

CANADIAN MENNONITE

May 2024 Volume 28 Number 7

What is
the **Essence** of
Anabaptism?



MARRIED IN 15
REHOBOTH CHURCH JOINS MCEC 18
RAISING THE STEAKS 22

Risking introspection

WILL BRAUN



I recently met someone who is new to Anabaptism after decades in other churches. He was unrestrained and exuberant about the distinctive gifts that

Anabaptist churches can offer young people in our society.

I could have spoken with him for hours about Anabaptist values.

At the same time, some discussions of Anabaptist identity feel tired and self-absorbed.

With that risk in mind, this issue of the magazine explores the essence of Anabaptism (pages 9, 12-19). We do so with one hope and five caveats.

The hope is that discussion of our identity can strengthen our witness in the world, as opposed to just making us feel good about ourselves.

Caveat 1: There's no one answer. We're presenting many perspectives. This is in keeping with Anabaptist notions of the priesthood of all believers.

For the most part, we have sought the particular views of people who were not born into Anabaptist churches.

Caveat 2: Our particular brand of Mennonites are not the centre of the Anabaptist universe. "*Canadian Mennonite*" and "Mennonite Church Canada" are presumptuous names to the extent they imply we are *the* publication for Mennonites in Canada or *the* conference of Mennonites or Anabaptists in Canada.

I'm curious how the Amish, Hutterites and other Anabaptist groups would define the core of Anabaptism.

Caveat 3: Surnames pose a challenge. For those of us with genetic ties to early generations of Anabaptists—and surnames to prove it—it can be a challenge to truly see more recent adopters of Anabaptism as something other than a different class of Anabaptists. May God help us.

I suggest that surname Mennonites need to rigorously examine our history, repent of that which requires repentance, and claim that which we discern to be of God. Let us hold tightly to the good with one hand and use the other hand to reach out with profound openness to the broad, beautiful Anabaptist world. If the legacies we inherit turn our hearts toward others, they are a gift. If they narrow our hearts, they become a curse.

Caveat 4: Anabaptism is one of many traditions within the Church. If we look at our strengths, we must also ask what we lack. What can we learn from others?

As one example, I believe the monastic, contemplative and mystic strains of Catholicism and the Eastern church can complement our practicality.

Caveat 5: Beware of self-aggrandizement. I recall my mom saying, "Guard your strengths." Emphasis on peace can become destructive avoidance of critical underlying questions. Simplicity can become stinginess. Community cohesion can become closedness. A penchant for practical service can sideline the work of inner transformation.

These caveats stated, our hope, again, is that exploration of the essence of Anabaptism can help us live out our calling to bring love to the world.

We intend to revisit the question of Anabaptist values next year—the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism—with insights from around the globe, from a range of Anabaptist traditions and from some Anabaptist-adjacent thinkers.

On the inside back cover you'll see our latest addition, "Faith Story." With this regular item, we'll share stories of faith from among readers. If you wish to testify to transformation in your life, or if you know someone whose story has opened something in your heart, please be in touch with us.

Finally, part of me longs for the pre-screen era, while another part is glued to a screen. Perhaps you can relate. *CM* faces this dilemma as well.

We are committed to a print magazine—rest assured. We also want to reach out to the digital crowd.

As we now offer the print magazine monthly, we will fill in the gaps with current web content and concise weekly emails containing timely news and behind-the-scenes reflections. Subscribers now have three options. A: to receive the magazine in both print and PDF formats, plus the new weekly emails. B: to receive the magazine in PDF format plus weekly emails (no print magazine). C: to receive only the print magazine.

If you want A or B, contact Lorna at office@canadianmennonite.org with your preferred choice. If we don't hear from you, your current subscription arrangement will continue. ☺



Funded by the
Government
of Canada

ISSN 1480-042X



ABOUT THE COVER

Photo by Diego Gonzalez/Unsplash.

15 Married in

Nicole Weber, a Chinese woman who married into a Swiss Mennonite family, talks about desserts, contentment and a quest for deep connection.

18 Rehoboth among five churches joining MCEC

Madalene Arias speaks to Paulos Berhe, of Rehoboth Inner Healing Church, a Toronto church happy to come under the Mennonite umbrella.

22 Raising the steaks

Aaron Epp recaps the CM online event during which two vegans and a cattle rancher discussed food decisions.

31 Running toward Jesus

To start our new "Faith Story" item, former United Church minister Wendy Rankin shares her story of conversion.

Regular features:

4 What in the World

6 Readers Write

7 Milestones

27 Calendar

29 Classifieds

12 What is the essence of Anabaptism?

From France to rural Saskatchewan, 19 people share their thoughts on what constitutes the core of Anabaptism.

8 Learning unity

Yoel Masyawong

9 Am I Mennonite?

Troy Watson

10 To talk about God

Anika Reynar

11 Deeper Communion responses

Ryan Dueck, Cindy Wallace, Justin Sun

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One-year Subscriptions

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

Contact: office@canadianmennonite.org

Send general submissions to:

submit@canadianmennonite.org

Letters to: letters@canadianmennonite.org

Calendar items to: calendar@canadianmennonite.org

Milestones to: milestones@canadianmennonite.org

Published by **Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service**.

Chair: Kathryn Lymburner (board@canadianmennonite.org)

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Other members: Mary Barg, Tim Miller Dyck, Lois Epp, Arthur Koop, Donna Schulz, Brenda Suderman, Alex Tiessen

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

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

Publications mail agreement no. 40063104 Registration no. 09613

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





What in the World



Sweet by and by

Six in 10 Canadians believe in life after death. According to a recent Angus Reid poll, this is true for 97 percent of evangelicals, 87 percent of Muslims, 67 percent of Catholics and 40 percent of Jews.

Photo: Igor Mashkov/Pexels



Sabbath politics

Catholic bishops in Angola are concerned about reports of citizens being forced to take part in political party activities on days of worship. Many locals attend the party activities out of fear of victimization or reprisal from authorities and local party functionaries. Source: Vatican News

Photo: F. H. Mira/WikiCommons



Bishops, chief sign covenant

The Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc (Kamloops First Nation) and Catholic bishops from Vancouver and Kamloops signed a Sacred Covenant at an Easter Sunday ceremony. Work on the Covenant, which includes a commitment to increased access to historical church records, began after discovery of suspected graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in 2021. Source: Catholic Register

Photo: Michael Swan/Flickr

50
YEARS AGO
Mennonite Reporter, April 1, 1974

Relief sale
Toronto — The Ontario Government has decided that the proceeds from the Mennonite relief auction sale will henceforth be subject to the seven percent provincial sales tax.
Revenue Minister Arthur Meen said in the past it has been possible to turn "a blind eye" to charitable causes such as the auction. But since proceeds have grown to such large proportions—from \$31,000 in 1967 to nearly \$100,000 last year—the government must now enforce the sales tax act.



Apolitical Bible

Donald Trump wants supporters to buy the “God Bless the USA Bible,” which includes the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. As per godblesstheusabile.com, this Bible is the only Bible endorsed by Trump and the only one inspired by the U.S. anthem, though it is “not political and has nothing to do with any political campaign.”

Photo: godblesstheusabile.com



US views on Gaza

According to the Pew Research Center, 38 percent of Americans think Israel’s conduct in the Gaza war has been “acceptable,” but only 22 percent think it will make Israelis more secure. Fifty-seven percent “express some sympathy for both Israelis and Palestinians.”

Photo: Anthony Crider/Flickr



Furry funeral

The *Washington Post* reports that the nascent field of animal chaplaincy is growing. It involves providing funerals for pets, support for bereaved pet owners and care for veterinarians. Animal chaplain Sarah Bowen says her work is about “deep systemic and existential questions about our relationships with other species.”

Photo: Richard Brutyo/Unsplash



Sacrilegious socks

The head of the Malaysian convenience store chain KK Super Mart could be jailed for up to a year for selling socks with the word “Allah” on them. Use of the term by non-Muslims in the majority Muslim country is contentious. Source: BBC

A moment from yesterday



Henry P. Friesen (left), Jacob K. Klassen and Heinrich H. Neufeld are pictured at the annual meeting of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in St. Catharines, Ontario, in July 1962. During the sessions, leaders “wrestled with division in the churches.” In his address, Friesen said the presenting issues included leadership, language and church regulations, but the deeper reasons for division were weak Christians, jealousy, envy, pride, inactive members and unconverted church members.

Text credit: Conrad Stoesz

Photo credit: Rudy Regehr, Conference of Mennonites in Canada photo collection



archives.mhsc.ca

✉ Taxing ideas

Thanks to Ernie and Charlotte Wiens for their letter highlighting their resistance to paying war taxes (“Readers write,” March 8).

