serves as Canadian coordinator of this bi-national organization, which saw its beginnings in the 1950s when men fundraised for projects like new church builds, wrote a letter to Mennonite Church Canada and the regional churches, questioning the viability of Mennonite Men.

"Our donation base is aging and unfortunately passing away, and new donors are not coming on board. We have been unable to recruit new board members outside Ontario for many years. The interest shown to our displays at conferences has been minimal."

Neufeld, who lives in Virgil, Ontario, asked for suggestions on ways to carry forward and whether MC Canada knew of any potential participants. Neufeld himself joined the board of Mennonite Men in 2013. He then became Canadian coordinator in 2020, a volunteer position that requires him to report back to the board. The only other Canadian board member is Doug Amstutz from Ontario.

Mennonite Men is on more solid footing in the U.S., where they have part-time staff.

Neufeld described for *Canadian Mennonite* the three areas that became the focus of Mennonite Men's ministry: JoinHands offers grants for congregations establishing their own worship spaces; JoinMen became a space to discuss men's spirituality and healthy masculinity; JoinTrees promotes tree planting and caring for creation.

But times are changing.

The demand for new worship spaces looks different now than it did decades prior. As Neufeld discussed with *Canadian Mennonite*, today it's often newcomer churches in urban centres that require help finding worship spaces. But with rising property costs, it's nearly impossible to raise sufficient funds for a new brick-and-mortar establishment.

For example, Mennonite Men gave $54,500 to a Chin church in Calgary in 2020. The congregation was only able to purchase a unit in a strip mall for their worship space.

Ideas of masculinity have also changed in ways that deter people from participating in an organization with a name like Mennonite Men. In his letter to MC Canada, Neufeld wrote:

"In a world in which matters related to gender are dynamic and evolving, and where men's behaviours and mental health continue to stand out as concerning within our society, what if any role might a ministry such as Mennonite Men have in our churches today?"

Twenty-five paddlers travelled 28 kilometres to raise $63,000 for Camp Squeah during the B.C. camp's annual paddle-a-thon in September.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CAMP SQUEAH

In an interview, Neufeld recalled a student at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) who organized a men's reading group in 2019 discussing the book *Peaceful at Heart: Embracing Healthy Masculinity*. When Neufeld reconnected with the student several years later to see whether he had any interest in working with Mennonite Men, the student replied that he and his friends were "beyond gender."

This is disappointing to Neufeld. As a social worker and therapist, he says it is necessary to maintain spaces that support and respond to the needs of those who identify as men.

Neufeld suggests that those who are engaged with social justice in the areas of gender, sexuality and violence in Mennonite Church Canada may feel suspicious of any men's organizations or representation of men's voices.

"That ends up becoming the biggest dilemma," he noted. "It would be presumed that there was some nefarious intent behind organizations that represent men."

To understand more, *Canadian Mennonite* spoke with Hyung Jin Kim Sun (Pablo Kim), who contributed a chapter to *Peaceful at Heart* in which he provided an Asian perspective on experiences of masculinity.

Mennonite Men bi-national board, 2024.

Kim agrees with Neufeld that it is important for people who identify as men to have spaces of support where they can listen to each other, but he also understands why folks might raise concerns about men's groups.

"My perspective is that so far everything has been male-centric," says Kim. "Now you're trying to have a separate male gathering. What's the point?"

Kim says it is easier to come across spaces that promote unhealthy notions of masculinity than those that nurture healthy ones. Such spaces may include online groups or popular mass media.

This is true across cultures. A second-generation Korean-Paraguayan and first-generation Korean North American who has lived in North America for more than a decade, Kim recognizes how South Korea's militaristic society heavily influences notions of masculinity.

Because of the abundance of spaces that promote unhealthy masculinity, Kim believes it is important for an Anabaptist faith-focused group like Mennonite Men to have some kind of continuity.

Whether this will happen or not remains to be seen.

"I am sad, but I'm not horrified," says Neufeld. "This is the reality we as a church are facing."

United Mennonite Church of Black Creek, B.C., celebrated the ordination of its pastor, Dan Forest, on September 8. Forest has been pastor at the church since 2021. Pictured are Gareth Brandt (left), Amy Forest, Dan Forest and Shelby Boese.

PHOTO: (ABOVE) COURTESY OF DON NEUFELD; (BELOW) ANNE BOESE

Where the lake was drained

Indigenous historian leads tour of Stó:lō land

By Amy Rinner Waddell

Indigenous historian Sonny McHalsie explains the traditional importance of Big Rock in Aldergrove Provincial Park.

