

ANABAPTIST LEADERSHIP 10 | BLUE CHRISTMAS 22 | RUINING DINNER 27

CANADIAN MENNONITE

DECEMBER 2024

○ HOLY NIGHT

WAITING IN DARKNESS

ADVENT: FEAR NOT

The ordinary dark

WILL BRAUN



Dawn comes slowly.

There is no rush in it.

Often—not always—the hour is still and quiet when the dark so

gradually abates in the east. The dawn comes slowly. As it must. We can but wait.

I have not always been an earlier riser, but since Cinnamon the milk cow moved into the barn on our micro-farm in July, I have usually been out the door before dawn. It's a gift, though one that requires an investment.

As I write—the cow milked and the chickens, which stir and murmur at the hint of new day, fed—dawn turns dullish orange. The gradual becoming. An ordinary day. No particular glory, but still the gift of a new day.

Dawn is a gift, as is dusk, as are spring, summer, fall and the dark,

'Let it be done ...'

fallow winter. As are infancy, youth, midlife crises and old age.

I'm a great believer in seasons and cycles. Though it has much more to do with acceptance than belief. Seasons, as with the turn of night to day and youth to old age, exist whether anyone believes in them or not. It is only ours to accept. Which is to surrender. Not all of life is light or day or the freshness

of spring. So it must be.

Sometimes the hour is one of waiting. The wait can be aggravating—the deep irritation of lack of control—or, perhaps, it can be liberating. Can there not be freedom in the surrender?

The writer of Lamentations said, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."

In Advent, Mary waits. As she must. There can be no rush in it. She ponders slowly. She needs her rest—the rest of the becoming within.

The daybreak from on high will visit her, as Zechariah said, but not yet. Dawn comes slowly. In the great, pregnant meantime, Mary says to God, "*Let it be done to me according to your will.*"

A word about getting the word out. We invite you to think about people you know who might not get *Canadian Mennonite* but who might benefit from it. Encourage them to subscribe. We don't spend big bucks on advertising our magazine; we rely largely on the community.

Here's how subscriptions work. Everyone in a Mennonite Church Canada congregation is entitled to a subscription at a cost paid collectively through the church. All they need to do is inquire with the *CM* contact person in their church—usually the church administrator or pastor—or email Lorna at office@canadianmennonite.org.

We deliver the magazine electronically, in print, or both. Same price.

People who are not part of an MC Canada congregation are also welcome to subscribe. The cost is \$49 per year.

A magazine is one way to nurture a sense of broader belonging; let's make that circle as wide as possible.

For those wondering about the financial nitty-gritty, we send a bill to each regional church annually for a portion of the cost of the subscriptions in their region. It works out to about \$31 per subscription. Some regional churches pay it out of general revenue while others ask congregations for a contribution based on the number of subscribers in their church.

Four more logistical notes from *CM* HQ.

1. We have a new HQ. We moved our headquarters from Waterloo, Ontario, to 50 Kent in neighbouring Kitchener. Because most staff now work remotely, we need much less space. The move also brings us under the same roof as other Mennonite organizations.

2. We print a magazine monthly and send out a short, newsy email with three links every Friday. To sign up for "*CM Weekly*," contact Lorna by email at office@canadianmennonite.org.

3. We've revamped our website: canadianmennonite.org.

4. We welcome Betlehem Yimer as our advertising representative. Betlehem lives in Kitchener and attends Bethel Ethiopian Evangelical Church, a Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) congregation. She replaces Ben Thiessen who took a position with MCEC. Welcome aboard Betlehem! ●

- 4 WHAT IN THE WORLD
- 6 READERS WRITE
- 7 MILESTONES
- 8 NEWS BRIEFS

Columns

9 FROM OUR LEADERS
Awakening to the Church's true vocation
BY MELANIE NEUFELD

10 DEEPER COMMUNION
The challenge of Anabaptist leadership
BY JUSTIN SUN

Feature Section

12 O Holy Night: Waiting in darkness

News & People

25 Ethiopian 'Joseph' takes risks to serve
BY BIZUAYEHU ABERA

26 Pastors embrace Narrative Lectionary
BY KATIE DOKE SAWATZKY

27 Ruining dinner
BY KATIE DOKE SAWATZKY

28 Hawkesville sells property, donates money
BY SUSAN FISH

30 LIFE IN THE 80s
Interview with Mabel & Walter Paetkeu
BY AMY RINNER WADDELL

31 MCEC reviews 67 church annual reports
BY MADALENE ARIAS

32 Chinese pastors tour Canada
BY A. S. COMPTON

33 Investment in youth summit pays off
MWC RELEASE

34 Rockway solar project generates imperfect hope
BY A. S. COMPTON

35 Tours visit Mennonite reserves
BY MIKE THIESSEN

37 CALENDAR & CLASSIFIEDS

38 FAITH STORY
With God, all things are truly possible
BY DANIEL TEFATSION



15 The world's most low-key Advent group
When churches were deep in pandemic darkness, one small group decided to meet through Advent—finding hope.
Photo: Dana Davis/Pexels



16 Waiting in the uterverse
Like Mary during her pregnancy, Madalene Arias learns “when you try to balance hope with the possibility of despair, you are forced to surrender what you can no longer carry.”
Photo: Daiga Ellaby/Unsplash



27 Ruining dinner
Members of Hope Mennonite Church learn to have healthy conversations in contentious situations.
Photo: Chuttersnap/Unsplash

About the cover Image: Anne Boese
See masthead on page 39.



What in the world



King of the ring

A new film brings together the Gospel, mixed martial arts and a bit of Mötley Crüe in hopes of appealing to churchgoing sports fans. “The Carpenter,” which tells the story of a first-century fighter who is an apprentice in Jesus’s carpentry shop, opened in 1,000 theatres in November. *Source: RNS*
Credit: carpentermovie.com



Christian trade show

Among the exhibits at the 2024 Christian Resources Exhibition in Milton Keynes, England, were a big biblical Lego set-up, “faith on your feet” socks, “JC/DC” T-shirts, religious karaoke players, OneWayUK puppets, eco-friendly heated cushions and more. *Source: BCC, CRE FB*
Credit: Mission Housing



Pope cuts Vatican wages

Cardinals working at the Vatican will be making about \$750 less annually after Pope Francis cut their wages to approximately \$90,000. In total, the Vatican spends approximately \$15 million monthly to pay its 4,000 employees. *Source: RNS*
Credit: Andreas Tille, unaltered, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_Commons

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, DECEMBER 23, 1974

Two plaques mark site of first village

Kleefeld, Man.—Two plaques honoring the arrival of the first Mennonite settlers to Manitoba were unveiled here November 23 with several speakers and special guests in attendance.

E.S. Russenholt, representing the Historic Sites Advisory Board of Manitoba, praised Mennonites for their leadership in agriculture and community development and said that

the greatest challenge is now to provide food for a starving world.

P.J.B. Reimer of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society spoke of hardships suffered in the past and expressed the fear that the young are becoming materialistic.



Spying from the pulpit

A new documentary tells the story of how Berlin Mennonite Church hired a pastor who was, in fact, a spy for East German and Soviet authorities. He worked with the church from 1980 to 1990. The German film, which has English subtitles, is available through tweeback.com/katalog/gemeinde-unter-beobachtung. *Source: AW*
Credit: Noir, unaltered, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_Commons



Holy mascot girl

The Vatican unveiled an anime-style mascot for the Catholic Year of Jubilee in 2025. “Luce,” which means light in Italian, is a girl prepared for pilgrimage through the storms of life. Archbishop Fisichella said the church wants to engage “the pop culture so beloved by our young people.” *Source: Forbes, CNA*
Credit: Simone Legno/tokidoki/Vatican Media



Magical religious buzz

A Quebec religion known in English as Gratitude Sanctuary is seeking an exemption from laws that control the use of hallucinogenic mushrooms. The group says its members cannot practice their religion without the mushrooms. *Source: CTV*
Credit: Alan Rockefeller/cropped/en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_Commons

“Reconciliation has no ending. It’s not a state of arrival.... It’s a constant, everyday battle.”

– Murray Sinclair, addressing members of Mennonite Church Canada in 2014. Sinclair died on November 4.



A moment from yesterday

Starting out as farmers in Manitoba in the mid 1870s was difficult for Mennonites. In this photo, a man demonstrates broadcast seeding by hand, which was the method used in the first years. It was only into the 1880s that Mennonites could purchase horses and seeders used to plant straight rows.

Text: Conrad Stoesz

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Archives



archives.mhsc.ca

✉ A sprinkling of change

As I read the “Exit Interviews” issue of *CM* (September 2024), I thought of the words of Jessica Herlein in a *Rejoice* devotional from October 30, 2021: “All our systems for righting wrongs and making amends pale in comparison to God’s overtures of mercy and restoration.”

Born and raised Mennonite, I was baptized by sprinkling in my early 20s. Several years later, I was engaged to a member of a Mennonite Brethren (MB) church who worked in Congo on a Bible translation project, supported by the MB Mission Board. We decided to return to Congo to continue the translation work.

Our marriage counsellor, an MB pastor, raised the question of rebaptism, since the MB conference’s mode of baptism was immersion. At that time, after struggling with the issue for about 20 years, the MB conference had decided to let individual churches decide whether to accept non-immersed people into membership. My husband’s church agreed to accept me without rebaptism.

About 20 years later, when our family returned from Congo, rebaptism was no longer an issue. Instead, the question of ordination of women pastors was the concern in the MB conference. We formed a women’s networking group that lobbied for the change.

Fast-forward another 20 years and this is no longer an issue. Inclusion of LGBTQ people is now the struggle.

I predict it will be another 20 years before that changes. In that case, I will no longer be here to see it happen.

When we retired and moved to Winnipeg, my husband and I joined Jubilee Mennonite Church, in part because it was a member of both conferences. Sadly, that is no longer the case, as we were voted out of fellowship by the MB conference in March 2023.

Through our overseas experience, my husband, Hardy, and I learned so much about what it means to immerse oneself in a different culture, to envision God through the lens of that culture, to accept the “other” as part of God’s creation, loved and valued for who they are and what we can learn from them. This influenced our decision to be part of a congregation that accepts LGBTQ people.

– ELFRIEDA NEUFELD SCHROEDER, WINNIPEG
(JUBILEE MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ HR Obfuscation

Having worked for nearly 40 years in some of the largest corporate organizations in the world, moving from junior to senior positions, I found the stories about human resources (HR) I have been reading in *Canadian Mennonite* brought back unsettling memories of how

corporate HR has dealt with similar issues.

I do not want to comment on the cases directly but thought it might be helpful to offer my perspective on the general principles. I would like to highlight a few observations.

Observation 1: Since when did a charitable organization like Mennonite Central Committee turn into a corporate structure? The infiltration of HR-speak into the discourse of the church is unsettling. Obfuscation is the primary tool of HR organizations and is usually justified by citing the protection of individual rights. I don’t buy it.

It’s a tool to cover up what one really means but is afraid to say in clear English (or French or whatever other language).

Observation 2: In my experience, HR never makes the rules. These are set by upper management. Look to the top of the organizational structure for the source of directions. I am not absolving HR of any responsibility in how they handled the individual cases, but upper management is always behind HR actions.

Observation 3: In the corporate world, upper management policy is directed by the board of directors and ultimately the shareholders. In this case, the Mennonite churches are the shareholders. If they feel change is needed, they should say so and not leave the poor individuals to deal with this alone.

It is up to everyone to make their opinions known.

– NORMAN HUEBERT, SASKATOON
(WILDWOOD MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ A recipe for trouble

As someone who has worked for several different Mennonite organizations, I was interested in the recent articles on conflict in Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and other Mennonite organizations (“MCC executive directors respond to concerns of former workers,” August 2024)

At first blush, it seems impossible that such dedicated, idealistic, and profoundly well-meaning people as one finds in MCC and other organizations could ever end up in bitter conflicts with one another. However, that very idealism often means that people will feel so strongly about the work they do that they become absolutist on important issues, and even on quite minor issues that seem to align with core beliefs. Combine the tendency to take strong positions with the sort of Mennonite honesty (read: bluntness) that compels people to tell others exactly what they think of their opinions or their actions, and you have a recipe for trouble. Especially when the recipient of the criticism is expected to swallow it whole because, after all, it comes from the heart.

The challenge is to find a respectful way to separate the conflict from the person, and work together toward a solution.

– PAUL REDEKOP, WINNIPEG
(FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ Prescribing poetry

In her interview with Pádraig Ó Tuama (“Looking for words that matter,” November 2024) Susan Fish asks if there is a poem Ó Tuama would prescribe to help us reframe our differences with respect to LGBTQ differences. He answers, “Not in general.”