The options suggested by Conscience Canada are worthy of consideration. Option A—a declaration of conscience and an objection to paying for war—has limited consequence. Option B—a declaration of conscience accompanied by withholding/diverting military taxes—can have financial repercussions. I recall the pioneering work in this regard by people like John R. Dyck and Ernie Hildebrand.

Let me suggest a third option: Reducing one’s income or giving enough money to charities that issue receipts can eliminate the payment of all income taxes.

This could be considered a quiet protest while at the same time helping others.

RUDY FRIESEN, WINNIPEG
(CHARLESWOOD MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ Meaty thoughts

I am retired and spend much time wondering, thinking, sourcing and growing a small amount of food, and using it to prepare meals. I could identify with what Sandy Yuen said during *Canadian Mennonite’s* March 20 online event about meat.

I believe there was some agreement that factory farms are not ideal for food or the environment. I think there would be less agreement on defining what constitutes factory farming.

My unqualified definition of a factory farm is the over-feeding of animals with a few types of feed and not allowing animals on the land. Clare Martens and her family know their animals well, and the animals spend time on the pastures. I appreciate that.

My main concern is for the health of the planet in our use of the land. I believe maintaining diversity and balance of species in soil, gut and air microbiomes is ideal.

I am encouraged by what I have heard about regenerative farming with little or no tillage. Therefore, as we strive to protect the earth and maintain diversity of species, I think there is a place for small amounts of animal consumption if one chooses.

Thank you for hosting this event.

PHYLLIS MARTIN, NEW HAMBURG, ONTARIO,
(MANNHEIM MENNONITE CHURCH)

Editor’s note: Read more about this event on page 22.

✉ Blessed are the preppers

Many global analysts say we’ll soon enter a long, severe Great Depression. They cite climate change, mainly. Nothing much succeeds without suitable weather, of course. Drought, deluge, storms and so on will increase crop failures, food shortages, economic decline and other problems.

Most people have no strategy for preparing and adapting to such a near-future. On the other hand, some are taking up or increasing gardening and doing other things to improve food security. Building personal, family and group self-reliance makes sense in the face of a back-to-basics era.

Shouldn’t we be talking about all this more? To be of service to others, we must help ourselves. It’s also a matter of faith. God walks with us through thick and thin, but we must use our heads and do our part. We must face certain realities and deal with them as positively as possible.

Mennonite Church Canada and local churches could help facilitate dialogue. There are too many things to discuss and projects to do already, some may say. However, none of them will carry on if we don’t survive, or if we end up huddled in refugee camps ourselves.

I often think of Russia a century ago. Many Mennonites there ignored the gathering storm and were trampled by it. Upheaval is again upon, us and there’s no new country to run to this time.

The storm will be global, and Canada seems like it will be one of the best places to endure it. However, not without planning and effort.

I’d like to hear from others on this and I’d like *Canadian Mennonite* to embrace it as a vital, timely topic.

HOWARD BOLDT, OSLER, SASKATCHEWAN

Be in Touch

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

Corrections

In our “Church basement tribute” on page 9 of the March 29 issue, we incorrectly identified Denise Bartel as Denise Martens.

On page 33 of the same issue, we noted that Bloomingdale Mennonite Church has one junior youth. In fact, they have six junior youth and one senior youth. We apologize for the errors.

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

✉ Pax Romana and Pax Americana

The “Peace shall destroy many” feature sprang out at me (March 29). My thoughts don’t relate to Rudy Wiebe’s book but rather the peace that the Romans imposed on their subjects 2000-plus years ago.

Jesus lived under the Romans’ imposition of peace, referred to as Pax Romana. A sort of peace was established, but at great expense to the nations conquered. Jesus was one of thousands who died on crosses to maintain this peace.

The concept of nations establishing and maintaining peace through violence has not abated since that time. Today we have what could be called Pax Americana.

With its military and financial resources, the U.S. was left as the greatest and only world power after the collapse of the Soviet Union. America’s political and military leadership has felt its hegemonic position needs to be guarded at all costs to bring about world peace.

Many evangelical Christians agree, believing that America is still a Christian nation that plays an exceptional role in maintaining world peace.

I believe the Christian Church needs to give voice to the realities we experience in the world today. Many U.S. citizens, regardless of their spiritual beliefs, are voicing these concerns. We need to express our solidarity with them.

Peace can indeed destroy many.

LINDEN WILLMS, PINCHER CREEK, ALBERTA
(SPRINGRIDGE MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ A plea for movement

How can you get a drug dealer to make orderly reductions in sales and profits? In fact, how do you get them to help cure addiction and create new lives?

How can we get the fossil fuel industry, nationally and globally, to cut back production? We need alternatives for heating and transportation.

A two-plus degree Celsius rise in global average temperature would lead to troubles for human societies and for nature. We are 1.44 degrees above pre-industrial temperatures now, rising 0.18 degrees per decade recently.

There are 425 parts per million (ppm) of carbon in the atmosphere right now—a number that increases by approximately two ppm each year. At 450 ppm, the world will get to two degrees warmer and beyond.

Even if all carbon emissions were totally stopped, it would take decades for the changes to reach a stable condition. Ocean levels would rise for a century or more.

For the Second World War, the war effort required an incredible focus of work and energy across all parts and all levels of Canada and many other countries. Such a focus is needed now.

The prize is a stable future not only for future generations but also for us living in the present.

Get government and business to move. NOW.

RAY AND MARILYN HAMM, NEUBERGTHAL, MANITOBA
(ALTONA MENNONITE CHURCH)

CM MILESTONES

Births/Adoptions

Schultz—Aidan Michael (b. March 17, 2024) to Mitchell and Sean, Poole Mennonite Church, Milverton, Ont.

Yang—Yubin (b. Mar 19, 2024) to Chan Yang and Stephanie Jeong, Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship, Vancouver, BC

Deaths

Friesen—John, 80 (b. June 11, 1943; d. Dec. 30, 2023), Morden Mennonite Church, Morden, Man.

Harder—Bill, 88 (b. April 22, 1935; d. March 27, 2024), Niagara United Mennonite Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Janzen—Louise Esther Merle, 79 (b. May 21, 1945; d. Feb. 24, 2024), Morden Mennonite Church, Morden, Man.

Kerber—Lydia, 92 (b. Oct. 9, 1931; d. March 17, 2024), Bethany Mennonite Church, Virgil, Ont.

Martens—Cornelius “Cornie,” 94 (b. Aug. 16, 1929; d. Dec. 18, 2023), Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church, Rabbit Lake, Sask.

Peters—Arthur John, 89 (b. May 21, 1934, d. Feb. 25, 2024) Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, Winnipeg, Man.

Peters—Frieda (nee Schellenberg), 91 (b. Sept. 1, 1932, d. March 12, 2024), Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, Winnipeg, Man.

Give

Investigate, explore and
contemplate larger questions.

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Learning unity

Yoel Masyawong

As Christians, we are called to be in the world but not of the world. We are urged to be transformed and renewed by the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2).

Whatever the dominant culture in the world says to us is not who we are. Instead, we are a community of faith that has Jesus at the centre of our lives.

I believe that Jesus Christ came to tear down the walls that divide people, and that the Holy Spirit unites us to be one in Christ.

The intercultural church must reframe a new kind of church to which everyone belongs. It is a corporation of churches made up of people with different cultures, and it is a place where all members can bring and share communal gifts.

The vision in which I bring multicultural pastors together is to share a gift of cultures—foods, languages and, most importantly, to learn the deeper values of cultures that do not appear on the surface.

Intercultural church is a learned skill, not an automatic part of theological education in the community. The diversity within the churches is rewarding like no other place in the community, because when churches gather and worship God Almighty, we promote a new kind of church where race, ethnicity and culture no longer hinder or divide us.

Thus, the characteristic of an intercultural church requires us to sow



Photo by Caglar Oskay/Unsplash.

the intercultural seeds deep down to the core of our identity. Along with the condition of putting aside our biases, we must together start nurturing our differences and embrace the peace, love and reconciliation of Jesus Christ.

The common challenge the church faces today is the struggle to pass the faith on to the next generation. Sadly, the church community has lost its ability to draw young people and keep them in the church.

In traditional ways, often the church tends to put the young within a fence meant to protect and love. However, young people today have been growing in distinct life ethics. The virtual world

broadens their views without fences, and the church becomes ancient and rearmost in their freedom of options.

The Mennonite Church Eastern Canada intercultural volleyball tournament, held in March, is an event that creates space to engage in physical, tangible relationships and builds a bridge between the church and young people on common ground.