A bus tour around B.C.'s Lower Mainland on Sept. 21 gave 49 participants a chance to hear Stó:lō historian Sonny McHalsie relate local Indigenous lore. The tour highlighted the significance of the traditional land of the Stó:lō people, the Semá:th and Máthxwi First Nations, who lived on the land bounded by Vedder Mountain, the Vedder River, the Sumas River and the Nooksack River in Washington State. Joint hosts, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) B.C. and Mennonite Church B.C., chose the late September date in connection with the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

The first stop on the bus tour was Big Rock in Aldergrove Provincial Park. The boulder was deposited by retreating glaciers some 12,000 years ago. McHalsie, a cultural advisor and historian at the Stó:lō Nation's Research and Resource Management Centre in Chilliwack, recounted the importance of the rock to the area's Indigenous peoples, as passed down through oral history.

The group stopped next at a monument south of Abbotsford that tells the history of the Sumas Prairie from the early 20th century. Sad and sobering stories related here included the case of Louis Sam, a 15-year-old accused of murder who was lynched without trial; and the trade route that brought a smallpox influx, taking the lives of many Indigenous people.

In the 1920s, despite objections raised by the Indigenous inhabitants, Sumas Lake between Abbotsford and Chilliwack was drained to curtail flooding in the area and to reclaim 10,000 acres of new farmland—an action from which many Mennonite settlers benefited. As McHalsie noted, however, the First Peoples of the area lost a significant resource as a result.

The final stop was at Yarrow, a village where many Mennonites settled and farmed after the Sumas Lake drainage. As the bus traveled back to Abbotsford, McHalsie pointed out where the 134-square-kilometre lake had once been. Time did not allow a stop at the Barrowtown pump station that prevents excess water from entering the Sumas Prairie.

Bridget Findlay, of the MCC B.C. Indigenous Neighbours program, said participants gave much positive feedback. She believes events such as this tour are important for learning about Indigenous culture, particularly the local Stó:lō people's beliefs and oral traditions. "It is important to be respectful and develop relationships, to respect each other's views and beliefs," she said. "Indigenous people believe the land is sacred and I think people are interested in that."

Those on the bus tour agreed. Sharon Pratt of Richmond, B.C., said the tour guide "was extremely knowledgeable, passionate, an amazing storyteller with the voice to match it. Overall, getting that alternate narrative of Indigenous history is really a must for everyone, as it sets the scene for truth and reconciliation to happen in a meaningful and intentional way."

PHOTO: AMY RINNER WADDELL

News briefs

Dream garden feeds campers at Camp Valaqua

Ingrid Janssen dreamed of a garden at Camp Valaqua, where she was a Camp Manager until her death in 2015. Now Ing's Garden has been established in her memory. The rocky ground was amended with compost and manure to become fertile soil while an old cabin was repurposed to become a garden shed and chicken coop. Rain barrels and a greenhouse were added. This year, the garden provided a food source for camps as well as a place of community, peace and education for campers and staff.

Source: Camp Valaqua

PHOTO: RUTH BERGEN BRAUN

WE'RE HIRING!

Eastern Canada Correspondent
Part-time, remote

Social Media Curator
Part-time, remote

Canadian Mennonite
APPLY BY NOV. 15
canadianmennonite.org/employment

Are you our next Publisher?

Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service (CMPS), which publishes this magazine, is searching for its next Publisher to work in collaboration with staff and publishing partners to "educate, inspire, inform and foster dialogue on issues facing Mennonites in Canada, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ from an Anabaptist perspective."

As the organizational leader, accountable to the Board, the Publisher has overall responsibility for print and digital publishing activities, fundraising, staff supervision and operations, while providing a vision and strategy for how CMPS contributes to the church as a source of information, inspiration and interconnectedness.

For more on what a successful candidate might bring to the role and its responsibilities, visit: **canadianmennonite.org/employment**.

Submit cover letter and resume to Kathryn Lymburner, Board Chair: board@canadianmennonite.org by November 15, 2024.

Canadian Mennonite

Speakers

- **Monday:** **John D. Roth**, PhD, Project Director, "Anabaptism at 500"; General Editor, *Anabaptist Community Bible*, MennoMedia
- **Tuesday:** **Kelbessa Muleta Demena**, MDiv, Vice President of Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia
- **Wednesday:** **Lesley Francisco McClendon**, DMin, Senior Pastor of C3 Hampton, a Mennonite Church USA congregation in Hampton, Virginia
- **Thursday:** panel discussion and Q&A with all three speakers

Held at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.
Join us in person or online! Learn more: **ambs.ca/pastors-and-leaders**

Plus! Leadership Clinics Monday, Feb. 17

As we celebrate 500 years of Anabaptism, join us to examine how the values of the early Anabaptists still resonate today and can guide us into the future!