Neither do I know of such a poem, though I suspect such poems must exist. But I am a collector of poems, and the question brought to mind two poems by Sam Walter Foss, whose poem *The House by the Side of the Road* could be familiar to some older readers. These poems—*Odium Theologicum* and *The Prayer of Cyrus Brown*—speak about religious divisions. *Odium Theologicum* ends with these words:

They lashed each other with words that stung,
That smote as with a rod;
Each glared in the face of his fellow man,
And angrily talked of God.

Then each man parted and went his way,
As their different courses ran;
And each man journeyed with wrath in his heart,
And hating his fellow man.

LGBTQ issues would not have been a topic in Sam’s day, but I think these poems were an attempt to highlight the foolishness of the artificial religious differences that existed at the time and may find application for us today.

– ERIC UNGER, WINNIPEG

CM Milestones

Baptisms

Nathan Girma—Bethel Ethiopian Evangelical Church, Kitchener, Ont., Oct. 13, 2024.

Juan (Jen) Li—Wideman Mennonite Church, Markham, Ont., Oct. 20, 2024.

Pasquale Zambri—Wideman Mennonite Church, Markham, Ont., Oct. 20, 2024.

Weddings

Gerber/Strathdee—Josh Gerber (Poole Mennonite) & Erin Strathdee, Aug. 10, 2024, Brunner, Ont.

Green/Warkentin—Aaron Green & Jaye Warkentin, North Star Mennonite Church, Drake, Oct. 4, 2024, Saskatoon, Sask.

McLaren/Van Den Tempel—Kylie McLaren & Ben Van Den Tempel (Poole Mennonite), Oct. 4, 2024, Stratford, Ont.

Deaths

Bergen—Virgil, 82 (b. Feb. 21, 1942; d. Oct. 15, 2024), Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, Alta.

Braun—Anne (Martens), 92 (b. April 21, 1932; d. Oct. 29, 2024), Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Brubacher—Raymond Laverne, 78 (b. July 20, 1946; d. Aug. 23, 2024), Erb Street Mennonite Church, Waterloo, Ont.

Buehler—Zenas, 85 (b. Jan. 14, 1939; d. Oct. 5, 2024), Floradale Mennonite Church, Floradale, Ont.

Driediger—Frieda, 86 (b. Aug. 10, 1937; d. April 21, 2024), First Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask.

Dyck—Johanna (nee Peters), 100 (b. Dec 25, 1923; d. Oct. 5, 2024), Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

Froese—Guenter, 91 (b. June 25, 1933; d. Sept. 12, 2024), Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

Gerbrandt—Susan (Heinrichs), 105 (b. Sept. 13, 1919; d. Oct. 13, 2024), Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Koop—Elizabeth (Betty) (nee Hildebrand), 70 (b. Dec. 2, 1953; d. Oct. 17, 2024), Grace Mennonite Church, Steinbach, Man.

Martens—Ruth Anna (nee Rempel), 90 (b. April 9, 1934; d. Aug. 7, 2024), First Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask.

Neufeld—Linda, 83 (b. Nov. 6, 1940; d. Sept. 16, 2024), Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Penner—Menno, 90 (b. Aug. 12, 1933; d. July 28, 2024), First Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask.

Roth—Carolyn, 87 (b. March 12, 1937; d. Oct. 3, 2024), Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont.

Scott—Kenneth Norman, 81 (b. Feb. 20, 1942; d. Oct. 23, 2023), First Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask.

Siemens—Erika (nee Allgeier), 89 (b. July 27, 1935; d. Oct. 8, 2024), Niagara United Mennonite Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Tiessen—Edith (nee Isaak), 89 (b. June 19, 1935; d. Sept. 7, 2024), Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

Toews—Arthur, 89 (b. March 23, 1935; d. Sept. 26, 2024), First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Be in Touch

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

Agape supports street ministry

Agape Fellowship, which closed in July after nearly 50 years in London, Ontario, have given a portion of their final assets to Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. The contribution will support an outreach worker who will work with street-involved people in Hamilton through The Meeting Place, a provisional congregation of MCEC. *Source: MCEC*

CPT staffer arrested

Rachelle Friesen, Canada coordinator for Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT), was arrested by Toronto police at Pearson International Airport on September 30. She faces two counts of mischief and one count of disguise with intent related to events in Toronto in November 2023 and March 2024. Friesen was protesting arms manufacturers linked to Israel.

Police had searched Friesen's home in May, confiscating clothing, earrings, a keffiyeh and political banners.

In a statement, CPT said, "Friesen's arrest comes at a time of an increasingly concerning global trend of state criminalization and crackdowns by law enforcement of people standing in solidarity with Palestinian liberation." *Sources: CPT, Toronto Police Service*

Doug Klassen's term extended

Mennonite Church Canada's Joint Council has extended Doug Klassen's employment as executive minister to "an open-ended term." Klassen's work includes relationship-building inside and outside MC Canada, resource generation and preparing for national gatherings. Bruce Baergen, assistant moderator for MC Canada, notes Klassen's "unbounded energy, commitment and vision for the future of MC Canada and the entire church." Klassen started in this role in June 2019. *Source: MC Canada*

MCM holding focus groups

As part of its "Hope and Courage" visioning process, Mennonite Church Manitoba is inviting MCM congregants to be part of focus groups (between now and May 2025) or to complete an online survey starting in January. The process, expected to culminate at the 2026 MCM gathering, may lead to a new vision statement and/or strategic plan. See mennochurch.mb.ca/hopeandcourage. *Source: MCM*

Clergy policy approved

Mennonite Church Canada approved a new clergy conduct policy at Joint Council meetings in October. Guiding Ministerial Leadership in Mennonite Church Canada (GMLC) replaces the previous policy, which had been in place since 2016. The new policy will consolidate documents by bringing the code of conduct alongside procedural protocols. The new GMLC takes effect immediately. Copies will be sent to all credentialed leaders in MC Canada and can be downloaded at commonword.ca/go/gmlc. *Source: MC Canada*

Global Bible read-a-thon

The Global Anabaptist Bible Read-a-Thon will feature 500 or more voices reading the entire Bible in multiple languages. Individuals or groups can register at mennomedia.org/register-now/. Participants must submit readings by December 15. The recording will be available at AnabaptismAt500.org by January 18. The project is sponsored by MennoMedia and Mennonite World Conference. *Source: Menno Media*

Rudy Wiebe receives award

Novelist Rudy Wiebe received the 2024 Arnold Dyck Prize for Lifetime Achievement from Plautdietsche Freunde (Low German Friends). The prize, named for a Canadian Low German writer, recognizes people who have contributed to Plautdietsch culture. Plautdietsche Freunde represents Low German speakers in Germany, Canada and Paraguay. *Source: Anabaptist World*

Staff transition



Mennonite Church Eastern Canada has announced that Anthony Siegrist will serve as the new executive minister,

starting February 1, 2025.

Siegrist will leave his position as Ontario director of A Rocha, a faith-based creation care organization, to join MCEC. Prior to working with A Rocha, he served as lead minister at Ottawa Mennonite Church and on the MCEC Executive Council.

Earlier in his career, Siegrist worked as professor of theology at Prairie College in Three Hills, Alberta, and was an environmental educator and wilderness guide. He is the author of *Speaking of God*, and has published on theology, creation care and residential schools.

Siegrist holds degrees from Prairie College, Eastern Mennonite University, Wycliffe College/University of Toronto and the University of Ottawa.

Looking to the new role, he said in an MCEC release, "The possibilities involved in exploring new ways of embodying our Anabaptist vision is exciting, and my hope is that MCEC becomes known as a network of churches that both treasures its past and creates space for new, holy experiments in following Jesus."

Siegrist will replace Ann L. Schultz, who has served as intentional interim executive team leader since January 2023.

MCEC is made up of 108 congregations in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick.

AMBS marks fifth year of growth

Enrollment at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, is the highest it has been since 2009. Of the 190 current students, 149 are graduate students and 41 are in the nondegree Journey Missional Leadership Development Program. Four of the graduate students are Canadian. Students also come from Chad, Colombia, D.R. Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, New Zealand, South Korea, Tanzania, Thailand, Zambia and Zimbabwe. *Source: AMBS*

Awakening to the Church's true vocation

Melanie Neufeld

“God has been at work from the beginning to form a covenanted people of God to help bring about God’s plan for reconciling the world to its intended purposes.”

– From *The Baby and the Bathwater*, by Robert (Jack) Suderman

When I heard that Jack and Irene Suderman were visiting Winnipeg this fall, I reached out for a visit, hoping they could answer some of my burning questions. After being outside Canada for much of the last 20 years, I am trying to make sense of where Mennonite Church Canada is today on questions of mission. Jack is former general secretary of Mennonite Church Canada.

In the 1990s, I happily participated in what was then called Native Ministries (run by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada). In this role, I spent two summers relating to the Manitoba communities of Pine Dock and Matheson Island.

Then, I lived for 18 years in the U.S., first studying and then offering leadership in two Mennonite Church USA congregations.

Since returning to Canada in 2022, I have re-established connections with some northern communities. One question I have heard among those people is: “Why aren’t pastors sent here anymore?”

Given that I missed the tumult of 2003, when the Native Ministries

program was cut amid a time of major budget shortfalls, I have been unable to give them a clear answer.

When we met this fall, Jack Suderman helped me understand the challenges of that season. He also named the opportunities it presented.

The shift away from direct involvement in Indigenous communities has led to a new understanding of the role Mennonites play and have played in colonialism. It has brought a greater awareness of the need for advocacy, given the ongoing harms perpetuated by systems and the need for repaired relationship with Indigenous people.

But as we have ventured into this new direction as a denomination, it seems to me that there is real loss still being experienced from this break in relationship. Today, only four northern Indigenous communities have connections with Mennonite Church Manitoba (MCM) congregations. These four are Matheson Island, Pauingassi, Manigotagan and Pimicikamak. Seven MCM congregations are involved. Their involvement ranges from family camp to Vacation Bible School and sports camps.

I’ve watched closely as congregations such as Sterling Mennonite rally with other congregations every year to prepare, raise money and send volunteers to Pimicikamak. In 1943, Henry Gerbrandt became the first Mennonite to serve there. Today, along the shores of Cross Lake, the Pimicikamak people fight for the lives of their young people

and for greater search and rescue capabilities. They also endure the impacts of a hydroelectric project.

In response to my deeper missional questions, Jack gave the example of the Colombian Mennonite Church. Reflecting on the relationship with Mennonites elsewhere, Colombian leaders said that the planting of the church was the greatest gift offered to their country by Mennonites. This effort required long-term listening and contextual understanding, which enabled the formation of a people—a visible community that grew its own leadership, became an ongoing support system for members, is a great witness to the transforming love of Jesus, and has the ability to organize and be responsive in its location.

Jack encourages our congregations to not lose sight of our vocation in forming liberative communities of people “implementing the agenda of God.” He encourages us to continue to reflect on the expansive vision for the church offered in his book *The Baby and the Bathwater*.

Let us pray for the rebirth of this expansive vision within our communities this Advent season. ●



Melanie Neufeld serves as director of mission engagement with Mennonite Church Manitoba.



JUSTIN
SUN

DEEPER COMMUNION

The challenge of Anabaptist leadership

Justin Sun

In the faith community of my youth, church leaders were held in extremely high esteem. The expectation of respect for leaders weighed heavily, for better and worse. To respond to a call, to serve and to be an elder or pastor in the church, meant equal parts responsibility and regard.

Growing up, I was taught this both explicitly, through words, and implicitly, through action. From things as big as the annual deacon and elder elections to small things like ensuring children called pastors by their respective titles, leaders were held high, and much was expected from them.

Imagine the challenge I faced as I sat one day in the Anabaptist History and Thought class at Columbia Bible College and heard for the first time in my life about a whole Christian tradition that exists apart from dominant Catholic and Protestant expressions, one that takes the idea of a “priesthood of all” to its logical end, a tradition that believes church is not dictated from up top but from below. That is, the lives of everyday, ordinary Christians can witness more powerfully to the reign of God than that which is imposed by authorized institutions. Therefore, community must be voluntary, scripture must be read together, baptism must be chosen in adulthood, churches must not be knit

to states and so on.

This was revolutionary for me, and I have been pondering the implications ever since, attracted helplessly to a faith that looks to and empowers the everyday person in community, rather than looking to established figureheads and overseers.