Through my job with the regional church, I have been blessed by walking with the pastors and leaders in our area. The richness in diversity among our churches allows for the pursuit of a true intercultural church. I say, with humility, that I have heard numerous stories of how we are a blessing to a wider church.

Let us hold hands, persevere in pursuing an intercultural church by faith, and believe that the church of Jesus Christ will stand forever:

“For through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So, then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:18-19). ✎



Yoel Masyawong is a mission associate at Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and pastor of Grace Lao Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario.

Am I Mennonite?

Troy Watson

Although I've been a Mennonite pastor for over 25 years, I'm reluctant to call myself Mennonite. For several reasons.

First, there's an ethno-cultural component to the Mennonite identity that I lack. One does not simply become Mennonite, one is born Mennonite. Plenty of Mennonites would disagree with my assessment, and there seems to be a movement to change this perception, but I don't think this is a negative thing that needs to be resolved. Distinguishing the terms Mennonite and Anabaptist would solve the issue. However, I don't really think there's an issue to begin with.

Which brings me to the second reason I'm reluctant to call myself Mennonite. I don't like labels. Labels can be useful, but when we find our identity in them, they accentuate our sense of separateness from others and intensify comparative thinking. Labels by nature create an "us" and "them" dynamic. This is why Jesus challenges us to examine what we identify with, and why Paul says finding our identity and unity in Christ is the central mystery of the Gospel.

Although I'm reluctant to call myself Mennonite, I'm enthusiastic to share how Anabaptist spirituality and Mennonite people have helped me grow and become a better human being. I have been profoundly transformed by Mennonites. Their spirituality, lifestyle, sense of community and pragmatic faith have shaped and influenced my life more than anything else, besides God, over the past 27 years. I'm quite taken with

Mennonites. I even married one, and she has opened my eyes to a way of following Christ that is as close to the real deal as I've encountered.

Mennonites have a remarkable history of loving their enemies, serving people in need, forgiving those who've wronged them and extending grace and compassion without discrimination. Most Mennonites I know are gentle, kind, self-controlled, peaceful and generous to a fault. They are like trees bearing plentiful yields of all the fruit of the Spirit, and most of them are quiet and humble about it.

When I first read about Mennonites being the "quiet in the land," I thought this was a fitting description. I also thought this was exactly the kind of Christians the world needs today. I grew up in a faith tradition that never shut up. They didn't just talk the talk, they shouted it. At everybody. When I found this faith tradition that focused on walking the walk more than talking the talk, I was instantly drawn to it. It grieves me when Mennonites are apologetic for their history of being the "quiet in the land." Yes, sometimes silence is complicity, and sometimes we need to speak up for truth, justice and give a voice to the "voiceless." Yet I can't help but wonder if part of the sacred beauty and power of the Anabaptist tradition has been their quiet example. The Gospel was given to us in the form of a story for a reason. The Mennonite story is good and powerful because it has embodied the most essential narrative technique, "show, don't tell."

This brings me to the third and most important reason I'm reluctant to call

myself Mennonite. I respect Mennonite people and their lifestyle, tradition and culture so much, I don't want to contaminate or dilute it. I want the world to see people like my wife, Tammy, her parents and the Mennonites like them, and be inspired by their faith and example. In my opinion, the more that people like me come to represent Mennonites, the less inspirational "we" become. Not because people like me are bad or inferior. I think we newbies bring much-needed gifts, qualities and perspectives to the Mennonite tribe. However, we newbies don't embody the unique strengths and qualities Mennonites have cultivated over centuries, that are sorely needed in this world, simply because we are newbies.

I appreciate the hospitality and openness Mennonites have extended to me. I feel accepted, empowered and valued in the Mennonite church. I'm profoundly grateful for the Anabaptist tradition and Mennonite people who have welcomed me, walk with me, inspire me and show me how to follow Christ more consistently. Yet I'm still not sure I'm Mennonite. This isn't a bad thing, because I don't think being Mennonite is the point. Being an authentic, loving human being, who is growing in Christ, is the point. This is what Mennonites have taught me. ☺



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


 DEEPER
COMMUNION

To talk about God


 ANIKA
REYNAR

When I started seminary three years ago, I realized I didn't know how to talk about God.

I was motivated to go to seminary because of my love for the Mennonite church. I wanted to deepen my understanding of how the church can draw people into forms of life that challenge us to transform boundaries constructed out of a fear of difference.

This desire led me to study theology in an ecumenical space where people from faith traditions different from mine would challenge my own tradition.

At Yale Divinity School, I noticed a pattern. While many of my peers spoke about their life in relation to particular images of God, I spoke about my life in relation to particular faith communities.

I shared stories of growing food alongside my neighbours who had arrived in Canada as refugees and preparing meals in the spirit of more-with-less. I recalled gatherings of friends who were present with my family in experiences of chronic pain. I spoke of walking the streets of Winnipeg to call for clean drinking water for our Treaty 3 neighbours.

Formed within the Anabaptist tradition, I learned to speak of my faith through the practices of my life. These practices offer a way of articulating God's presence in the world without speaking about God directly.

In coming to Yale Divinity School, I stepped outside the faith communities

where the grammar of life was recognized as the grammar of shared faith. In seminary, when I was asked to speak of God directly, my words failed me.

Why, I wondered, is it so hard to talk about God? Do other Mennonites struggle with this?

I began to ask. Over the last three years, in conversations with friends, mentors and leaders who are part of the Mennonite church, I've regularly posed two questions: Why are you part of the church? What does God look like or mean to you?

Repeatedly, I've heard people tell me they are drawn to church for the sense of community but are unsure how to speak about God.

Sara Wenger Shenk, in her book *Tongue Tied*, writes that "it is the discrepancy we feel between the magnetic pull of our deepest longings towards a God of love and a contrived, false God that renders us voiceless."

There are so many ways that the image of God has been distorted and contorted. God is often portrayed as one who possesses, controls and has mastery over all things. If we believe that we are made in the image of this God, then we too are tempted to relate and act in this way.

The challenge is to speak of God from places that are still burdened by a desire to control bodies, land, behaviour and longings. The challenge is to believe God will be recognizable in the midst of the given, the common and the ordinary.

As I've worked, prayed and learned alongside friends from many different faith traditions, I've come to believe that God is made visible through our everyday efforts to give voice to what

we desire, fear, trust and doubt. It is our love for each other, more than anything, that compels us to find words.

These days, in my attempts to say something about God, I reach towards the image of Woman Wisdom. She reminds me, "*Listen, for I have trustworthy things to say*" (Proverbs 8:6).

During my time at Yale, Woman Wisdom has become my companion. I recognize her in unexpected bursts of laughter, delight, playfulness and connection that interrupts places and interactions that are shaped by struggle and fear.

Wisdom invites me to speak freely about what I desire, long for, trust and doubt. This freedom is not defined by the ability to control my life, my place or my sense of God. Rather, it's a freedom that compels me to intertwine my life with the lives of others and to trust that in the vulnerability of these connections I will become more whole, more human.

Wisdom continues to remind me that community is not an end in itself. Rather, perhaps community is the place where we practice making God visible to one another as we transform places that are divided by fear into places that attend to deep human flourishing.

Does this resonate, fellow columnists and readers? How do you speak about God? What images accompany you through your desires, longings and doubts? ☞

Anika Reynar is a student of religion and environmental management at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.



Inverse

I was fascinated to read the opening lines of Anika’s article. I was struck by how my experience is almost the exact inverse of hers. Perhaps to my discredit, I did not go to seminary motivated by any great love for the church (Mennonite or otherwise) or desire for community. I was motivated by a kind of existential itch, a captivation with the question of God, meaning and what, if anything, could really be hoped for.

I did not struggle with language to talk about, or wrestle with, or agonize over God. My challenge was more in the realm of anchoring that talk in embodied communities and recognizing that while God does indeed encounter us as individuals, he has also bound us to one another in inconvenient, at times constraining, but ultimately liberating ways.

Anika ends her piece using the language of desire, longing, trust and doubt. She speaks also of a wisdom that affords the freedom to speak of these things freely. This resonates deeply with me, not least because I see all these things, and more, operating in the stories—individual and communal—radiating out from the empty tomb of the first Easter. ✎
– Ryan Dueck, pastor at Lethbridge Mennonite Church, Lethbridge, Alberta



Bedrock

I grew up in churches that talked about God as an impatient father. He was angry, jealous and omnipotent. He couldn’t stand our sinfulness, but he loved us, so he had his son killed to pay for our sins.

This way of talking about God has harmed many people, in part through the temptation Anika describes: to justify mastering, controlling and possessing by normalized angry power.