Gain intercultural perspectives on how reading the Bible in community can help us connect more authentically in our present and future contexts.

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

International

British Columbia

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

Alberta

Nov. 2: Come Together, faith in action celebration in support of MCA ministries. Calgary, 7 p.m. at Calgary Chin Christian Church.

Saskatchewan

Nov. 11-15: Registration for "Healing Haunted Histories: Decolonizing Discipleship" with Elaine Enns & Ched Meyers. Presented by CMU and MC Sask, at MCC Centre, Saskatoon. Details at **mcsask.ca**

Manitoba

Oct. 30: Meet guest Chinese pastors, 11 a.m. coffee at Mennonite Church Manitoba offices.
Oct. 31: Meet guest Chinese pastors, 10 a.m. Bible study, Douglas Mennonite Church, 7 p.m. worship and sharing, Vietnamese Mennonite Church.
Nov. 1: Meet guest Chinese pastors, 9:30 a.m. breakfast at Covenant Mennonite Church, register at **mennochurch.mb.ca**
Nov. 2: Meet guest Chinese pastors, morning at Whitewater Mennonite Church.
Nov. 2: 75 Years of Song: Camps with Meaning celebration banquet, Emmanuel Mennonite Church, 5:30 p.m., Winkler. Register at **campswithmeaning.org/news-events**
Nov. 3: 75 Years of Song: Camps with Meaning celebration banquet, Douglas Mennonite Church, 5:30 p.m., Winnipeg. Register at **campswithmeaning.org/news-events**
Nov. 7: Common Word Book Launch for *The Secret Treaty*, Marpeck Commons, Canadian Mennonite University.

Ontario

Nov. 2: Challenge for the Church: Antisemitism workshop, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Waterloo North Mennonite Church.
Nov. 2: Menno Singers Concert: Love, Loss and Eternity, 7:30 p.m., Trillium Lutheran Church, Waterloo.
Nov. 3: St. Agatha Mennonite Church's 200th anniversary. 10 a.m. worship service, potluck to follow, hymn-sing.
Nov. 7: Discover Rockway: Information night for grades 7-12; 7 p.m., Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener.
Nov. 9: Hearts of Freedom, stories of Southeast Asian Refugees, 7 p.m., Brock University, St. Catharines. More at **mcc.org/events**
Nov. 14: Benjamin Eby Lecture Series, "Reading socio-political experiences through graffiti and street art in conflict-affected societies," by Eric Lepp, Peace and Conflict Studies. 7:30-9 p.m. Great Hall, Conrad Grebel University, Waterloo.
Nov. 17: Menno Singers Messiah Sing-Along, 3 p.m., St Matthews Lutheran Church, Kitchener.
Nov. 27: MCEC Financial Zoom Fall Call, 7-8 p.m. Register at **mcec.ca**
Nov. 29-30: Church at Nairn (formerly Nairn Mennonite) annual Spirit of Christmas, Ailsa Craig (29) 6:30-9 p.m.; (30) 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Live music, crafts, tearoom. More info: 519-232-4425
Nov. 29-30: Men Listening, Men Talking retreat November 29-30, at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg.

Online

Nov. 15: Mennonite World Conference international hour of prayer, 14:00 UTC. Register at **mwc-cmm.org/en**

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

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.

Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
January 2025	December 4
February	January 8

Advertising Information

Contact us at 1-800-378-2524 ext. 3
advert@canadianmennonite.org

After the bubble shatters

by Annika Krause

I felt delight in growing up in the church. Not only did I attend Sunday school and children's church, but I went to Christian elementary and secondary school. I felt most safe in the Christian bubble around me. As I grew up, I was very active in my church and volunteered in several different capacities, including with children and teens in my congregation and community. It was this church family that inspired and encouraged me to consider becoming a pastor. In many ways I was nurtured and mentored for the role I'm in now. I was deeply in love with my spiritual family and the broader Mennonite Church.

In my late teens, I became an affirming Christian. I never hid that perspective. In fact, I regularly talked about it with the more traditionally-minded pastors of my church. I believed we were disagreeing well and that we all respected the worth of every individual as equally made in the image of God, all offering valuable contributions to the community.

Then in 2016, the *Being a Faithful Church* process, the intentional discernment period around same-sex marriage, concluded with permission for churches that chose to perform same-sex marriages to do so without consequences.

Fear took over my church. People stopped seeing the image of God in each other. We no longer gave each other the benefit of the doubt and stopped trying to understand where people were coming from. Part of what happened was that the leadership tried to get church members to pass and sign a lifestyle document that included a prohibition on behaviours that affirm same-sex romantic relationships. This endeavour ultimately failed but caused a lot of in-fighting.