As I ponder these phases of my life today, however, I find myself looking for some sort of synthesis. A little time, experience and distance is allowing me to rethink this either/or approach—that a community must either focus totally on its leaders at the expense of the community, or the reverse.

Today, I ask: how might Anabaptist-Mennonite visions of leadership and church impact, both positively and negatively, our ability to discern our place in the world?

For example, does an overemphasis on grassroots organizing keep us from hearing our leaders, thus impeding our ability to grow in areas we must? Or maybe the leaders we choose to guide us, in fact, feel disempowered to make the decisions they feel led to make, because that is not how we operate. Does fear of overstepping cause ministers to shy away from offering their gifts? Or the opposite—how might an overemphasis on communal discernment allow those who lead to shirk their responsibility to lead?

In my experience and observation, sometimes Anabaptists wrestle with these questions well, and sometimes poorly. I believe we can be a valuable witness to the structures of our world, and I want to continue to press into that. At the same time, it would be good for us to ask whether we trust our leaders to lead. Do we trust each other to follow? Will leaders take responsibility to lead? And will all of us take responsibility to let them lead?

In this all, I still hear a voice from my childhood say, “With great power comes great responsibility.” I pray we understand both the power and responsibility—equally and together, that leading may come from above *and below*, understanding that Jesus is ultimately the head of it all.

So the next time you’re at a congregational meeting, trying to pass a budget, hiring a new pastor, wondering how churches might work together, or organizing for a cause with other Anabaptists, consider this: what is the flow of leadership in the scenario; what are the underlying assumptions; and how do they function to further the community along the Jesus Way? ●

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



Reflection

To me, the priesthood of all believers is beautiful because it invites anyone to be a leader. People lead in particular times and places, and they follow in others.

A good leader honestly and accurately reflects a community back to itself. This builds trust. It is also core to Anabaptism: the belief that we cannot fully know ourselves, that we learn to see ourselves through the other. In the way of Jesus, this other often shows up as the marginalized, the oppressed or the one who has been denied formal positions of leadership.

For me, the question is less about whether we trust our leaders, and more about who we trust to accurately help us to discern what our faith is calling us towards.

I hear Justin speaking primarily about leaders in formal roles: pastors, regional or national ministers. These leaders are important, and yet, I suspect that leadership “from above” is only as good as the practices of discernment within and between communities. I see leaders (formal or not) as holding the responsibility to listen closely and support this discernment, while also reflecting pieces that have been missed. When our leaders honestly and vulnerably reflect our hopes, desires and struggles, it becomes easier to trust their direction. ●

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



Trust

I find myself returning to a word Justin mentions near the end of his article. Trust. I doubt I’m alone in worrying about the low-trust culture we are collectively creating.

Very often, we do not trust our leaders, whether this is in government, science, healthcare, media or the church. Sometimes this lack of trust is richly deserved (the list of leaders behaving badly is, unfortunately, a very long and tiresome one). Sometimes we simply want to be our own authorities and will only tolerate leaders who confirm our preferences and tell us what we already think. The rise of social media and a perpetually online culture only makes this worse. Suspicion and resentment are algorithmically (and profitably!) engineered. As a result, trust is decimated.

Whatever structures of leadership we end up adopting or synthesizing in the church will fail without at least some level of trust. Yes, we must be wise and discerning. But we also cannot give up on trust and fall prey to the cheap and easy cynicism that crouches at our door. A community that claims to worship and follow the Servant King must point to a better way in this cultural moment, both in how we lead and in how we are led. ●

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



Transparency

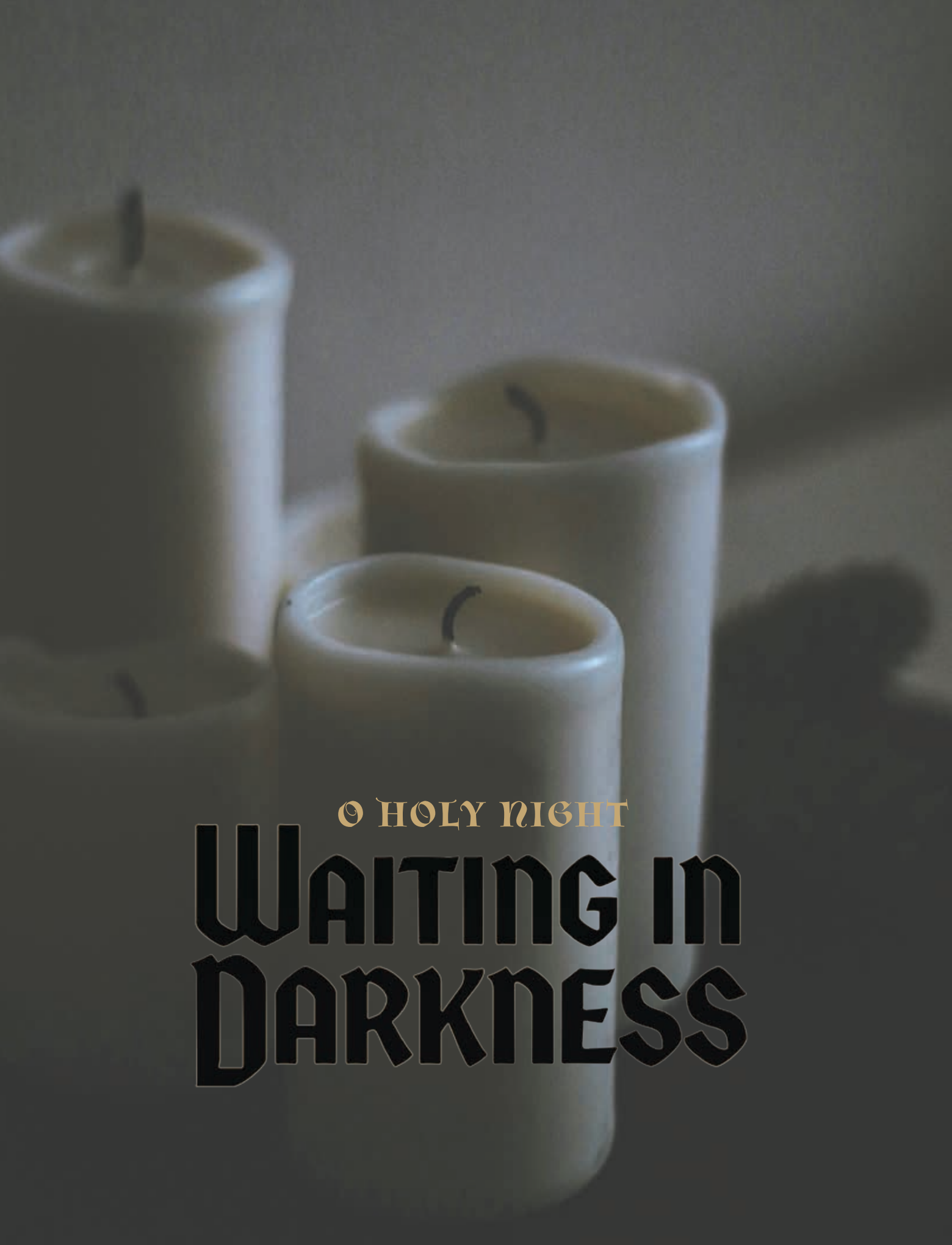
Like Justin, I’m compelled by a grass-roots recognition of an all-believers’ priesthood that still honours the way the Spirit has equipped and gifted members of our congregations in distinctive roles. I think the questions Justin raises about leadership invite us to think about the related categories of power and prestige.

We sometimes critique explicit shows of power or prestige while allowing them to function implicitly through old social connections, unspoken traditions or passive aggression. Power is going to be at play among us; the question is whether we’re telling the truth about how it’s working in our communities. We could probably all do with more transparency.

I also wonder about our influences. In Matthew 20:24–26, Jesus advises his disciples not to follow the reigning cultural modes of leadership. Few Anabaptists are kissing priests’ rings these days after the model of ancient emperors, but I wonder whether our tempting cultural influence might be business styles of leadership.

Are our church leaders learning from CEOs and CFOs to prioritize efficiency, measurable outcomes and PR management over the mysterious and life-giving guidance of the Spirit? What does it look like to lead in the way of Christ here and now, with humility and truth? ●

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



© HOLY NIGHT

WAITING IN DARKNESS

SACRED DISRUPTION

By Mary Barg

I don't like the dark. If I can't avoid walking into a dark room, I will use my phone's glowing screen to break up the night until I reach the light switch.

What is it about darkness that I find so disconcerting? Perhaps it's the uncertainty, the unknowability of what lies unseen. My brain tells me this is unreasonable; I am privileged to live in a part of the world where there are unlikely to be any hidden creature dangers in my kitchen.

But there is something deeper than fear of bite, sting or personal harm. In the darkness lives the unknown.

This became a visceral feeling after my dad passed away several years ago at the age of 67. My family was devastated by the rapidity of his diagnosis, illness and death. At the time, I did not understand why, but I had to keep a light on in order to sleep, for several months. I needed that light to tether me to that which I could understand, to keep the uncertainty of the darkness at bay.

I also don't like waiting. It's unsettling. I am quick to fill up a waiting period with distractions. I have no problem finding a book or a show or a puzzle, so I don't have to sit in the discomfort of waiting.

At a few times in my life, this uncertainty has been particularly disquieting. There was a longer gap between my fourth and fifth children than there was with the others. When I was pregnant with our fifth child, I found myself asking myself whether I still knew how to care for a baby. What if I couldn't get to know this baby enough to understand what it needed? This wasn't debilitating, but it did shift my focus from excited anticipation to nervous preoccupation.

Darkness and waiting are not comfortable spaces, but I have learned that leaning in, instead of avoiding, grows peace and hope instead of fear. This takes practice because it doesn't feel natural to move toward discomfort and uncertainty. Yet I have found that when I allow myself to sit with

these feelings and have them infuse my prayers and self-reflection, the Spirit inevitably shows up in a fresh way.

The season of Advent is about darkness and waiting. It is a darkness of unknowing, uncertainty and inability to control the outcomes.

It's hard to imagine how profoundly distressing that could have been for Mary. Her life was uprooted in an unfathomable way, and yet her response was one of trust and acceptance.

Here on the other side of the birth of Jesus, this season of waiting for the fullness of shalom to be found in Jesus can still cause anxiety. There is more than enough uncertainty in my life and in the world to create discomfort. What would it look like for me to lean in and embrace it during this Advent season?

The unexpected has proved to be a sacred disruption so many times in my life. Can I walk in confidence of God's faithfulness, while at the same time allowing myself to acknowledge the feelings of fear and uncertainty?

Despite my spirit's pull toward resolution of this discomfort, Advent calls me to notice the unknowns and the "not-yets" that trouble my soul. My list could be long: insecurities, unrealized professional goals, troubled relationships, community conflicts, world events, climate concerns.

Perhaps the Magnificat can be the metaphorical light I leave on as I wait, tethering me to hope in a time of darkness and uncertainty. This song of response to a drastically changed and unfamiliar future identifies what Mary knew to be true about our Lord: our Saviour is mindful of us, shows mercy, cares for the humble, fills the hungry and cares for those who serve.

May that knowledge be enough to help me sit in the darkness to wait without despair. ●

Mary Barg is a spiritual care practitioner with the Fraser Health Authority. She lives in Chilliwack, B.C., attends Eden Mennonite Church and serves on the board of Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service.

1

*Five spiritual practices
for waiting in darkness*

NIGHT SKY MEDITATION

Go to a quiet spot, under the night sky.

Pray with Psalm 8. (*“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”*)

Ponder: How am I invited to wait in darkness for what only God can give? What are the “good tidings” that I long to hear? ●

– BIFF WEIDMAN, SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR, SOUTH BEND, INDIANA

THE WORLD'S MOST LOW-KEY ADVENT GROUP

By Susan Fish

In the middle of the pandemic darkness of the fall of 2020, when church gatherings were fraught, a small idea ignited.

I sent an email to people I knew, inviting them to meet online each Sunday in

December for what I called “The World’s Most Low-Key Advent Group.” A grand name for a small gathering.

Though tired of Zoom, people said yes. About eight women gathered each Sunday evening, sitting in front of our computers with a candle and a longing for connection. Hope, Joy, Peace, Love were the themes. Each week I played music on each theme—not the expected hymns or choruses—we read Bible verses and we talked. For less than an hour.

A couple of those who attended that

year were regular church-goers, but some were not. One had lost her church in the divorce and said she wasn’t sure she believed in God. Some had children struggling with addiction. One was a recent widow. We were all weary of isolation and restrictions.

It wasn’t the most festive group.