I cannot speak of God without bearing witness to that harm.

Yet against all odds, my heart still burns within me at the name of Jesus. I have learned to speak his name otherwise, through decades of listening to people, often those most familiar with weakness, who know in Jesus a God who upends all those death-dealing paradigms of power.

Jesus surprises me with weakness, with tenderness, with laughter. He eats with everybody, and he’s not even usually the host. He is angry at injustice yet also deeply inefficient. He heals, but almost never in the way I want him to.

This Jesus both comforts and unsettles. He’s not an atonement pawn but flesh and blood. Trembling for so many reasons, I speak of the God I see in him with this bedrock conviction: his love holds all things together. The world’s burning core is love. ✎
– Cindy Wallace, professor of English at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan



Unpacked

If Anika asked me what God looked like or meant to me, I wouldn’t have a solid answer. Growing up, my language for God was a jumble—caught between the cultures and communication styles of an intergenerational immigrant community. “耶和華. 天父. 耶穌,” I would hear on top of, “Yahweh. Heavenly Father. Jesus.”

Unpacking this has been a lifelong project, even as I’ve simultaneously struggled to investigate and articulate paths forward. In this way, I imagine it was not so different growing up Chinese Canadian in the 2000s as it was growing up German Canadian Mennonite in the 1950-80s.

I love that at the core of this is language *in faith communities*. Appropriately, Anika links her question of God to church. The way people talk about God is, I imagine, deeply entwined with their reasons for being part of a faith community.

Often, I see how the disconnect between the faith of generations is rooted in language, and, like Anika gets at, not just in words directly about God but in the “ordinary.” In this, I think being multilingual is a gift.

Who is God in the gaps and translations? ✎
– Justin Sun, youth pastor at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond, B.C.

What is
the **Essence** of
Anabaptism?



We asked numerous people to share three to five words that express the essence of Anabaptism for them. We also invited them to elaborate if they wished.

Personal faith. Christocentrism.
Discipleship. Community and
simplicity.
– SYLVIE KREMER, EDITOR,
CHRIST SEUL (FRENCH MENNONITE
MAGAZINE)

Serving Jesus through serving others.
– CATHERINE GITZEL, PASTOR,
THE GATHERING CHURCH, KITCHENER,
ONTARIO

Peace extremists in Jesus' name.
– JOSHUA PENFOLD, FORMER CANADIAN
MENNONITE COLUMNIST

Holistic, Jesus-centered discipleship,
rooted in community.
– RACHEL WALLACE, PASTOR,
EIGEMHEIM MENNONITE CHURCH

***Anabaptism
lives in this
rightfully tense
relationship
between
our acting and
our yielding.***

A living tradition.

I do not know that Anabaptism has an “essence,” if by that is meant a core set of beliefs or practices. For almost every conviction one could identify, there would be Anabaptists who would hold opposing convictions. Just look at the letters to the editor section of the Anabaptist magazines.

However, what holds Anabaptists together is that we share a 500-year-old tradition that is still living and breathing today. That means that it will continue to grow and change in conversation with those who came before and those who embody it in a variety of ways and in various contexts around the world.

– DAVID CRAMER, MANAGING EDITOR,
INSTITUTE OF MENNONITE STUDIES,
ASSOCIATED MENNONITE BIBLICAL
SEMINARY

Following Jesus. Love. Nonviolence. Communal.

Anabaptism focuses on Jesus. That's true of Christianity in general, of course, but Anabaptism focuses on Jesus in very particular ways: prioritizing Jesus' teachings and way of life as found in the Gospels, centering Jesus in our faith and life individually and communally such that nothing else is central, and holding allegiance to Jesus and his way of love above all other claims for our allegiance in this world.

This leads Anabaptists toward such distinctive (not unique) commitments as nonviolence even in the face of violence, voluntary service to others both within and beyond our faith community, and broader humanitarian and "social justice" efforts in the world. – MICHAEL PAHL, EXECUTIVE MINISTER, MENNONITE CHURCH MANITOBA

Following Jesus together.

For elaboration, I think the "together" piece is critical, although no less critical than the focus of our action: Jesus. Lately, I've been meditating on what Jesus meant when he said others would know us as his disciples by the way we love one another (John 13:35). Is there a way to truly follow Jesus apart from doing it in community?

Assuming the answer is "no," how does that shape the ways we work and serve together as church communities, and how we live out our faith in the current culture?

– REBECCA ROMAN, EDITOR, THE MESSENGER (EVANGELICAL MENNONITE CHURCH)

A worldwide network of peacebuilders committed by love to listen and work for justice.

– KRISTAN PAWLIKOWSKI, WINNIPEG (FORMER MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE WORKER)

Jesus is Lord! Daily discipleship. Holistic witness. Spirit-filled community. Allegiance through adult baptism.

Peace, willingness to suffer, reconciliation, evangelism and the cross are subsumed in the above categories.

– JOANNE DE JONG, CURRENTLY WORKING AT MESERETE KRISTOS SEMINARY, ETHIOPIA

The essence of Anabaptism is breaking with expected norms.

The Anabaptists saw problems with the church and, ultimately, with the way church/society was structured and reinforced. They took action that broke from what was expected of them, at great personal cost, in order to live into their morals and dream of a new way of doing church.

– STEPH CHANDLER BURNS, PASTOR WITH PASTORS IN EXILE

Everyone is welcome, and every voice matters.

What I love about the Anabaptist tradition is that it welcomes everyone. But not only do we welcome everyone, we also listen to all who we welcome.

There is no hierarchy within the Anabaptist tradition. Time served is not a prerequisite before we will listen to what someone has to say.

– JORDAN PILGRIM, PASTOR, VALLEY ROAD CHURCH, KELOWNA, B.C.

Baptizing into Christ's body of peace.

– ISAAC VILLEGAS, ORDAINED MINISTER WITH MENNONITE CHURCH USA, PHD STUDENT AT DUKE UNIVERSITY

Faith. Family. Peace. Work. Love.

– KEVIN MCCABE, ST. CATHARINES, ONTARIO

Jesus
Community
Baptism
Peace
Service
Discipleship
Yield
Family
Wholistic
Simplicity
Fellowship
Witness

Social Justice. Peacebuilding.
Mennonite.

– ISAIAS RODRIGUEZ, ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

Self-referential. Dedicated. Moralizing
minority. . . . Allowing generous room
for kindness and criticism in relation to
each word.

– ADAM ROBINSON, PASTOR, ARNAUD
MENNONITE CHURCH, ARNAUD,
MANITOBA

Family, persistence and committees.

Something I found oddly familiar in
Mennonite histories was how they
would organize meetings to discuss
how to organize a bigger meeting, trek
through Russia to have the bigger
meeting where they discussed how to
get another bigger meeting with the
czar. That doesn't happen unless you
are persistent (stubborn), good at
committees and really like the people
you live with.

– NIC GEDDERT, WINNIPEG

Volunteering to yield.

“Volunteering,” because we enter the
church and circulate our gifts within it
by choice, and because we tend to
emphasize our works, for better and
worse. “Yield,” because the thing we
volunteer to do is often to hold back
and let the same self that speaks its
“yes” now listen and follow. In the
space yielded by this *gelassenheit*, God
yields fruits. Anabaptism lives in this
rightfully tense relationship between
our acting and our yielding.

– ISAAC KUHL-SCHLEGEL, WINNIPEG

Family. Fellowship. Working for peace.

– HEATHER YANTZI, AYR, ONTARIO

Peace with the Creator. Peace with our
being. Peace with others. Peace with
creation.

Think of these four aspects of peace
as quadrants connected at the middle
by the cross of Jesus.

– REVEREND DANN PANTOJA
(INDIGENOUS NAME: LAKAN
SUMULONG), PRESIDENT AND CEO,
PEACEBUILDERS COMMUNITY, INC.,
INDONESIA

**For almost
every conviction,
there would be
Anabaptists who
would hold
opposing
convictions.**

Anabaptism for me reaches back 500
years to the Reformation, when the
Bible became more accessible to the
common person due to easier and
faster printing methods. As a result,
many young intellectuals read the Bible
and rethought the standard Catholic
doctrine. Many different reformed
groups emerged, among them Anabap-
tists, with their idea that you became a
Christian upon your confession of
faith—a personal conscious decision.

This new idea was rejected by the
Catholic church and some of the other
Reformed movements. As a result, the
re-baptizers were often persecuted for
their thinking, and this eventually
moved them to a position of not
repaying the violence they were
subjected to with further violence.

These ideas were foundational for the
subsequent Mennonite Church.