Still, after ten years of volunteering, I was removed from being a youth

PHOTO: MICHAEL DESCHARLES/UNSPLASH

leader, considered a bad influence. (This happened despite my individual conversations with all the teens' parents who said they were happy for me to continue mentoring their kids.) I felt the leadership was telling me I wasn't a good enough Christian to participate my community. I eventually left, jaded, bitter and angry.

This stunted my spiritual growth for quite a while. I stopped being able to pray on my own. It's not that I didn't believe that the Holy Spirit was with me. I truly did. She was my main support as my bubble—shown to be made out of glass—shattered in shards that cut me deep as my faith in church was razed to the ground.

I didn't have words for what I was feeling, nor could I think of anything else. I turned to the psalms and John Donne's holy sonnets. I copied them out in my journal and took comfort in the wisdom of people who had come before God in times of major conflict and strife, and who had found comfort and assurance that they were fully loved. I felt God's presence in the words of others when my heart felt like a giant black hole.

My grief and my new inability to trust church folks prevented me, a recent seminary graduate, from attending church for about a year. While I still trusted in God, I couldn't walk into a church building without bursting into tears. I knew that I wanted to return eventually—and even that I was called to serve in the church—but it felt too painful to sing familiar songs and hear certain passages read out loud. Church didn't feel like a safe space for a long time, even once I started attending regularly again. Sometimes it still doesn't. Even now, church can bring up old feelings of fear and profound loss.

Still, despite everything that had happened, I felt a strong sense of call and the urging of the Spirit to move forward. But it took a lot of time, meditation, and work on myself to get to a place where I felt spiritually healthy enough to seek out a pastorate. The healing journey isn't over, either, even though I've been pastoring for a few years and on the other side of the country from where I grew up.

However, being grafted into the church where I serve—Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal (MFM)—has given me new life and has opened my mind, heart and spirit to new ways of seeing and experiencing God. Not that we always get it right, but I have the privilege of pastoring a community that values curiosity over fear. At MFM, more often than not, people with differing theologies disagree well with each other because they see the value in diversity of opinions and beliefs within a community. (Let me say they were that way before I got there. In fact, sometimes I think they have impacted me and helped bandage some of my church hurts more than I have impacted them.) Seeing church folks disagreeing well has helped me to practice being vulnerable in community again.

In my role as a pastor, I have been able to explore new and creative ways of doing church and worshipping God. And my congregation, full of fellow creatives, has encouraged me through sharing their many gifts in community. For me, somatic practices (practices that bring together mind, body, and spirit) have been a big part of how I've connected with the Divine; I have been sharing some of that with my congregation as well. Together, and with all of our accumulated baggage, we are on a journey to seek what it means to live in the footsteps of the one called Love.

Annika Krause is the pastor of Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal. She serves on the board for Canadian Mennonite.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

CANADIAN MENNONITE

canadianmennonite.org

Publisher: Tobi Thiessen
Editor: Will Braun
Associate Editor: Susan Fish
Editorial Assistant: A. S. Compton
Design: Anne Boese
Social Media: Madalene Arias
Advertising: Ben Thiessen
Circulation: Lorna Aberdein
Finance: Audrey Montag

Regional correspondents
B.C.: Amy Rinner Waddell
Prairies: Katie Doke Sawatzky
Eastern Canada: Madalene Arias

Published by Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service. Mennonite Church Canada and regional churches appoint directors and provide about one-third of *Canadian Mennonite's* budget.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Chair: Kathryn Lymburner, board@canadianmennonite.org
Vice-chair: Karen Heese
Secretary: Donna Schulz
Treasurer: Aaron Penner
Other members: Mary Barg, Annika Krause, Tim Miller Dyck, Brenda Suderman, Alex Tiessen, Andrew Stoesz

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

CONTACT US
202-50 Kent Avenue
Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1
Phone: 519-884-3810
Toll-free: 1-800-378-2524

General submissions: submit@canadianmennonite.org
Letters: letters@canadianmennonite.org
Calendar items: calendar@canadianmennonite.org
Milestones: milestones@canadianmennonite.org
Change of address or any other inquiries: office@canadianmennonite.org