But simply sitting together quietly in the darkness brought its own comfort. It was easier to believe God’s promise of Emmanuel when we didn’t wait alone.

We’ve gathered each Advent since. We have plans to gather this year again. We also have begun meeting during Lent. (Did I mention we aren’t the cheeriest bunch?)

A couple of years ago, one of our number was going through a hard time, and another left a care package on her doorstep. When one person had a parent die, people brought casseroles, and I thought: *oh, this is church.*

We have begun meeting in person the last two years, in my church’s sanctuary. There are no lights other than candles and those on the Christmas tree. For some of our people—a group that has shifted and added new folks—this is the only time they step into a church building. For others, it is the only time they sit still and quiet in a church.

I’ve told people to come as they are. Occasionally people have shown up in pajamas or sweatpants. Sometimes we cry. There has been swearing. There have been honest requests for prayer and shared rejoicing. People have brought friends. Some have found a church home. All look forward to gathering again the following year.

God is with us. And in the dark season of the year, we are together with God. ●

WAITING IN THE UTERVERSE

A personal story of pregnancy

By Madalene Arias



In every one of my previous visits to the fertility clinic, the waiting room was full.

Women of different ages, ethnicities and income brackets would take their seats in fertility limbo. Some would sit on their own, while others sat with partners who held their hands and brought them water or coffee until they were called up.

On a particular day last April, the clinic was unusually quiet. My husband and I had managed the miracle of travelling through the congestion of cars, pedestrians, cyclists and never-ending Toronto construction without missing our appointment time.

That was the day we would learn whether our procedure had worked, whether our little embryo had managed to safely cushion itself somewhere in the walls of my uterus and begin to grow.

The preceding months had been one big expensive blur of frequent visits to the pharmacy for seemingly endless sets of injections and boxes of pills.

“Here’s another thing I can’t do,” a voice in my head said each time my husband pulled out his wallet, the dollars I couldn’t cover with my own earnings weighing me down.

In the weeks leading up to this appointment, I had experienced the common symptoms of early pregnancy. I could smell anything across a room or down the hall. But my husband and I both knew better than to let ourselves get too excited. We’d made it this far before. It didn’t guarantee anything.

The previous year I had become pregnant, even though doctors had told us the chances of this happening naturally were slim to none. The pregnancy was later ruled unviable.

Watching someone you love break down and cry is a searing and stifling sort of hell. Especially if their eyes had

been filled with joy only moments before.

As we sat together in the waiting room on that morning in April, I wondered whether we’d visit that terrible place again. If we did, how long would the pain linger this time?

Finally, we were called up. I changed into a hospital gown while my husband waited in the hall. The nurse welcomed us into the dimly lit ultrasound room.

She was friendly and talkative, and this was relieving for both of us, even though her kindness did not guarantee that she would deliver good news. She explained that she would first scan everything before turning the screen so that we could see.

We waited. My husband sat in a corner of the room.

“Are you ready?” the nurse asked. My husband came close. We fixed our gaze on the screen. The nurse zoomed in on a tiny shape outlined in white against the darkness of what I’ll call the uterverse.

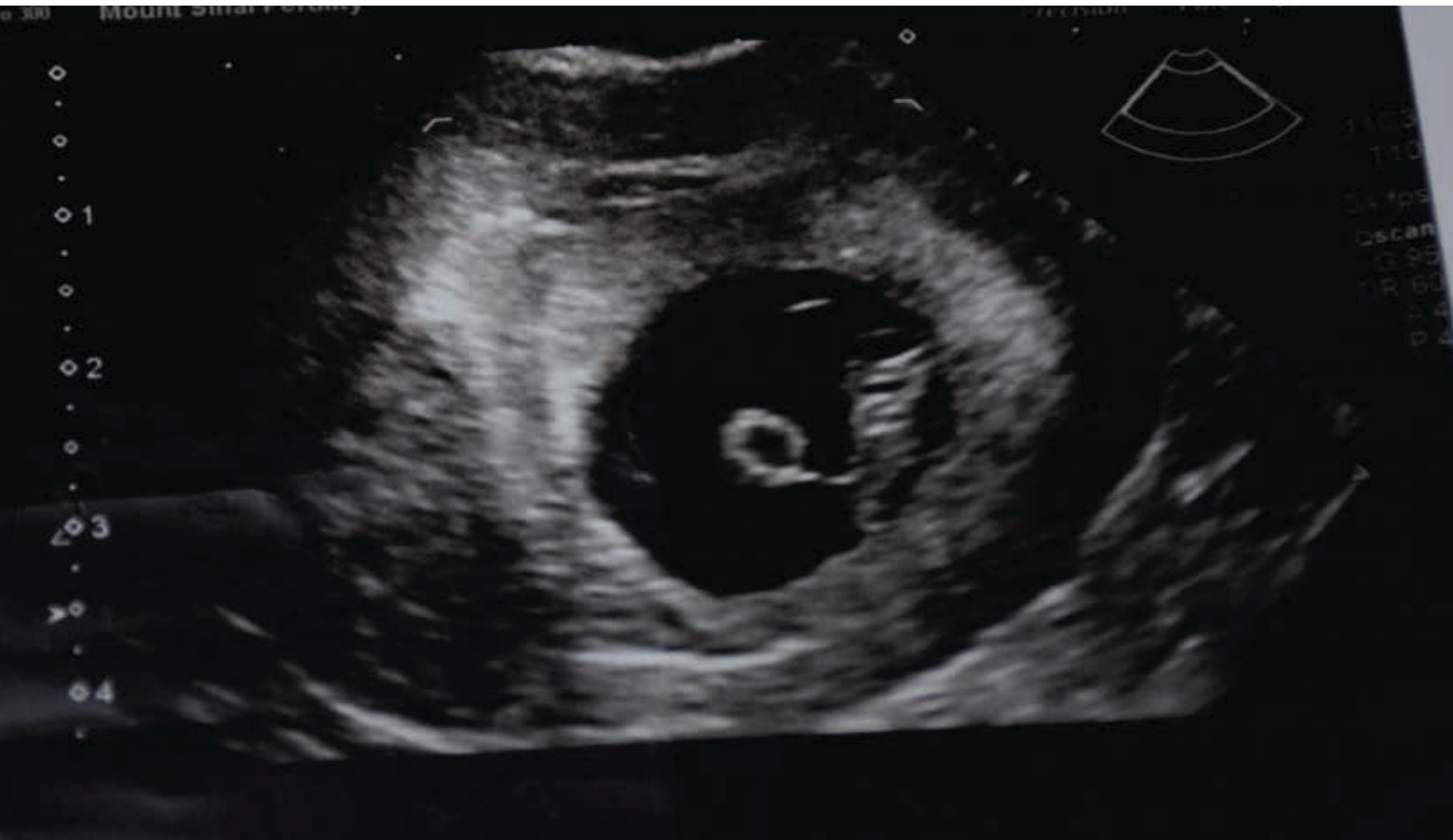
“Do you see the gestational sac?” she asked. We nodded, not knowing what to expect next.

She zoomed farther into the darkness. What we saw knocked the heaviness out of our nervous systems in an instant. From the darkness appeared a little being that resembled a seahorse. It had big eyes, a pointed nose and what appeared to be cheekbones.

The nurse hovered her cursor over a small, beating sac inside its chest, and a blue glow emerged.

Three things came to me at once; one of them was music. I wish I could say it was a hymn or something from a gospel choir, but it wasn’t. Instead, I heard the blaring bounce of songs that filled nightclubs in the 2010s, where the drunkest of drunks danced into the night, eyes closed, not a care about the hangover that awaited or how they looked or how soon security might kick them out, dancing in their own worlds and in the one where everyone else could see.

While my husband and I were wondering and worrying, our little seahorse and his blue glow had begun to dance to his own tune, at 170 beats per minute.



The second sensation in the dim ultrasound room was the certainty that this was a boy. This didn't make sense to my husband or any other logical thinker. We would later find out I was right.

The third feeling told me that there was a happy, mischievous and funny personality on the way, but whether this is also true remains a mystery among other mysteries for now.

"It was a very happy moment," my husband now recalls. "It was the moment it became real for me."

Our son is supposed to arrive at the end of November. Of course, there are other fears that come with this type of waiting. "What if I don't make it?" I sometimes think. I know a couple of women who have lost infants to fatal conditions that went undetected prior to birth. I think of them every day.

Being pregnant literally looks like holding the world in your midsection. You hold it in your head, too.

I think of how society celebrates

some children but not others. I then think how irresponsible it is to bring more people into the world as it is being destroyed. Scientists have made it clear that the climate destruction we've caused cannot be reversed at this point.

It's a rather long stream of concerns.

Eventually I remember something a man told me years ago. He believed women were closer to God than men because they bring life into the world. I have been annoyed with what he said ever since.

Firstly, anyone who wants to come close to God can do so. Secondly, some women will never have children, and this in itself can deepen their connection with God. Third, there are a multitude of ways to bring life into this world besides childbearing. Finally, this sounds like a primitive idea from a time when humans had limited scientific understanding about the conception of children.

However, in my journey of enduring

the mental and physical tolls of pregnancy, I have been pushed to the edge over and over again. That's the place where conversations with God tend to happen.

I had forgotten all about Psalm 46:10 until one day my sister posted it to her Instagram in between a series of clips about food and skincare. "Be still and know that I am God."

When you try to balance hope with the possibility of despair, you are forced to surrender what you can no longer carry. There's a much-needed stillness in such moments. This is where childbearing women may come closer to God. It's almost like we don't have a choice.

Our little guy is running out of space in the uteriverse. He moves at the sound of my husband's voice. He once swayed from side to side to an old Lebanese song. Neither of us is Lebanese. It was really funny. This is a very different place where we laugh as we wonder and wait. It's as simple as that. ●





*Five spiritual practices
for waiting in darkness*

WALK INTO THE DARK

As Advent approaches and nights become longer, I am reminded of Barbara Brown Taylor's book *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. What does it mean to welcome the long nights at this time of year? What new birth requires a gestation period in my life? What is waiting to emerge within me?

During Advent, I find myself waiting for that time of day when the sun disappears, and darkness begins to deepen. Whenever I can, I like to sit in the semi-darkness and listen to Velma Frye's song "O, Beautiful Darkness." (You may have another song that comforts you.) Velma's song is very meditative, and so I begin with five deep, long breaths to calm my heart, mind and body. I feel held and comforted by the darkness, knowing God invites new birth in all of us. ●

— MIRIAM FREY, SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR, KITCHENER, ONTARIO

3 Five spiritual practices for waiting in darkness

DAILY EXAMEN

As sunlight hours get shorter, and the darkness of winter solstice nears, we wait.

We wait for the rest that accompanies darkness. We wait for rejuvenation. We wait for the Christ child to awaken us to new life burgeoning within us. What is that newness which God is enacting in and through us?

Saint Ignatius of Loyola offers a practice that will help us to hear and perceive and intuit more clearly the mysteries wrought in darkness. This practice is known as the Daily Examen.

Here is one form of this prayer: In the evening, ask God to enliven your holy imagination as you become aware of God's presence with you. With gratitude, **review the day** you've just lived through. Pay attention to the emotions you felt at various times. Recall what thought, memory or action prompted your emotional responses, whether boredom, elation, resentment, compassion, anger or confidence. What is God saying through these feelings?

God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. Look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a new direction? Are you concerned about a friend?

Choose one feature of the day and pray from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that is particularly important—a feeling, an encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. It may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether intercession, praise, repentance or gratitude.

Look toward tomorrow. Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful, cheerful, apprehensive, full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Ask God for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

As you wait in the darkness, spend time with God and listen for God's voice. Experience the joys expressed in the ancient prayer of Richard of Chichester: *"May I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly."* ●

— CLAIRE EWERT FISHER, PART-TIME CO-PASTOR OF ROSTHERN (SASKATCHEWAN) MENNONITE CHURCH

*I said to my soul, be still and
wait without hope,
for hope would be hope for the wrong thing;
wait without love,
for love would be love of the wrong thing;
there is yet faith,
but the faith and the love are all in the waiting.*

*Wait without thought,
for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light,
and the stillness the dancing.*

– T.S. ELIOT



BLUE CHRISTMAS

Churches attend to grief

By Susan Fish, with poetry by Carol Penner. Used with permission.

Walk into any store during this season and the message is clear: it's the most wonderful time of the year.

Sometimes, however, the message to be of good cheer creates its own pain for those who are struggling. That includes the bereaved, those with mental health challenges and the increasing number of people struggling to make ends meet. It's also the time of year with the least amount of daylight and long, cold months ahead.