– KEN REDDIG, PINAWA, MANITOBA

Love Reconciliation Hospitality

CM FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you see as the essence of Anabaptism?
2. How can we as Anabaptists nurture our strengths without developing a sense of superiority?
3. What can Anabaptists learn from other faith traditions?
4. What are the benefits and pitfalls of having such a variety of views on the essence of Anabaptism?

-Staff

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commonword.ca/go/3542

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Married in

By A. S. Compton

“Mennonites, they love sweet things,” Nicole Weber says with a laugh. “Mennonite stores make the best desserts, and if you go to a [Mennonite] party or event and bring sweets, they will love it.”

Nicole is married to my cousin Josh. We attend the same family gatherings, and at those gatherings the dessert table is usually larger than the main dish table. Our family is Swiss Mennonite; Nicole is Chinese.

Josh, who taught English in China, introduced her to Mennonite theology and values when they met there in 2016. They have been back in Canada for over two years.

Nicole was raised by Buddhist grandparents. When she was about 20 years old, she was introduced to Christianity by Taiwanese missionaries. She was baptized at 23.

Though she is the only Christian in her family, her parents respect her choices.

When she and Josh married in 2018, they went to the International Church in Xiamen. People from about 65 different countries attended. The church was not part of a denomination, and differences in denominational backgrounds of those who attended weren't important for the most part.

Josh shared many of the fundamentals and history of Anabaptism with Nicole over the years, and when another member of the International Church called Mennonites weak, she confronted them.

“I said I think they are a group of people trying to live more like Jesus, trying to be peaceful, kind, loving, humble, content,” she recalled. “Lots of Christians in China want God to bless them with things; I see Mennonites as content.”

Nicole says key values she admires about Mennonites are their commitment to peace, the belief that everyone

is equal and the belief that God's love can bring everyone together.

During their time in Canada, Nicole and Josh have lived in one town and two small rural communities in Southwestern Ontario, attending various Mennonite churches.



Nicole and Josh Weber with their daughters. Supplied Photo.

She has observed that Mennonites accept people regardless of appearances, race, intelligence or economic standing. “They will accept you and love you because you are a person,” she says. “They will love you and let you know love from Jesus.”

Her encounters with the more traditional thinking found in some Mennonite circles have been difficult. Nicole says most people in churches here are “very nice,” but she feels that some people wonder why she is there, given that she is Chinese and everyone else is white.

Finding a church that accepts and empowers women in leadership has

been important to both Nicole and Josh, but this has been a challenge in the areas where they have lived.

Family connection, Nicole says, is one of the oddities of Mennonite communities. “They care about your background; where are your grandparents; who are you?” Her husband often works with Old Order Mennonites, and they always want to know where he belongs in the Mennonite family tree. After being gone in China for well over a decade, Josh is proud to be able to make the family connection; everyone knew his grandfather.

But Nicole is an outsider, even though married to an insider.

Mennonite families, she observes, can be very tight-knit. That's a good quality, Nicole says, but it is difficult for her and for her young daughters to make the deep connections they desire with other people when she feels like others are always committed to spending time with their siblings or at family events. Josh's only sister lives on the other side of the country. Nicole has no siblings, and the rest of her family are in China. It can be lonely.

She sees deep blessings in being raised surrounded by faith in Christ, something Josh experienced but she did not. Nicole says that for people raised in faith, prayer is often a first reaction to bad thoughts or hard situations. Not being raised with those practices, she says it can be a struggle to make prayer a first reaction to adversity.

“Some people, you just know they have peaceful minds, peaceful souls. When you talk to them you just know they love Jesus, love God,” Nicole says. “[They're] joyful,” she says of the Mennonites she is surrounded by. “That was something I did not find much in Chinese society, and even Chinese churches, they don't have that joyful or peaceful mind.” ❧

From ‘the centre of the military universe’ to central Alberta

By Aaron Epp

Debbie Bledsoe wants people to know about the beauty she sees in the Mennonite Church.

“I think people who grew up in it lose sight of what makes Anabaptism unique,” she says.

Today, Bledsoe is the pastor at First Mennonite Church in Edmonton, Alberta. But her teenage years were spent in a Nazarene church in Fayetteville—a city in North Carolina next to Fort Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg), a military base once described as “the centre of the military universe.”

Bledsoe initially felt at home in the Nazarene church, but she was

troubled when it became clear to her that church leadership believed it was not a young woman’s place to ask questions about God and scripture.

The church had a U.S. flag in front of it and held special services on Memorial Day and Independence Day. Those ties to the military increased after the 9-11 terrorist attacks.

“I remember these discussions in church around the righteousness of war—how it was our calling to essentially go to war to kill Muslims because they were against God.”

In Bledsoe’s eyes, those views didn’t match Jesus’ teachings. That

dissonance, along with her growing sense of her queerness in a church that didn’t accept LGBTQ+ folks, led

Bledsoe to stop attending the church.

Bledsoe met her now-wife, Emily, at

the church. They married in 2009 and, over the course of about seven years, tried two dozen churches in numerous denominations in their effort to find a place that affirmed their sexuality and aligned with their idea of what it means to follow Jesus.

“For a little while, we abandoned our search,” Bledsoe says. “We thought we’d have to honour God in a

private way instead of in a church.”

Things changed when Emily filled out an online quiz for fun. The quiz promised to identify the Christian denomination respondents belonged to. The quiz told Emily, “You are Mennonite,” a denomination she and Bledsoe were not familiar with.

They investigated, and the more they read, the more they were drawn to Mennonites.

“It was so powerful—kind of like finding God all over again in a way,” Bledsoe says. “It was so ground-breaking and so shocking because I’d never heard of most of these things before.”

One of the first characteristics of Anabaptism that stood out to Bledsoe was the priesthood of all believers. For someone who grew up being taught that scriptural interpretation was the domain of men in leadership, the idea that there is no spiritual divide between ministers and laity “shook the foundation of my world,” Bledsoe says.

Believer’s baptism also stood out to Bledsoe. “Finding out there were people who care about baptism as something you can choose and that changes your life made so much sense.”

Pacifism was another key characteristic that attracted Bledsoe and her wife to the Mennonite Church.

“So many people that I knew growing up—both my dad and stepdad were in the army—justified with glee and joy either their training to murder or the actual murder they had committed because Jesus called them to do it. To find that there are Christians that know the God I know and that love the Jesus I know, and don’t believe that just because we believe in Jesus we are called to kill, that was just so overwhelming.”

The couple searched the internet for an affirming Mennonite church in their area and discovered one close to their home. The congregation was led by a woman pastor, welcomed queer folks, cared for the poor and participated in community organizing—all things that appealed to the couple.

“It was like magic,” Bledsoe says. “To feel like I’m lost and I’ll never find my way home, and then I find the home is just a 10-minute drive.”

The couple joined the church in 2017. In 2020, after encouragement from her pastor and others around her, Bledsoe made the decision to study at



‘People who grew up in it can lose sight of what makes Anabaptism unique,’ says Debbie Bledsoe. Supplied photo.

Third way community

By Will Braun

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. She graduated in 2022 and moved to Alberta last year.

“I have so much energy and joy for this faith community and for this work that I have been called to, which still astonishes me every day. I can’t believe my good fortune,” she says.

“There is so much vibrancy and life and beauty in our faith structures. Sure, things get hard and we get bogged down in the weeds sometimes, but given my experiences from before—all the things I went through, all the things I was taught that were harmful—there’s so much joy in its place now.” ❧



After years of searching, Emily and Debbie Bledsoe have found a home in the Mennonite Church. Supplied photo.

If Joe Heikman had to choose a single distinctive Anabaptist value, it would be community. “That’s how I met Jesus,” he says, in community, growing up as part of a Brethren in Christ church in Pennsylvania.

He did not arrive where he is at on his own.

When I spoke with Heikman, he was preparing a series of sermons on the basics of Anabaptism for Wildwood Mennonite Church, the Saskatoon congregation he serves as pastor. The series will cover some history—Heikman loves history—and then shift to material based to some extent on Palmer Becker’s book, *What is an Anabaptist Christian?*

Heikman quotes Becker’s three-prong distillation of Anabaptism: “Jesus is the center of our faith; community is the center of our lives; and reconciliation is the center of our work.”

Jesus, community and reconciliation.

Circling back to community, Heikman notes that of Becker’s three points, community is the key for him. We find the other two—Jesus and reconciliation—through community. Heikman also notes that the Bible itself is a sort of communal endeavour.

Heikman says Becker’s three characteristics are not necessarily unique to Anabaptism, but perhaps the combination of them is.