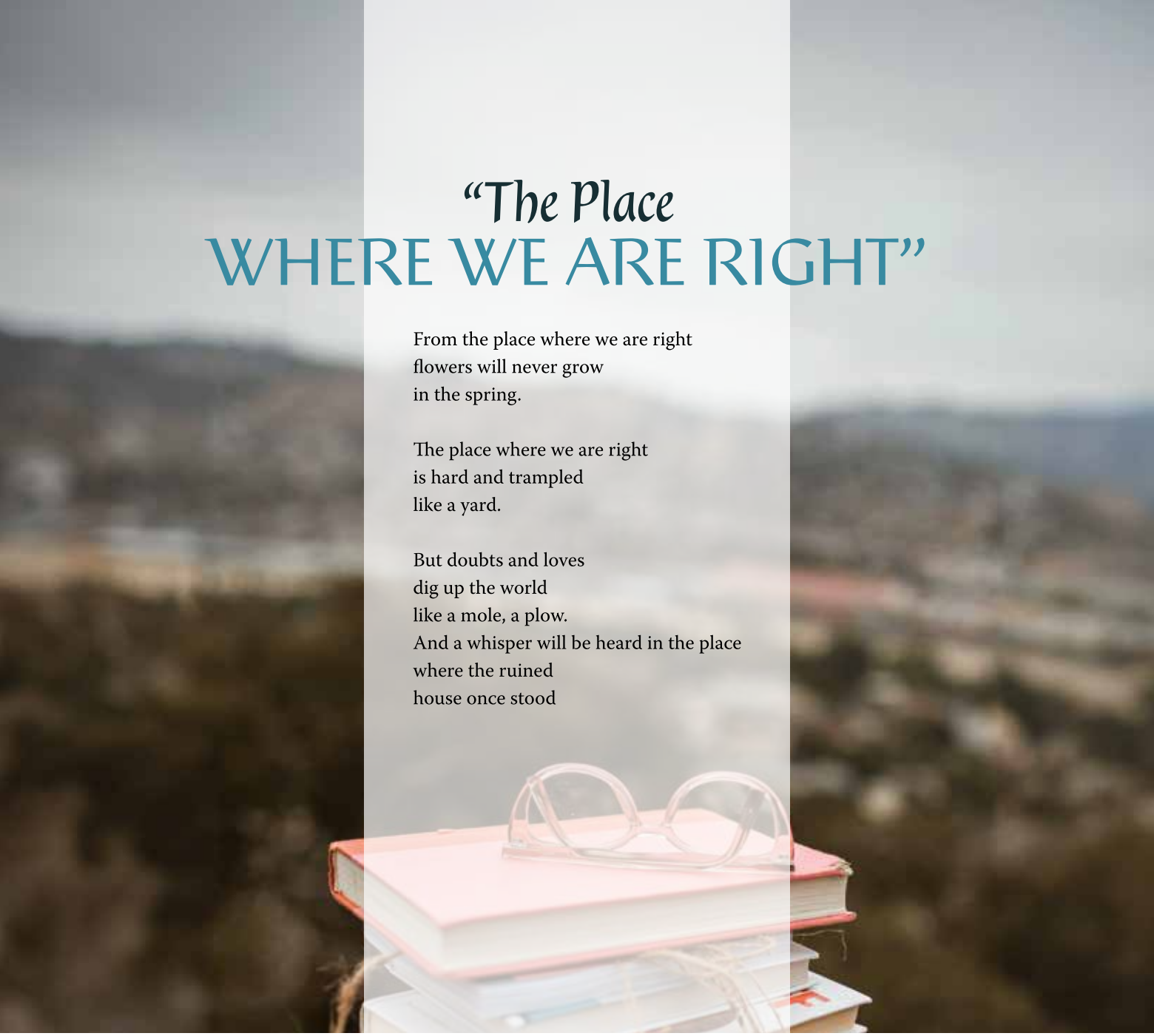
One-year subscriptions, Canada: $49+tax
U.S.: $65/International: $80

CANADA POST
Publications mail agreement no. 40063104
Registration no. 09613
Return undeliverable items to the address above.
Printed in Canada with soy ink.

AWARD-WINNING MEMBER
CMCA AUDITED
CANADIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATORS

Funded by the Government of Canada | Canada

ISSN 1480-042X



"The Place WHERE WE ARE RIGHT"

From the place where we are right
flowers will never grow
in the spring.

The place where we are right
is hard and trampled
like a yard.

But doubts and loves
dig up the world
like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
where the ruined
house once stood

"The Place Where We Are Right" from *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* by Yehuda Amichai, translated by Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell. Copyright 2013. Reprinted by permission of University of California Press.

PHOTO: RDNE/PEXELS.

VOLUME 28 ISSUE 13

CANADIAN MENNONITE

202-50 Kent Avenue
Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1

Phone: 519-884-3810
Toll-free: 1-800-378-2524
canadianmennonite.org

PM40063104 R09613