Many churches of a variety of denominations, including Mennonites, respond by holding either a Longest Night service or a Blue Christmas service, typically held on or around the December 21 solstice.

This is also the traditional feast day of the apostle Thomas, offering a connection between Thomas's struggle to believe in Jesus' resurrection and the struggle some face with darkness and grief.

The first Blue Christmas service is believed to have been held in B.C. in 1987 as a way to accompany people in their suffering.

Often, candles are used at such services to remind people that, *"The light shines on inside of the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it"* (John 1:5). Sometimes empty chairs are included as a way of remembering those who have died during the previous year.

*There are good years and bad years,
and then there are years from hell.
Hear our prayer, O God, for all who suffer.
You hear the anguished cries,
you collect our tears,
you know when hearts turn to stone.*

For the past two years, Eigenheim Mennonite has been part of an ecumenical Longest Night service in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. The first such service in 2022 drew curious participants, including a local funeral director seeking grief resources but also support for his own grief. In 2023, after a local young man died by suicide, most of those in attendance at the Longest Night service were connected to him. The quiet and contemplative service includes a litany using the Advent candles. "We do resolve the minor into a major key," says Rachel Wallace, pastor at Eigenheim Mennonite.

"While the first three candles are for those loved and lost, other losses and our feelings at Christmas, the final candle is

for the gift of the incarnation.”

Each year, Wallace reads from Sarah Bessey’s “A Prayer for the Broken-hearted at Christmas.” Last year she cried as she read it because her own father had died only two months before. While she felt awkward about crying, she adds, “Seeing tears from the person leading is okay.”

This year, the Rosthern churches are asking the local funeral home to invite any families with a loss in the past year to join them.

*Send a Saviour now with good news
for those who sit in the shadow of death:
for children who have lost their parents
and have no one to take care of them;
for all who are fleeing violence
and looking for a place of refuge;
for all who have violated or been violated;
for caregivers who have responsibilities
and nowhere to turn to get help;
for all who have been ravaged by sickness
or who have watched a loved one suffer;
for all who suffer the pain of racism,
or are bowed under the yoke of poverty.
God, you know the particular pain of each one,
and on this longest night, you hold them and us.*

The Blue Christmas service held each December at Toronto United Mennonite Church (TUMC) is usually a small and intimate service, but it has been very meaningful to those who attend—and even to some who choose not to attend. Peter Haresnape, a pastor at TUMC, says, “When I contact people who’ve been bereaved during the year, often they say, ‘I won’t come to the service, but thank you very much for doing it and for inviting me.’ It’s an opportunity to remind people there is space for them and their feelings.”

Haresnape adds, “We are definitely doing something very necessary with this. We are perhaps identifying griefs we weren’t aware of previously.” These include griefs about divorce, separation by borders, loss of family cohesion due to political differences and more.

TUMC uses the same service each year, based on a liturgy written by Carol Penner. The service begins and ends with silence. People can come and go, and can gather after the service to talk if they wish.

Usually, Haresnape says, there are tears.

“One critique I’ve heard of this service is that it could reinforce that you’re supposed to be joyful in church

at every other service, but [this] intentional space for grief is ... a uniformly positive experience and very meaningful.”

*On this longest night, in the mystery of your love,
steal into our world again.
Be born again in hearts that long to be reborn,
in communities that have nowhere to go but up.
By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
and you will guide our feet
into the way of peace.
This is our prayer, may it be so.*

Since 2019, Waterloo North Mennonite Church in Waterloo, Ontario has offered a Longest Night contemplative service on the winter solstice, “to acknowledge grief of all kinds, [and that] it’s not all tinsel and celebration,” says Waterloo North pastor Carmen Brubacher. “There are deep aches.”

The congregation, including their pastor, is experiencing deep aches this year after the sudden death of Kendra Whitfield Ellis, the other pastor at Waterloo North. They expect more people to attend than usual this year.

Like Eternity Sunday, Brubacher says the Longest Night service allows people to name their sadnesses and to ask for God’s presence and companionship.

While Brubacher is planning the contemplative service, a lay leader will lead it. “I want to provide space for the community, but I need rituals like that, too. My wish is to be able to weep.”

Not only does Waterloo North light candles of loss, but they also light candles for wisdom and faith as they put their losses in God’s hands. Brubacher concludes, “There’s a peace in this.” ●

For discussion

1. What is waiting to be born in you this Advent?
2. For what prayer request(s) do you pray: O come, o come, Emmanuel?
3. If Advent has been part of your family or church, what were the most meaningful and most challenging traditions?
4. How do you feel about waiting in the dark, literally or metaphorically, and have any of the articles in this issue coaxed you into the dark?

– **CM Staff**

Find resources on “Advent” at
commonword.ca/go/2190

CommonWord
Bookstore and Resource Centre

4
*Five spiritual practices
for waiting in darkness*

FOR FAMILIES

Children need the rhythm of resting and turning inward in the dark season of the year as much as adults do. We can welcome the little people in our lives into the sacred moments of our spiritual disciplines. Below are two such practices.

Jesse Tree

A Jesse Tree is a symbolic tree with images on it designating stories coming from the biblical narrative. It was a tool used to remember and tell stories in pre-literate churches.

Slowly decorating a Jesse Tree (Isaiah 11:1) with simple decorations that symbolize stories from the biblical narrative helps children recall the sweep of God's faithfulness.

At home in the evening, remove distractions: turn off lights, put away devices for the night. Light Advent candles (allowing the privilege of lighting them to come at a certain age) and sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Each evening, add one new decoration to the Jesse Tree, recounting the story it tells, a combination of the biblical narrative, beginning with creation, and including stories of faith from our own families as well as our Anabaptist heritage.

Say a prayer, sing some more. Leave the lights off. When ready, each person carries a small light to their bedroom to go to sleep.

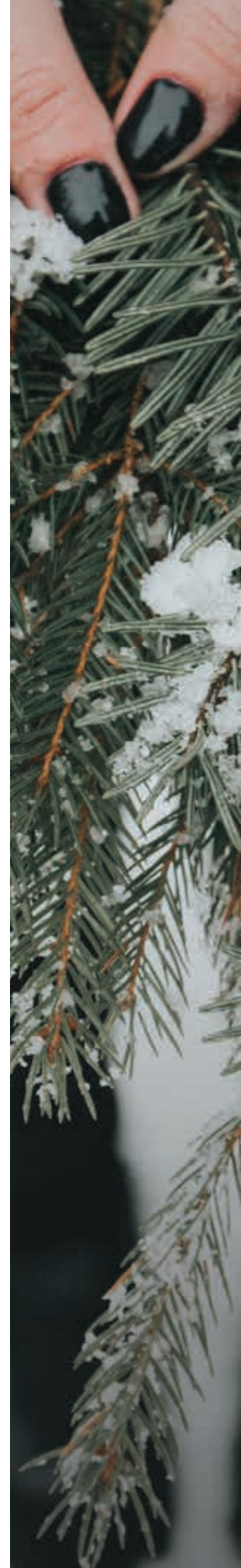
Outdoor Advent spiral

In the afternoon, hunt for evergreen boughs, or, if not possible, long pieces of cloth. Place these on the ground in a large spiral with a lantern at the centre. Stomp down a path between the boughs. After darkness falls, gather with friends and family, each carrying a small Mason jar filled with sand anchoring an unlit candle. Standing around the spiral, sing and tell stories of those who've walked into the darkness before, seeking wisdom and courage from our cloud of witnesses.

Ask the eldest child to walk into the dark spiral with a single lit candle, lighting the centre lantern. All the children light their jar lights and leave them along the spiral path. Encircle the spiral, singing, and remember those who have left their lights for us to follow. Let the songs fade to silence, taking in the beauty and cold of the night. ●

— ELISA BARKMAN, CO-RESIDENT MANAGER OF CAMP KOINONIA, NEAR BOISSEVAIN, MANITOBA

PHOTO: ALISA ANTON/UNSPLASH



Ethiopian ‘Joseph’ takes risks to serve

By Bizuayehu Abera, as told to Linda Espenshade and MCC staff in Ethiopia (MCC release)

I have been the Tigray relief project coordinator for Meserete Kristos Church Development Commission (MKCDC) for the past four years. Because of this work, people gave me a new name. They called me Joseph, after one of the most renowned figures in the Bible, who saved his family and all of Egypt during the famine.

The war that broke out in Tigray has profoundly affected our lives. During the conflict, many people were killed by both the Ethiopian National Defense Force and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front. In addition, many homes were intentionally destroyed using heavy artillery.

Families have lost their sons, daughters and homes, leaving them in a state of profound grief and loss. Among those who perished were my aunt’s son, and also a Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) missionary, whom I considered my spiritual son. (MKC is a Mennonite church and a partner of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Ethiopia.) The memory of these losses weighs heavily on my heart.

I grew up in the church, and I have served with various MKC churches and church plants for 16 years. Currently I am a pastor for the MKC congregation in Mek’ele, the capital of Tigray, the northernmost state in Ethiopia.

My primary interest lies in work that focuses on community development and growth. I have a bachelor’s degree from Meserete Kristos College in peace and conflict transformation and a diploma in legal services. The expertise and skill I have gained fuel my passion to assist those who require support and courage.

At the beginning of the war, I shared information about the situation directly with MKC’s head office in Addis Ababa and via social media. Despite the inherent risks, I assumed the responsibility of being a voice for the people suffering from hunger in Tigray.

After MKC sent a first round of MCC-supported relief supplies to Tigray,

I brought a relief report to Addis Ababa. But while I was there, everything went under blockade, and I was stranded for a year.

I had no means of communication with my family. I was completely cut off from my wife, child and other relatives.

I was worried about how they were



Bizuayehu Abera with his daughter, Medan, and wife, Senayt, after being separated by war for a year.

eating. I was concerned that the war would cause many deaths, sickness and much damage. I had internal anxiety, which I shared with nobody, that drone attacks in Mek’ele streets might kill my family.

While in Addis Ababa, I continued working with MKC’s Development Commission. I proposed the idea to MCC representatives to bring cash to Tigray on a United Nations airplane to help my people. They studied the idea and then agreed.

When I arrived at the airport, I would board the plane, keeping the bag containing the money securely under my feet. Undeniably, there was fear associated with carrying a large amount of money.

The entire process was extremely stressful and filled with tension. But God never let us down.

Whenever I arrived in Mek’ele, the

people were full of hope. For instance, once a young girl saw me arrive and quickly ran home to tell her mother. Her mother responded, “Why didn’t you tell me that Jesus has come? Don’t you know that when Bizuayehu arrives, it means God has arrived?”

I felt my contribution was minimal, but the community’s profound thankfulness led them to nickname me for the Joseph we read about in the book of Genesis, who not only helped his people, but was also separated from his family. This experience reminded me of God’s past work in my life that prepared me for a time such as this.

Personally, these past four years stand out as a period in which my faith was profoundly tested by the multitude of challenges and upheavals experienced by the whole nation and my family, as well as the uncertainty I felt when my movements were restricted in my own country.

My prayer life faced its own tests as I grappled with questions like why these events were happening despite my prayers, why God seemed silent and why intervention appeared delayed. In many ways, these experiences tested the core of my faith, challenging me to find resilience and trust amid uncertainty and adversity.

When I finally returned to my family and children after the peace agreement, I was overwhelmed with tears of joy as I rejoiced in seeing them. I wanted to stay with them, but I felt I needed to continue to travel back and forth to Addis Ababa for MKCDC.

Sometimes, taking risks is necessary to effectively assist people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. By taking these risks, I aimed to embody a life of service.

This initiative provided me with the opportunity to become a bridge of peace, love and compassion. It positioned me as an intermediary for the people of the country, especially those in Tigray, fostering understanding and unity. ●

Pastors embrace Narrative Lectionary

By Katie Doke Sawatzky

This Advent, if you hear sermons about Daniel’s plight in the lion’s den, Joel’s urging to mourn and repent, and the promise of the Spirit in Isaiah, it’s most likely because your church’s worship planners are following the Narrative Lectionary.

Created in 2010 through Luther Seminary, the Narrative Lectionary is gaining popularity among Mennonite churches in Canada and the U.S. for its focus on telling the sweep of the biblical story—from creation to the early church—throughout the year.

Leader magazine, a MennoMedia publication that offers worship resources, printed its first resources using the Narrative Lectionary this fall, a departure from its 20-year reliance on texts from the Common Revised Lectionary. The magazine had received positive feedback about the Narrative Lectionary over the last year from pastors in the U.S. who were already using it.

“I think people are ready for something different, and it really is different,” said *Leader* editor Sharon Williams.