When asked what Anabaptism has to offer the world, Heikman says he prefers to look at what we have to learn rather than what we have to offer.

He notes that Mennonites have been isolated for much of our

history, and we are “still emerging into the world” and altering our view of the world as an adversary. As such, he says we need to have a “posture of learning . . . learning to see what God is doing beyond the boundaries of church.”

“Our humility and willingness to do that might be a gift we have to offer,” he says.

Though he prefers not to start with the question of what Anabaptists have to offer, he does believe the Anabaptist emphasis on community can be a gift to the world.

He notes the tension between the Anabaptist emphasis on individual choice—going back to Anabaptist origins in adult baptism upon confession of faith—and the need to work together as community and come to faith in community. Individuality matters, and community matters.

“We do a really good job of holding on to both,” he says.

I ask if he sees a further tension between highlighting Anabaptist distinctives and the value of humility. “I struggle with that all the time,” he says, noting that we have to be willing to speak about our beliefs while also “recognizing that other traditions have something to teach us.”

Heikman says the Anabaptist experience of living with tension may, itself, be one of our valuable distinctives. We seek a “third way,” neither passive nor violent. We have experience finding ways to live together in tension. Heikman says the ability to find a third way is important in a world of polarization and binaries. ❧

Rehoboth Inner Healing Church among five churches joining MCEC

By Madalene Arias

For Paulos Berhe, being Anabaptist means taking what has been received from Jesus Christ and sharing it with others.

He serves as pastoral leader at the Rehoboth Inner Healing Church (RIHC) in Toronto, a small congregation that will be among the churches officially joining Mennonite Church Eastern Canada at the annual gathering at the end of April.

“It’s good to have an umbrella,” says Berhe about joining MCEC. He and other members of the congregation look forward to receiving blessings and prayer from the broader faith community.

The congregation worships mainly in the Tigrinya language, as members have immigrated to Canada from Eritrea and Ethiopia in recent years. After a couple of native English-speakers began to regularly attend their services in the last two months, RIHC has made adjustments to accommodate both languages.

Since its inception in 2017, the congregation has grown to include 30 adults who gather for worship on Sunday evenings. At least 15 children and youths between the ages of three and fifteen attend Sunday school.

Berhe says that since RIHC’s members are coming from Africa, it is helpful for them to build connections to Mennonites who have deeper roots in the country and can help newcomers



Rehoboth Inner Healing Church in Toronto. Photo from Facebook.

adapt and integrate into Canadian society.

When Berhe and his wife first planted this church, they opened up their home to new worshippers as they came. They now rent a space in Toronto’s Danforth neighborhood for their Sunday gatherings.

They have Bible study on Tuesday evenings, meeting in homes. On Friday nights, the group gathers at their Danforth location for prayer from 9 p.m. until midnight.

Berhe’s connection to Mennonites goes back to his life in Eritrea. In Canada, the love and welcome he felt from MCEC intercultural minister Fanosie Legesse and mission minister Norm Dyck made him want to see RIHC become part of MCEC.

He anticipates that many good things

will come from this love, and he looks forward to seeing his congregation grow within the Mennonite umbrella.

Along with Rehoboth Inner Healing Church, the four other churches joining MCEC are Mennonite Disciples Swahili Church, FreeChurch, Shalom Worship & Healing Church, Guelph, and Shalom Worship & Healing Church, Windsor. ☸

Catholic and Mennonite worlds collide on YouTube

By Aaron Epp

What happens when an Italian American actress and model from Edison, New Jersey, marries a Mennonite farm boy from Lancaster, Pennsylvania?

Kristen and Scott Hertzog answer that question on their YouTube channel, “So I Married a Mennonite.”

The Hertzogs, who married in 1996 and who attend Forest Hill Mennonite Church—a Mennonite Church USA congregation near Lancaster—started the channel in 2022 to uplift, educate and entertain viewers.

In the videos, Kristen draws from her experiences to share the joys and challenges of being part of the Mennonite culture in Pennsylvania’s Amish Country. She explores the struggles she’s faced being an outsider and how she’s become a part of the community despite those struggles.

The Hertzogs’ story has been one of opposites attracting ever since they met at Sight & Sound Theatres, a Christian theatre company in Lancaster.

Kristen was onstage playing a queen; Scott worked in the husbandry department, helping care for the 100-plus animals involved in the company’s productions.

They struck up a conversation backstage, and Kristen asked Scott out on a date. After thinking about it for a couple of days—he was shocked because he had never heard of a woman asking a man out—he said yes.

A year later, they were married.

“There were quite a few people who were concerned about the cultural differences as well as the personality differences,” Kristen says.

Kristen describes her family as



Kristen and Scott Hertzog started their YouTube channel in 2022. Supplied photo.

stereotypically Italian American—forthright, passionate and quick to crack a bottle of wine.

Her family was surprised, then, when they showed up in Pennsylvania for a wedding with no alcohol, no dancing, a dress code for the bridesmaids and a rehearsal dinner held in a church basement instead of an upscale restaurant.

“It’s been a lifetime of challenges and figuring out how to make it work,” Kristen says.

But the Hertzogs’ commitment to each other, and their love for their 17-year-old son, Kiefer, is evident in the videos they make.

In addition to giving viewers a glimpse into Mennonite and Amish life in Pennsylvania, the Hertzogs share about their travels, Kristen’s struggle with ADHD, and their decision in late 2023 to sell the Hertzog Homestead—a farm that was in Scott’s family for eight

generations.

When asked what makes Mennonites unique, Kristen responds that in her experience, it’s quality craftsmanship, a strong work ethic and a willingness to come together to support a worthy cause.

She sees evidence of this in the way her community helps with the Hope for Haiti Benefit Auction, which she started in 2013.

The auction, which raises funds for educational and Christian training programs in Haiti, typically draws a crowd of 1,800.

More than 125 volunteers—including folks from Mennonite Church USA, Old Order Mennonites and Amish folks—are on hand to ensure things run smoothly.

“What’s interesting about it is the consistency,” Kristen says. “So many Mennonite and Amish people have been with us since day one. I absolutely admire that. That is a very strong thing.”

Kristen believes that ultimately, the videos she and Scott create speak to how ingrained the Roman Catholic and Mennonite cultures are when your families have been a part of them for generations.

“So much of what is unique about what we’re doing in our YouTube channel we didn’t make up,” she says.

“We’re talking about hundreds of years of experiences that bring us to these times and bring us to our own unique experiences.” ❧

To view the couple’s channel, visit youtube.com/SoIMarriedaMennonite.

MDS fund supports Winkler ministry

Grants worth \$137,000 distributed in 2022-23

Mennonite Disaster Service

Every year the Gospel Mission Church, an Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) congregation in Winkler, Manitoba, runs an event called Love the Valley.

The event includes a hot dog lunch and yard work for low-income homeowners, but one of the most impactful components has been handing out hampers of household essentials like cleaning supplies, toilet paper and paper towels.

In May 2023, volunteers from the church gave out 190 hampers.

The hampers were made possible with support from a grant of \$5,000 from the Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada Spirit of MDS Fund.

“These hampers are an awesome way to support those people in our community and a great steppingstone in helping to

build relationship with the people of our region,” said associate pastor Brenton Friesen.

The hampers included an invitation for people to attend the church’s monthly community meal. Some recipients of the hampers are now regularly attending the church as well, Friesen said.

The grant to Gospel Mission Church was one of 26 grants worth just over \$137,000 given to churches and organizations across Canada by MDS Canada in 2022-23.

For 2023-24, the organization is once again inviting Canadian congregations and organizations to consider applying for funding to help serve their communities.

The Spirit of MDS Fund was created during the pandemic, when MDS Canada was unable to do on-the-ground



Darryl Harder participates in Gospel Mission Church’s hamper distribution in Winkler, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Gospel Mission Church.

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projects but wanted to assist congregations responding to needs arising in their communities. When the pandemic abated, the Fund was retained as a way to partner with churches and organizations to meet needs in their communities.

Grants can be used to support people in need with home construction or renovation projects; food or other needed resources for those in crisis; ministry and service projects where volunteers serve the neighbourhood; or other creative ideas that are a fit with MDS Canada’s two core values: faith in action and caring relationships. Grants of up to \$5,000 are available. The application deadline is July 15. See mds.org/spirit-of-mds-fund/.

Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) is an organization of the U.S. and Canadian Mennonite churches that specializes in repairing and rebuilding homes for marginalized and vulnerable people affected by natural disasters. In 2023, 7,290 volunteers, including about 450 in Canada, built 95 new homes and repaired 402 houses at 29 responses in 18 states and 2 provinces. Total value of the work was over \$18.5 million. ❧

Writer reflects on 50 years of ministry in Latin America

By Aaron Epp

Helen Dueck occupied herself during COVID lockdowns by writing. The result is a book that tells the story of her life in ministry.