From September through mid-December, Narrative Lectionary readings begin in Genesis and follow Israel’s journey—the exodus, exile and return—through the Old Testament. Readings from Christmas through Easter are from one of the Gospels, and then move to Acts and Paul’s letters from Easter to Pentecost. The lectionary has a four-year cycle. Each year follows this pattern, with different Scriptures.

Churches following this year’s cycle won’t arrive in Luke until Christmas Eve.

“For a Mennonite church not to hear a Gospel for three-and-a-half months is different,” said Jonathan Neufeld, co-pastor of Charleswood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

Charleswood switched to the Narrative Lectionary for their worship planning this September, after using the Common Revised Lectionary (CRL) for years. The Narrative Lectionary only suggests one text each Sunday, compared to the four suggested by the CRL.

Focusing on one text makes worship planning easier for preachers and planners, Neufeld said, but spending weeks at a time



in one book means churches must wrestle with “troublesome texts.”

“Vulnerability and theological honesty come out of that,” he said. “If you get a text that talks about hell, and you don’t believe in hell, what do you do? There is an authenticity that comes ... because this is our Scripture, and all of it is sacred text.”

Kevin Peters Unrau, pastor at Hillcrest Mennonite Church in New Hamburg, Ontario, echoed this.

“[The Narrative Lectionary] forces you into areas of the Bible you might not otherwise go,” he said.

Hillcrest has used the Narrative Lectionary since 2018. Peters Unrau said several other Mennonite churches in his area also follow the lectionary, making it easy to do joint services. His weekly pastors’ group, which includes Mennonites and Lutherans, exchanges sermon ideas based on the resource.

Peters Unrau appreciates how the lectionary moves from the Old Testament to the New Testament through the year.

“There’s these sorts of natural arcs. It’s easy to see a through-line,” he said.

Most people in the pews won’t notice a switch in lectionaries by their worship planners, Peters Unrau said, but congregants do notice when worship doesn’t feel cohesive.

“When the plumbing’s working, nobody’s supposed to notice,” Peters Unrau said, quoting his grandfather’s advice, which he applies to worship. Overall, the “through-line” of the Narrative Lectionary is something planners at Hillcrest appreciate, and Hillcrest’s use of resources based on the Narrative Lectionary has livened up their worship and encouraged more participation by congregants.

Margaret Kruger-Harder, from Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary, coordinated the writing team for *Leader’s* Advent resources this fall. The team was made up of seven people from congregations in Mennonite Church Alberta.

The Narrative Lectionary was new to the group, Kruger-Harder said, but they rose to the challenge and found the theme of courage and journeying together within the texts in Daniel, Joel, Isaiah and Luke. She noted that the Narrative Lectionary’s structure around the overarching biblical story influenced the writing team to focus on the characters in the Advent texts and their encounters.

“In the [biblical] stories, each person had someone they were walking with or bouncing ideas off of or [were] challenged by,” said Kruger-Harder. “In the pews, people are experiencing pregnancies, deaths, challenges at work.... This [*Leader*] series is meant to speak to that, to support people in the pews who are going things that they will inevitably encounter.” ●

Ruining dinner

Church prepares for tough conversations

By Katie Doke Sawatzky

While Christmas is a time to contemplate peace on Earth, holiday gatherings can be stressful for some. One comment or opinion can ruin dinner.

Wendy Suddaby of Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg recalls a frustrating conversation over Thanksgiving dinner in 2018. It spurred her to action.

Suddaby, 72, who sits on her church's adult education committee, began mulling over the idea for an Adult Education series titled "Ruining Dinner," in which participants could learn how to have conversations with those they disagree with.

"I'm trying to figure out how to overcome my fear of being able to say, in the face of someone else's contempt, 'Well, gee, if we were to be loving and respectful, how [could] we work together?'" she said.

This fall, Hope Mennonite made it happen, holding a series of three Sunday morning sessions.

"So many people I talk to just want peace at all costs," said Suddaby. "If you're

so conscious of trying to avoid subjects in which people have different opinions, that's not peace."

Suddaby borrowed the title "Ruining Dinner" from a series of conversations between Christian historian Diana Butler Bass and theologian Tripp Fuller, who discuss American politics on YouTube.

Joni Sawatzky, who attends Hope and studies marriage and family therapy at the University of Winnipeg, led the final session on October 13. She called it "Confessions of a Family Killjoy." Sawatzky shared personal stories about unexpected conversations she has had with family members who hold fundamentally different beliefs.

Sawatzky emphasized the importance of face-to-face conversations and spoke about "the capacity for surprising ourselves and allowing others to surprise us."

"Even if we grew up together, what more is there to know?" she said.

Sawatzky also talked about checking in with our bodies during intense conversations.

"Everything is information, not just the words you're hearing," Sawatzky said. "You don't have to have a hard conversation right away or all the time or when you're in a heightened state."

John Koop Harder, a therapist, and David Dyck, a conflict mediator, led the first two sessions. Pastor Lynell Bergen said participants were very engaged and that 15 to 25 people attended each session.

Bergen appreciated the opportunity to think about how relationships with family can improve if you're open to change. The sessions were also helpful for Bergen as a pastor, reminding her that some find family gatherings uncomfortable.

"To help people to have some small tool or idea of where they want to go in a stressful or challenging situation is an important gift we can give to each other in the church and in other places, to provide people the resources they need to deal with challenging relationships," Bergen said. ●



Photo gallery

Elmira Mennonite Church celebrated its 100th anniversary this fall. The church, located in Elmira, Ontario, held four celebrations to mark the milestone. The congregation sang hymns from each of the song books of the century. Each celebration was followed by an era-defined meal: creamed potatoes for the '30s, Jello salad for the '50s and '60s, and a BBQ with potato salad for the '80s. Pictured: Elmira Mennonite members raise the roof with a capella singing at one of the celebrations.

Hawkesville sells property, donates money

By Susan Fish

Representatives of Hawkesville Mennonite Church in Hawkesville, Ontario, disbursed its final assets in a gift ceremony on October 24, held at the Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) offices at 50 Kent in Kitchener, Ontario. Recipients from MCEC, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and Mennonite Church Canada (MCC) were in attendance.

The congregation, which concluded its active ministries after 74 years in June, sold its church building to Wallenstein Bible Chapel.

Hawkesville leaders decided to use the bulk of the congregation's assets to support the future health of the wider church, with donations going to MCEC to support the growth of new congregations, and smaller distributions made to MWC to support global leadership development, and to MC Canada to support Indigenous



Hawkesville gift ceremony at MCEC offices. Pictured (left to right): David Martin, Pilar Aguirre, Al Rempel, Karen Metzger, Doug Klassen, Julene Fast, Norm Dyck, César García, Ann L. Schultz.



Anabaptism at 500

Looking Back, Living Forward



PASTORS & LEADERS 2025

Monday, Feb. 17 – Thursday, Feb. 20

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: amb.s.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**

ministries, as well as the Creation Care Fund for supporting Emissions Reduction Grants for MC Canada congregations. Smaller donations were also made to five local service agencies in the Kitchener-Waterloo region.

The congregation decided not to disclose the amounts of the donations.

Like many who attended Hawkesville Mennonite, treasurer Karen Metzger was part of the congregation since she was a young child. She describes Hawkesville as “a close-knit group” of approximately 40 people, most of whom are retired. These people now attend various churches in the area.

In advance of their decision to close, the congregation worked with Credence and Co. to evaluate their viability and

possible future options. After the decision to close was made in 2023, David Martin served as interim minister, helping the congregation close.

Metzger’s advice to other churches at this stage is to use a good process of evaluation. “It’s a job you can’t do by yourself as a congregation.” While she says there was grief about the decision to close, she also says, “It was a good thing that we decided to do it before we were forced to close. We closed well.”

Julene Fast, board chair of Hawkesville Mennonite, said at the gift ceremony, “While money is not what Hawkesville Mennonite is or was...maybe the money can be seen as a symbol of our essence: we have lived, we have lived well, we have served, we have cared for others and for

each other. We have been busy, and we have been blessed. We have given it our best shot to be true to our calling, even if we were not always at our best. We ask that you take these gifts and take *your* best shot at being true to your call.”

Those in attendance at the gift ceremony responded to that call with gratitude for the contributions to ministry. Ann L. Schultz, executive team leader, MCEC, said, “We have been holding the entire Hawkesville congregation in our thoughts and prayers over the last year as they have discerned the path forward. On behalf of MCEC, I would like to offer our gratitude to the Hawkesville congregation for their generous gift.” ●



CM Photo gallery Marking the 60th anniversary of their annual fall retreat, women of Mennonite Church B.C. gathered at Camp Squeah on October 18–20. Linda Todd of Langley spoke about “Being the hands and feet of Jesus” and provided stand-up comedy on Saturday night. Posing with the birthday cake are (left to right): committee members Laurie Johnson, Lisa Dyck, Susan Barbour, Janette Thiessen and Sheri King. – Amy Rinner Waddell

LIFE IN THE 80S



Grateful for community

An interview with Mabel and Walter Paetkau

By Amy Rinner Waddell

Mabel and Walter Paetkau of Abbotsford, ages 91 and 89 respectively, met as university students in Edmonton. They were married in 1960 and raised two sons.

At different points, Mabel was a registered nurse, homemaker, director of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) B.C. Refugee Program and a Government of Canada Refugee Board member.

Walter did service work with the General Conference Mennonite Church and MCC out of Abbotsford. He was founder and executive director of Abbotsford Community Service (now Archway Community Service) from its inception in 1968 until his retirement in 2000.

The Paetkaus were founding members of Abbotsford Mennonite Fellowship, which disbanded in 2010, and now attend Langley Mennonite Fellowship.

What is your earliest memory of church?

Walter: A plain building in the farming village of Rosemary, Alberta, where going to church was part of the family lifestyle. It was a vibrant community, and everybody just went [to church]. If you

didn't go, you were noticed.

Mabel: A large white building across the street from our family's favourite friends, and Sunday school in the small town of Duchess, Alberta.

What is your best memory of church?

Walter: Young people's activities in the early years. We sang, had choir night, played games. We went on outings to the Badlands and had Sunday school picnics and worship services in the evolving years.

Mabel: Seeing friends. Singing out of a big black hymnal—an "Old" Mennonite church, so a cappella singing with shape notes.

What is your most difficult memory of church?

Walter: Leaving a former congregation—Olivet Mennonite Church. It took me over a year to adjust to the idea of starting our own house church, and we had a nice nucleus of people to start.

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

Walter: Reverend David P. Neufeld, a Rosemary farmer who was lay pastor and conference leader (and later pastored Olivet). He inspired my interest in conference. [Also,] John Unrau, University of Alberta professor, for opening his home to student discussions and giving leadership to the fledgling Edmonton congregation. And Maurits Vanderveen, welfare supervisor in Abbotsford, providing community development insights and leadership. That led me from [church] conference service work to community service work.

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

Walter: "The Love of God," a favourite song from when I grew up.

What do young people not understand about old age?

Walter: The gradual slowing down of physical and mental health.

Mabel: I have lots of good experiences in life but little memory. It kind of sank in our mid-eighties. It's all supposed to happen, but you're not necessarily told about this.

MCEC reviews 67 church annual reports

By Madalene Arias

What is the hardest thing about getting old?

Walter: A loss of energy. As we get older, we have to adjust to a new reality in terms of pace and stamina. I'm not as vibrant as I was.

Mabel: A poor memory, weaker sight and weaker hearing.

What is the best?

Walter: Being able to live in our own home, doing yard work, enjoying basically good health, having a network of family and friends and people willing to help care for us as needed.

Mabel: A lovely family, a place to call home and have friends visit. We've gotten to know many international people. We feel good about the community and have lots of good friends and neighbours, many international.

What do you wish someone would have told you about aging earlier in life?

Walter: The stages, realities and challenges of growing older. With most of us who age, we now pay less attention to dogma and creeds. This is why, for me, living the Jesus way is a way to simplify life. I would no longer argue at length about the creeds; we can discuss things and not take offense. Everybody's responsible for their own self; we don't have to be right.

Mabel: And we don't have to be wrong!

If you had one chance at a sermon, what would it be about?

Walter: "Love as you are loved." Right now, the world is in such turmoil; I would address the subject of [everyone] living together.

Mabel: Relationships with other people. Refugee work. My garden! ●

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada invited congregations to share their annual reports with regional church staff in order to improve understanding of how MCEC can better support congregations and pastors, and also identify trends in giving and congregational activities.

Sixty-seven of 108 MCEC congregations shared their annual reports with the regional church, allowing MCEC to compile a list of themes and trends in an executive summary.

Ann L. Schultz, interim executive team leader of MCEC, stated in an email to *Canadian Mennonite*: "What is most helpful for congregations to know now is that they are not alone... We have already heard from some congregations that this report has made them realize that some of their challenges and joys are being shared by other congregations ... this has been validating."

Below are some excerpts of the executive summary which was shared in the October 4 "MC Connect" newsletter.

Finances

"Despite some year-over-year fluctuation at the local congregational level ... the overall data reveals stability in both revenues and expenses. The real challenge arises when considering the impact of historically high levels of inflation."

Pandemic

"[T]he COVID-19 pandemic altered congregational life and continues to impact programming and other ministries, specifically in the area of incorporating electronic technologies.... Some of the programs that were lost during the pandemic have re-emerged, while others were

permanently lost or altered as they restarted. Programming for youth and children ... significantly decreased in the time following the pandemic. In select congregations where youth involvement has been high, the youth are engaged and are choosing baptism."

Service and Outreach

"Over the last five years, there has been more of a prioritization on caring for one another within the congregation."

Peace and Justice

"The most commonly named peace and social justice concerns include creation care, Indigenous-Settler reconciliation, and affordable housing. These were most commonly expressed in the context of internal education and discussions rather than active mission and service."

Visioning

"Many congregations have engaged in visioning work in the last five years, noting a desire to be intentional about shaping the path forward."

Land and facilities

"Some congregations noted that they are using their facilities to a lesser extent and [have] sought creative ways to use their resources."

Connections

"The annual reports noted the importance of connections: grieving families desiring connections with their pastors; developing activities to support intergenerational connections; and finally, pastors noted their desire to connect with the regional church, as they cherish the feeling they are a part of a network." ●

Chinese pastors tour Canada

By A. S. Compton

Four Chinese pastors shared about the church in their home country at a “Lunch and Learn” event hosted by Mennonite Church Eastern Canada in Kitchener, Ontario, on October 29.

The pastors requested that their names not be used.

Churches in China are either registered with the government or are house churches, which operate outside the government’s knowledge. Some churches

messages that China needs.

Jeanette Hanson worked in China for more than 20 years and is now director of International Witness for Mennonite Church Canada. Hanson, who travelled with the Chinese pastors to locations in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and B.C. this fall, said Mennonites were in China as early as 1909. Over the years, they built and supported hospitals and schools.

When China reopened in 1980, Mennonites started the first non-governmental exchanges. These exchanges grew, and many relationships between Chinese and North American Mennonites developed. The pandemic brought an end to these programs.

The pastors said the church is not easily accepted in Chinese society. Many of the encounters Chinese people have with the church are with fundamentalist missionaries. When a person

becomes a Christian in that context, they are expected to give up their own culture; they are taught that Chinese culture is evil and they are expected to do things such as cover up their dragon art.

A commonly believed rumour in China is that many of the leaders of the Tiananmen Square demonstration fled to America and became pastors. Whether or not this is true, this kind of rumour fuels government distrust of churches and pastors.

These kinds of associations with Christianity make it more difficult for the church to be accepted in society. Growth of the church has slowed significantly from the 1980s and ’90s. Some say growth has stopped altogether.

MC Canada relates closely with global companions in 15 countries, including China. ●



A young Chinese woman teaches an Amish woman to use chopsticks during an exchange program.

are able to operate partly within legal bounds and partly underground.

The visiting pastors said that laws and attitudes towards churches in China have changed significantly in the past five years. The Chinese government forbids Sunday school for children. If a church is found breaking this law, it is shut down, and the pastor risks arrest.

One pastor who spoke at the event attended Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Indiana. He said that when he encountered Anabaptist theology, he felt he had found his spiritual home; it made sense in a way other spiritual training had not.

The pastors see the Anabaptist faith tradition as well-suited to the context of church in China. They believe that teaching of non-violence, forgiveness, patience and simple living are powerful

Staff transition



For the next 10 months, Evan Bueckert will be at the helm of youth ministry in Saskatchewan.

Bueckert, 30, is half-time associate pastor at Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon. He steps into the quarter-time role after Kirsten Hamm-Epp left at the end of August.

“I’m excited to be working with youth, and I hope they are excited to get to know me,” he said.

Bueckert studied biblical and theological studies at Canadian Mennonite University and worked at Rosthern’s Mennonite Nursing Home before pastoring at Mount Royal. He has been working with the congregation’s youth and young adults since last July.

Bueckert will plan MC Sask’s MegaMenno youth event, lead the Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization and help coordinate planning for the youth gathering at Mennonite Church Canada’s Gathering 2025 in Kitchener, Ontario, next July.

Bueckert recognizes the challenge of nurturing deep relationships with today’s youth.

“How do we pull them into a connection that is within our physical space, when it’s so much easier and takes so much less time to just jump on a computer and be with your peer group?”

He adds, “What I can do is try to make youth programming at Mount Royal, and now across our province, as inviting, interesting and desirable as possible.”

MC Sask is currently reviewing youth ministry programming.

“That is, how MC Sask can support ministry in congregations and how we do things as a body together,” said Len Rempel, MC Sask executive minister.

“We do want to continue the programs that have been established while the review takes place, but felt that hiring an interim youth minister allows for the freedom to respond to the result of the review moving forward,” he said.

Bueckert started his position on October 10.

Investment in youth summit pays off

Mennonite World Conference release

“Investing in young adults is a key way to move forward. Mennonite World Conference is the best way I can imagine to do that,” said Doug Klassen, executive minister of Mennonite Church Canada and the North America representative on MWC’s Executive Committee.

MC Canada is putting its money where its mouth is, sending one official representative from each of its five regional churches to the Global Youth Summit (GYS).

The practice started with the 2022 GYS in Indonesia. The national church gives each region \$1,000 toward the cost of their delegate. It’s up to the region to raise the rest.

Each GYS delegate is assigned the task of surveying young people in their country and writing a report on the results.

They ask their peers why some young people choose to invest time and energy in the work of the church, and why some young people are leaving. They also ask about leadership and barriers

to leadership, as well as which sensitive topics churches face and how conflicting ideas are managed in the church.

With a delegate for each region collecting answers according to their various strengths, MC Canada’s GYS report in 2022 was more representative of the country’s diversity.

After participating in GYS, the five delegates reported insights into the church’s challenges that neither Doug Klassen nor other leaders had named yet.

They also brought back energy to engage their local church.

“Sometimes, all it takes is a captivating event or experience to bump a trajectory by one notch for a young adult to see ‘maybe there is room for the church,’” said Klassen.



Participants at the 2022 Youth Summit.

Doug Klassen wishes for as many young people as possible to encounter the deep faith found in the global church and to broaden their understanding “beyond familiar Eurocentric stories.”

“To expose young adults to the global church is one of my highest priorities in this role,” he said. ●



Photo gallery

Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden, Ontario, celebrated its 200th anniversary in September with a bus tour, hymn sing, display of artefacts, comforter knotting, filling of relief buckets (pictured) and a celebratory service. The congregation was organized in 1824 by Amish Mennonite immigrants. Services were held in homes until 1884/5 when two meetinghouses were erected, one at Steinmann’s Corner in Baden and the other near St. Agatha, Ontario. Services alternated between locations until 1957, when separate congregations were established. Sources: SMC, GAMEO

Rockway solar project generates imperfect hope

By A. S. Compton

An array of 875 solar panels now sits atop the roof of Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ontario. Installation was completed in mid-October by VCT Group, with connection to the power grid expected by December.

The panels are owned by CED, an alternative energy co-op. After 20 years, Rockway, which was not

required to make a capital investment, will own the panels. The project serves as a proof-of-concept for CED, which expects an unprecedented increase in demand for electricity over the next decade.

According to the CED website, the 500-kilowatt project “will produce enough clean electricity to cover 100 percent of Rockway’s energy needs for decades to come.” Power will go straight into the grid, and Rockway will buy power back at a slightly discounted rate.

Climate justice isn’t a new conversation for Rockway. The school installed a handful of solar panels 12 years ago. Other green initiatives at Rockway have included recycling drives, waste awareness projects, music videos, gardening, a canoe trip to clean up garbage, tree planting and a composting campaign that fed a pig.

Data management classes will work with data from the solar project, and a counter in the school will show students how much power is being created.

Sara Wahl, Rockway’s head of computer sciences, said discussions about climate



Aerial image of Rockway’s roof covered with 875 solar panels.

justice regularly occur in the classroom in the same way that faith informs all subjects. “Climate action is very similar,” she said. “It’s a view of the world. It’s a way to be in the world.”

That said, Wahl has recently changed her approach to climate education.

“I used to think educating on the problem was my job,” said Wahl, “but now I’ve learned I have to give [students] hope—all that negative talk about the problem blew out that flame of hope.”

Wahl adds, “[We’re] building a culture of how this is a thing to do.”

Alyssa Panda has never known a world without climate change. Panda, a grade 12 student at Rockway, said climate anxiety is very real.

There’s significant apathy, Panda said, among youth. Some believe the world is falling apart, so why even try. Panda says some think the only solution is to go to a different planet.

At the same time, the benefits of solar energy dim when the mining of materials required for the panels is taken into account. (Those interviewed are not aware of where the minerals for the

Rockway panels were mined.)

In their book *So We & Our Children May Live*, Sheri Hostetler and Sarah Augustine push for a thorough analysis of green energy. “Many renewable energy industries continue to follow an extractive, colonizing logic; accumulation and perpetual economic growth are still desired outcomes. We must look beyond green growth. We need ecological justice and right relationship... to reduce our overall consumption of energy and of all resources.”

Rockway’s principal, Josh Hill, said, “Imperfect solutions move us closer to our goals.” He added that many students come from privilege, and conversations on overconsumption would be the next step, not one they have taken yet. “How do we encourage one another to live more simply? For lots of folks that might seem far off and not possible now.”

But Panda said, “I’m a theatre kid. Improv has one rule: *yes, and...* So my answer is: yes, and what can we do moving forward? That thought of the solar panels existing is the ‘yes.’ The ‘and’ has started putting itself in people’s minds.” ●



A tour group gathers at the junction of the Rat and Red rivers, where the first Mennonite settlers landed in Manitoba 150 years ago.

Tours visit Mennonite reserves

By Mike Thiessen

An October 10 tour of the Mennonite East Reserve began at the point where the Rat River meets the Red River, about 25 kilometres south of Winnipeg. At that place, in August 1874, 67 Russian Mennonite families arrived on the SS International.

The tour, organized by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS) to coincide with the 150th year of Mennonite habitation in Manitoba, brought 40 people to several sites on the land granted to Mennonites as the “East Reserve.” The tour was led by local historian Ernie Braun and Conrad Stoesz, who serves as archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Archives and chair of MMHS.

The second stop was the site of the Shantz Immigration Sheds, a few kilometres south of Niverville. Tour leaders provided a primer on the sheds, which were built in 1874 by Jacob Schantz as holding facilities for Mennonite families while they waited to settle the surrounding farmland.

After a quick loop of the town of Niverville and its Mennonite attractions, the tour proceeded to the Chortitz Heritage

Church, about 10 kilometres west of Steinbach, for lunch. The church, along with its cemetery across the road, are all that remain of the town that was once the de facto capital of the East Reserve.

As group members ate their meal in the church, Braun spoke about the history of the building and the area. After looking around the cemetery after lunch, the group headed off to the Schoensee Cemetery.

That cemetery is located approximately five kilometres northeast of Grunthal, alongside the driveway of a farmyard, fenced off from a cattle pasture around it.

The final stop on the East Reserve tour was the site of the former village of Bergfeld, southwest of Grunthal. Bergfeld was seen as an “absolute last resort” for Mennonite farmers, given the quality of the land. The village itself was home to various settler cultural groups, none of which stayed much longer than a year. Today, the site—a small tallgrass semicircle accessible by walking through a farmer’s field—juts out onto an enormous tract of commercial farmland.

There, Braun discussed the village’s

practice of *kouagel*, a communitarian design wherein every member of the village received equal portions of farmland, pasture and brush, thus providing the community members with equal opportunity, regardless of where they were situated. Stoesz went on to tell us about the *brandordnung* mutual aid system. In the event of a disaster such as a fire or a storm, community members who had suffered damage or loss of some sort had their properties assessed. Those who had not been affected were also assessed and subsequently taxed based on the assessments, all of which funds went to those whose properties had been damaged.

There was a general sense of enlightened satisfaction as those on the tour said goodbye to one another at the end of the day, having learned something about themselves and their history. A similar tour of the West Reserve took place on October 22. ●

Mike Thiessen is a photographer and writer from Winnipeg.