Published at the end of 2023, *Going Out and Coming In* recounts the nearly 50 years Dueck and her late husband, Henry, spent living and working in Latin America.

From Brazil to Bolivia, Uruguay to Colombia and Mexico, the couple were invited to teach, first with immigrant churches and institutions before working with national churches in leadership preparation.

“Because we had worked in quite a few places, I was often asked if I would write about our experiences,” Dueck says, sitting in the living room of her Winnipeg apartment. “Then it was the pandemic and I had time.”

In the book, the 91-year-old writes about growing up in Saskatchewan and committing herself to missionary work as a teenager.

She reflects on attending teacher’s college, meeting and marrying Henry, and raising five children—all while pursuing ministry opportunities with the Mennonite Brethren Church and Mennonite Church, both in Canada and abroad.

Dueck felt a special desire to share her stories because she is the only one left of the foreign teachers who served on the faculty of the Mennonite seminary in Montevideo, Uruguay.

The book takes its title from Psalm 121, which Dueck writes was precious



‘The God I know now is a bigger God than I knew growing up,’ says Helen Dueck. Photo by Aaron Epp.

to her and her husband. Verse eight says, “The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.”

Dueck describes her goings out and comings in not as travelogues or adventures, but as experiences of God’s leading to places where she and Henry could serve and build God’s Kingdom together with others.

“We felt from the beginning that we weren’t trailblazers,” Dueck says. “That had been done. We were there to walk alongside the people and be church builders with the people. We saw ourselves as working with them, not for them.”

The Duecks retired in 1992 and spent the next 10 years volunteering in numerous countries, including stints in India, Japan and Taiwan.

In 2005 they moved to Winnipeg. Henry died two years later.

Dueck, who attends Bethel Mennonite Church, reflects candidly throughout the book about her faith. In the final chapter, she writes that she sometimes wonders what she has left to give.

“Then I remember what a pastor once said in a seniors’ Bible study,” Dueck writes. “Don’t forget that you can still love and pray: for your children, grandchildren and many more people.”

Dueck writes about how meaningful her quiet times in the morning are, when she sips *maté* (South American tea) and reads from her Spanish Bible and German devotional.

When *Canadian Mennonite* interviewed her, Dueck had just finished reading *A New Kind of Christian* by Brian McLaren and had started reading *The Temple at the End of the Universe* by Josiah Neufeld.

“The God I know now is a bigger God than I knew growing up,” Dueck says. “I had many things to learn, and I still do.”

“I guess that’s the way I look upon my life,” she adds. “I think it’s got to be about growing—growing into maturity.”

Going Out and Coming In is available at commonword.ca, friesenpress.com and amazon.ca.

Raising the steaks

CM event explores food, faith and dietary decisions

By Aaron Epp



Sandy and Jason Yuen (left) and Clare Martens.

Jason and Sandy Yuen grew up in traditional Chinese-Canadian homes where meals included meat, but today the Toronto couple and their three children follow a vegan diet.

“This is one way that our family can sort of live out in some small way what we think God’s will for us is,” Jason said.

The Yuens shared their story during an online discussion hosted by *Canadian Mennonite* on March 20. Moderated by editor Will Braun, the discussion paired the Yuens with Clare Martens, who raises beef cattle in Manitoba.

The presenters explored the decisions behind their diets and how faith factors in.

Sandy started experimenting with a plant-based diet as an environmental studies student at the University of Waterloo. After learning about the impact of large-scale farming on the welfare of animals and the environment, she switched to a pescatarian diet (seafood but no other meat).

When the Yuens got married 18 years ago, Jason ate meat. In subsequent years, they were exposed to documentaries about plant-based eating that inspired them both to transition to a fully plant-based diet.

While some friends and family have struggled to understand the Yuens’ choice, they believe it aligns with God’s desire for humans to care for each other,

animals and the earth.

Martens described her relationship to meat as both a producer and consumer.

She grew up on her family’s farm and returned there in 2018 after moving away for a few years. Since then, she’s worked alongside her father, sister and uncle, raising Charolais cattle and growing annual grain crops.

Martens and her partner regularly cook and eat meat and dairy products, and they enjoy catching and eating fish.

“I feel best about eating food we’ve had a hand in growing,” Martens said, noting that she grows a garden every year, goes berry picking with friends, loves to cook and enjoys sharing meals with friends. “I do feel conflicted about eating meat to a certain extent, although ... I am proud of the way we produce meat.”

While Martens’ church experience has not included conversations about different ways of eating, she has vegetarian and vegan friends. She’s had fun learning to cook without meat, and she’s also appreciated the opportunity to invite those friends to the farm to see the cattle operation and ask questions.

“It feels sometimes a little bit vulnerable, but it is really neat to have those people out to the farm,” she said.

When Braun asked Martens what she

feels people don’t understand about cattle ranching, she wasn’t sure how to respond.

“I just know that some of the most gentle and most humane people I know are cattle farmers,” she said.

Jason said that one of the things people misunderstand about the Yuens is that they are openminded when it comes to their beliefs about food.

“We’re not just coming from ... an animal cruelty perspective or a bleeding-heart perspective,” he said. “But we try to be thoughtful about it.”

That spirit of open-mindedness permeated the discussion, which saw the participants readily admit that there are things about food production and consumption that they don’t know about—and that people’s approaches to these topics are heavily influenced by the environments in which they grow up.

“I really admire you for your dedication to the huge lifestyle change [you’ve made],” Martens told the Yuens. “I think that’s really cool and that’s something that I would like to emulate more in my



own faith.”

Sandy said that she and her family continue to learn about food choices, and she encourages others to do the same.

“We all have to eat three times a day,” she said. “Let’s try to experiment, let’s try to explore.”

The Yuens encourage people leading environmental work in church contexts to consider questions of diet.

“We’ve got to talk about this as a church,” Jason said. “We can’t just live with the status quo.”

Braun’s hope for the event was to have healthy discussion on a topic everyone can relate to.

“We all eat every day, and we all make decisions about what to eat every day. The shelves are stocked with ethical dilemmas,” he said.

“There is tension in all of our lives and that’s sort of where I wanted to focus, to some extent,” he added later. “To the extent that we consume more than we need to, which is most of us, we contribute to a system that’s very, very hard on the earth—whether that involves large farms or not. I would want us all to sort of infuse our views with that bit of humility.” ❧

Watch a recording of the event at tinyurl.com/cmmeat2024.

CM ART BRIEFS



Podcast tells the story of Münster

A new podcast tells the story of the German city that became a centre of radical Anabaptism in 1532-35. *Free Radicals* is produced and hosted by William Loewen, former pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Calgary. He describes *Free Radicals* as “a cult podcast, a true-crime podcast, a history podcast and a spirituality podcast, all wrapped into one.” Loewen’s research included visiting Münster last year.

See freeradicalspod.com.

Winnipeg Mennonite Theatre releases audio dramas

Winnipeg Mennonite Theatre has released three audio dramas, available for free on its website for a limited time. They include a 38-minute adaptation of *The Trial* by Franz Kafka and two five-minute mysteries: *Death Calls at Dinner* and *The Murder of Mrs. Brooks*. The company will stage its next live event, a reader’s theatre production of *Our Father* by Lukas Thiessen, on May 25.

See winnipegmennonitetheatre.ca.



Instead of a traditional Palm Sunday service at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, B.C., all ages gathered around tables in the gymnasium on March 24 to work on different parts of a puzzle. Individuals glued coloured papers to their puzzle pieces, which were then joined to make the final picture, which depicts Jesus’ ride into Jerusalem. The final project was revealed at the end of the Palm Sunday service.

The cooperative, creative service was planned by Rachel Navarro, family pastor (right), and worship leader Angelika Dawson. The picture will be on display in the church hallway. Photo by Amy Rinner Waddell.