Rockway
Mennonite Collegiate
A SMALL SCHOOL FOR A BIG WORLD

Grades 7-12
BOOK YOUR TOUR TODAY!

admissions@rockway.ca

Earn a Doctor of Ministry in Leadership

Shape your learning plan around your goals and gain expertise in key competencies!

Learn more: ambs.ca/dmin

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

CMU | CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY

Where faith and relationships matter

Small university
Big opportunities

cmu.ca/admissions

RJC High School
Grades 10-12
rjc.sk.ca
Apply Now!

APPLY NOW grebel.ca/futurestudents

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO Conrad Grebel University College

A Small School. Doing BIG things.

WESTGATEMENNONITE.CA

WESTgate
CONSERVATIVE

SEMILLA
SEMINARIO CASAS CASA EMAÜS

BUILDING Community ACROSS BORDERS

Life is enriched through connection, understanding, and shared purpose.

Discover Guatemala, a place where hope thrives, the Reign of God in the midst of adversity.
Experience Guatemala's complex history, rich culture, stunning beauty, and global interconnection, through a peace church lens.

CASAS, SEMILLA's Central American Study and Service Program, invites your adult or youth group for a custom, all-inclusive learning tour.

Contact Us :
direccioncasas@semillagt.org
semillagt.org

SCAN ME

British Columbia

Dec. 7 & 8: Advent Vespers with Abendmusik Choir, 7:30 p.m. (7) Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, Abbotsford. (8) St. Philip's Anglican Church, Vancouver. Donations to Menno Hall, UBC.

Saskatchewan

Dec. 1: A Very Shekinah Christmas with Music by Golden Hour, 3 p.m., Shekinah.
Dec. 4: Youth Farm Bible Camp annual Christmas fundraising supper, 5-7 p.m.
Dec. 7: Celebrate long-time camp manager Jeff Schellenberg, 5 p.m. at Shekinah. RSVP to info@campvalaqua.com
Nov. 30: Christmas Market in Marpeck Commons at CMU, 1-7 p.m., Winnipeg.
Jan. 12: MC Sask Townhall meeting, Eyebrow.
Feb. 2: MC Sask Townhall meeting, Swift Current.
March 7-8: MC Sask Gathering (Annual Delegate Sessions), RJC high school and Rosthern Mennonite Church.

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

Manitoba

Nov. – Dec. 21: No Place Like Home – Beyond the Walls art exhibit at MHC Gallery, Winnipeg.
Dec. 1: First Advent Concert by Soli Deo Gloria and orchestra, performance of Magnificat – John Rutter *Es ist ein Kind geboren* – J.S. Bach, 7 p.m., First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

Ontario

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 at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg.
Jan. 10-11: *Bonhoeffer: Cell 92*, a Cinematic Theatre Production, 7 p.m., Great Hall, Conrad Grebel, Waterloo.

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

Inspiring Devotionals

Just released: Two original books of inspiring Christian devotionals. *Authentic & Courageous, 100 Daily Boosts for a Woman's Soul* and *Positive & Courageous, 100 Daily Pillars for a Man's Soul*. By George & Kathy (Bartel) Watson. Get an inspiring copy today. Available on Amazon.

New to Montreal, Join Us

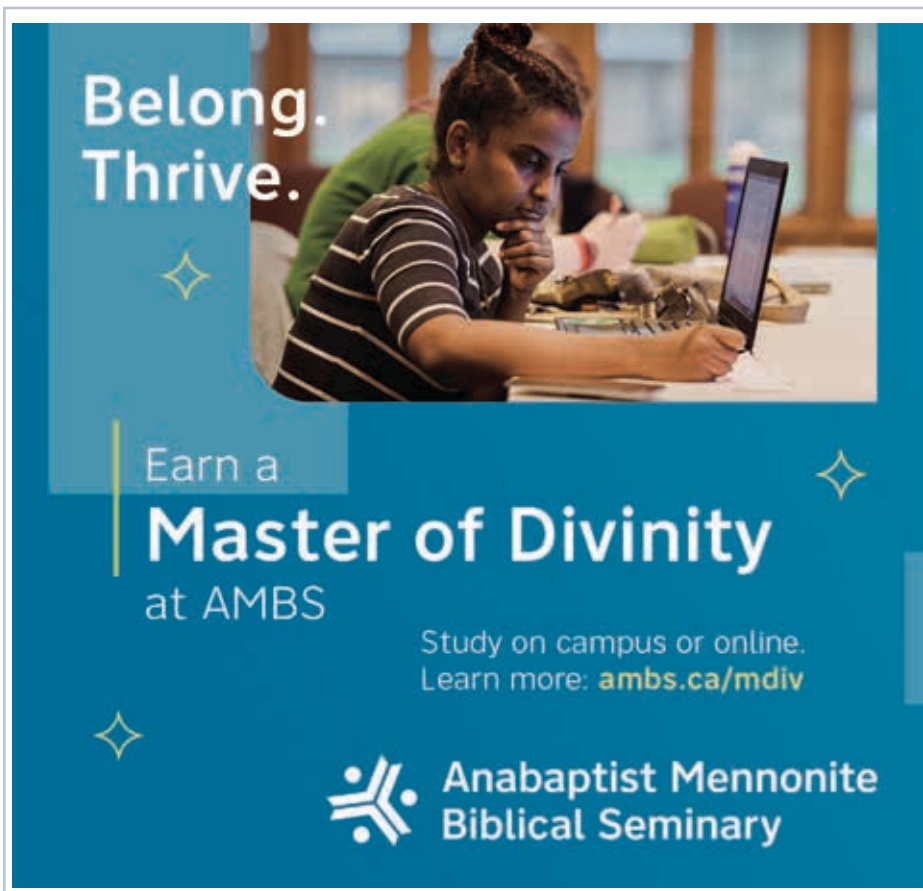
Located in the heart of Montreal, within walking distance of three universities, Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal is an Anabaptist, affirming congregation. Check us out: mfmtl.org/about-us.html.

Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
February	January 8
March	February 4

Advertising Information

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

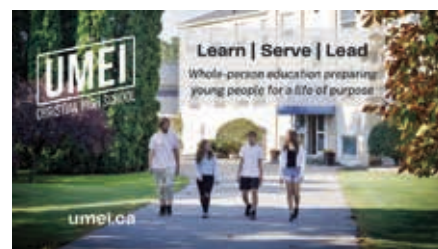


Belong. Thrive.

Earn a **Master of Divinity** at AMBS

Study on campus or online. Learn more: ambs.ca/mdiv

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary



UMEI
 UNIVERSITY OF MENNONITE EDUCATION IN ISRAEL


Learn | Serve | Lead
 Whole-person education preparing young people for a life of purpose

umei.ca



MENNONITE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

Gr. 9-12 HIGH SCHOOL



Integrating sound academic learning with growth in character, faith and service to God.

MSCS
 MENNONITE SIMONS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

— AN EDUCATION 4LIFE —

403.521.8748 | 7969 Elstos Drive SW Calgary, AB T2H 4Y7 | mennoniteschools.ca



FaithStory

Daniel Tesfatsion shows his son his book, written in Tigrinya, Train Up a Child in the Way He Should Go. His second book, Wisdom Has Built Her House, will be published in early 2025.

With God, all things are truly possible

By Daniel Tesfatsion

I am honoured and delighted to share my faith journey and to witness to the grace and love of Christ in my life. I am a proud Eritrean-Canadian who has called Canada home for eight years. I am a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, grounded in the teachings and love of my Saviour. I live daily to reflect his purpose. I am blessed with a wonderful wife and am the father of four incredible children who bring joy and inspiration into my life. I am employed full-time with the YMCA and am deeply committed to my faith community, Shalom Worship and Healing Centre in Kitchener, Ontario.

I always believed in God, but it wasn't until I sought to deepen my relationship with him through prayer, Bible study, and service that I truly felt his presence.



One moment that stands out was a church retreat where I had uninterrupted time to pray and reflect. During that retreat, I felt a sense of peace and clarity I hadn't experienced before.

Immersing myself in scripture, sermons and life-changing testimonies has profoundly deepened my relationship with God. This has also allowed me to experience his love, guidance and presence in ways I never imagined. As I journey with God, I continually find my faith strengthened, my heart transformed, and my understanding of his purpose becoming clearer. Volunteering to help refugees through our church has also brought me closer to God.

One of the most defining moments of my life was a time when it felt like

everything was falling apart. In that moment, I turned to prayer and felt God's presence more strongly than ever before. That experience completely reshaped how I saw faith—it was no longer just something I believed but something I lived and relied on.

I have witnessed some of the most daunting and seemingly insurmountable challenges—ones that could never be resolved through human strength alone—miraculously overcome by the grace and intervention of the Almighty God. These experiences remind me that with God, all things are truly possible. Being involved with Shalom Church has been an ongoing influence. The fellowship, the way we care for each other and our shared worship have continuously nurtured my faith.

So many people feel anxious about the future; I want to encourage them to lean into their faith. There is peace in knowing

that God is in control, and that we don't have to have all the answers. Nothing can replace the unique and sovereign position of God in our lives. While money, technology, fame and power may hold significant allure, promising satisfaction and success, they are ultimately temporary. As we navigate life's complexities, it is essential to remember that nothing can take God's place. He is the source of hope, joy and peace. It is through our faith in him that we can find meaning and direction.

I also feel led to share the power of community. Being part of Shalom Church has taught me that faith is something we should walk in together. It strengthens us to be there for one another. God has placed within each of us a unique gift, one meant not only to bless our own lives but to be shared with others. This divine gift is a call to service, an opportunity to uplift, support, and empower those around us. As we offer our gifts to others, we also open our hearts to receive the gifts they have to share, creating a beautiful cycle of giving and receiving that reflects the love and grace of God. Together, we fulfill our purpose, building a stronger, more compassionate community.

One of my ongoing struggles has been maintaining trust in God's timing. There have been moments in my life when I wanted answers or solutions immediately; when they didn't come, I felt discouraged. I've learned that sometimes God's "no" or "wait" is a part of his bigger plan. Even though I still struggle with patience, I am learning to surrender to God's will. I have always believed that when God grants the desires of our hearts, it is a divine gift. However, I've come to understand that when God chooses to say no, this, too, is an act of love. In his wisdom, that "no" is not a denial but a form of protection, shielding us from what we cannot foresee. Whether granting our wishes or withholding them, God is always working for our good, offering guidance and shelter.

Another struggle has been with doubt. Even though I believe in God, sometimes challenges make me question whether things will really work out. Sharing this concern with others helps me remember that faith doesn't mean the absence of

doubt—but pushing through it.

I'm excited to continue to grow in my relationship with God and to discover what he has planned for me. I know that as I trust God more and continue serving through the church, I will see more of his work in my life and in the lives of others. I am also excited about the impact we are making in our community, especially with refugee support, knowing our efforts help others feel the love of God.

I am also beyond excited to see my book finally published. It brings me such joy to think of how it will reach people's hands, guiding them towards the wisdom that comes from the fear of the Lord. I truly believe that through its words, readers will be inspired to grow in their reverence for God, discovering the deep understanding and insight that only comes from walking in his ways. My hope and prayer is that this book will serve as a vessel for transformation, leading many into a deeper relationship with the Lord. ●

Daniel Tesfatsion attends Shalom Worship and Healing Centre in Kitchener, Ontario.

**Study the Bible.
Seek wisdom.
Nurture your faith.**

MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

uwaterloo.ca/theological-studies

**Conrad Grebel
University College**

CANADIAN MENNONITE

canadianmennonite.org

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

Regional correspondents

B.C.: Amy Rinner Waddell
Prairies: Katie Doke Sawatzky
Eastern Canada: pending

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



Funded by the
 Government
 of Canada



ISSN 1480-042X

"I am especially aware of how many old-time Christians are looking into the dark right now. Attendance is down; debt is up. Plenty of smaller churches are closing or at least putting their buildings up for sale. All the divine energy seems to be going to the southern hemisphere, leaving the old-timers up north with a bad case of solar affective disorder. Learning to walk in the dark is an especially valuable skill in times like these—or maybe I should say remembering how to walk in the dark, since people of faith have deep pockets of wisdom about how to live through long nights in the wilderness."

— BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR, *LEARNING TO WALK IN THE DARK*

PHOTO: RDNE/PEXELS.

VOLUME 28 ISSUE 14

**CANADIAN
MENNONITE**

202-50 Kent Avenue
Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1

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

PM40063104 R09613