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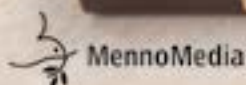
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CM NEWS BRIEFS

Canada bans arms sales to Israel

On March 18, Canada's House of Commons passed a non-binding motion calling for a ban on the sale of Canadian arms to Israel. The motion calls for Canada to cease authorizing arms shipments to Israel, as well as arms shipments that have not yet occurred but have been previously authorized by Global Affairs Canada. Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly has gone on the record to say that the new motion would become policy. *Source: Project Ploughshares*

New canning plan for Ontario

During the pandemic, border regulations became too strict for Mennonite Central Committee's mobile meat canning unit to cross into Canada. The mobile model was deemed to be no longer viable. In response, a new stationary cannery is being built at the material resource centre in New Hamburg, Ontario. The new cannery will double the 40,000 pounds of meat previously canned in the 2-week period the mobile canner was in Canada. The new unit will also enable MCC to can vegetables. The new facility is 60 percent funded. The hope is that it will be in service before the end of the summer. *Source: Anabaptist World/MCCO*

India MBs select new leader

Injamuri Asheervadam has been selected as president of the Governing Council of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of India. He is principal of Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College in Shamshabad and will continue leading the college in addition to his new role. According to Mennonite World Conference, the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of India, with 212,000 people in about 1,000 churches, is the international body's second-largest conference, after the Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia. *Source: Anabaptist World*

East African summit

The leaders of East African Mennonite churches held a summit April 2-5, 2024, at Meserete Kristos Seminary, Bishoftu, Ethiopia. The summit discussed improvements to Agenda 28:19, a guide map focused on fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). The leaders reached an agreement on how to implement it according to their local contexts and realities. They will continue to meet regularly. Leaders emphasized the need for contextual ways of doing theology that work for East Africa. This could contribute to and strengthen global Anabaptist theology. *Source: Anabaptist World*

Canada increases foreign aid

In the April 16 federal budget, Canada increased international humanitarian aid by \$150 million this year and \$200 million next year. Canada is still far short of the long-standing goal of spending 0.7 percent of gross domestic product on aid. The current government's stated goal for defense spending is 1.76 percent of GDP. *Sources: Globe and Mail, CBC*

U.S. war tax event

On Saturday, April 13, Shenandoah Valley Taxes for Peace held its third annual war tax redirection event. Members of 18 households, many of whom are members at Community Mennonite Church and Shalom Mennonite Congregation, both of Harrisonburg, Virginia, donated US\$5,888 to six nonprofit relief and peace organizations, including the Mennonite Church USA Church Peace Tax Fund.

Of these donations, US\$1,766 came from federal taxes withheld out of conscience against paying taxes for war. According to the War Resisters League, a secular pacifist organization, 45 percent of the 2025 U.S. Federal Funds Budget will pay for current and past military costs. *MC USA Release/Tim Godshall*



National resource centre going strong

After a 50-year evolution, Mennonite Church Canada's national resource centre now takes the shape of CommonWord, a bookstore and resource centre based at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. CommonWord offers a wealth of printed, audio and visual material for personal enrichment and collective use in worship or study.

Materials can be purchased, borrowed or accessed online.

An 11-page paper tracing the 50-year history of the resource centre, written by Dan Dyck, can be found at commonword.ca/go/3828.

B.C. college installs new president

by Amy Rinner Waddell

Saying he was “humbled, energized, inspired and focused,” Steve A. Brown was installed as the ninth president of Columbia Bible College on April 6.

The ceremony took place at South Abbotsford Church, which established the area’s first Mennonite-related Bible institute—South Abbotsford Mennonite Brethren Bible School—in 1936.

Brown assumed his new position on February 1. A distinguished author, speaker and non-profit leader, Brown served as president of Arrow Leadership for 12 years prior to joining the college. Arrow develops Jesus-centred leaders in Canada and around the world.

Carson Pue, an associate of Brown’s at Arrow Leadership, spoke briefly to the assembled crowd, calling Brown a “mentor of mentors and leader of leaders.” He challenged Brown to have “the wisdom of Solomon, the courage of

David, and the heart of Jesus.”

In his remarks, Brown said he was humbled by the sacred trust given him as president of Columbia Bible College. In his new role he wants to “listen and learn” as the college continues to develop “wholehearted followers of Jesus.”

The service included a litany by the college board, staff, students and constituents of the college and a prayer of dedication for Brown led by former president Bryan Born.

Columbia Bible College has its roots in two schools that merged in 1970: Bethel Bible Institute, operated by the Conference of Mennonites, and Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute. It was the first inter-Mennonite Bible institute in North America. Originally called Columbia Bible Institute, the name was changed to Columbia Bible College in 1987. ✎



Installation service for new Columbia Bible College president Steve Brown. Shel Boese (left), Graham Nickel, Carson Pue, Brown, Bryan Born and Kate Reid.

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CM CALENDAR

British Columbia

May 25: MCC Festival for World Relief, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at Black Creek United Mennonite Church, Black Creek.

May 26: Day of Prayer for Camp. More at prayforcamp.ca

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

Alberta

May 11: Spring work day, Camp Valaqua

June 8: Camp Valaqua Hike-a-thon.

June 9: Garden Party, Camp Valaqua

June 7-9: Young Adult Anabaptist Conference hosted by MCBC

June 15: MCC Alberta Relief Sale, 9 a.m. Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury. Join us for food, fellowship and the opportunity to donate to MCC projects around the world.

Saskatchewan

May 17-19: MC Sask Youth Retreat at Shekinah Retreat Centre. Youth gr. 6-12 welcome. Details at mcsask.ca.

May 22: Spend-a-day at RJC High School, in Rosthern. Prospective students can spend-a-day shadowing a current student. Register at admissions@rjc.sk.ca or call (306) 232-4222.

May 25: RJC Golf Classic at Valley Regional Park, Rosthern. Fundraiser for RJC High School's athletics program. Register by May 21 at rjc.sk.ca/golf.

May 28: RJC High School Spring Concert, 7 p.m. at RJC in Rosthern.

June 20-22: *Les Misérables* presented by RJC High School, 7 p.m. Tickets available May 21 at rjc.sk.ca

June 22: RJC Alumni & Friends BBQ, 5:30 p.m. at RJC High School in Rosthern, prior to the final performance of *Les Misérables*. RSVP to development@rjc.sk.ca

June 23: RJC Graduation. Please join us as we celebrate the class of 2024. Baccalaureate Service at 10:30 a.m., Rosthern Mennonite Church. Graduation Exercises at 2:30 p.m., RJC Auditorium, Rosthern.

Manitoba

May 10-11: Voices Together in Worship, a gathering to resource worship planners, pastors and musicians at South Side of Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg. More at mennochurch.mb.ca/events.

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

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

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

Ontario

May 16, 23: MCEC Healthy Boundaries in the Context of Ministry full workshop, 9 a.m.- 4 p.m., more at mcec.ca/events.

May 24-25: New Hamburg MCC Relief Sale.

June 14-16: Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church celebrates 100 years with food, Low-German play excerpts, storytelling and a zwieback-making tutorial.

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

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

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

Online

May 17: Mennonite World Conference international prayer hour, 14:00 UTC. Register for English at mwc-cmm.org/en/online-prayer-hour-registration

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

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

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A welcoming congregation, First Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, is seeking two pastors to fill a pastoral team. Applicants should be seminary-trained, with some pastoral experience preferred. If interested, contact Sharon Witmer Yoder, Indiana-Michigan Conference Minister at sharon@im.mennonite.net.

Pastor, Elim Mennonite Church

Elim Mennonite Church is seeking a full-time pastor to be a spiritual leader and provide care ministry for our congregation as we strive to be passionate disciples of Jesus Christ.

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The lead pastor will work closely with our existing leadership team to provide pastoral care, set the direction of worship services, and to help lead the congregation to a greater understanding of scripture and living in ‘Christlikeness’. Learn about our congregation at elimmennonite.org. For more information and a full job description, visit mennochurch.mb.ca or email Karen Schellenberg at kschellenberg@mennochurch.mb.ca

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Employment Opportunity Pastor

Wildwood Mennonite Church (WMC), located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Treaty Six Territory, invites applications to fill 0.5 FTE pastoral position. We are a Mennonite Church Canada congregation, rooted in Anabaptist theology that incorporates peace and justice as practical expressions of faith. WMC is an informal, welcoming congregation that is inclusive and affirming of all individuals. The successful candidate will work together with the 0.5 FTE pastor who is already working with WMC.

We invite interested candidates to contact the Pastoral Search Committee to express interest and/or learn more about this role and our congregation. Be sure to visit us at wildwoodmennonite.org. Inquiries can be sent to the Pastoral Search Committee via email pastoral.search@wildwoodmennonite.org.

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Eden Mennonite Church is seeking a dynamic and creative Lead Pastor for a full-time role. Eden Mennonite is an Anabaptist congregation located in Chilliwack, BC in the beautiful Fraser Valley. This person will work with the Associate/Youth Pastor, Church Council, Ministerial Council, and the congregation to grow and carry out the vision of Eden to encourage people's growth in their relationship with Jesus.

A summary of Eden Mennonite Church and a detailed job description are available upon request. Please email your interest to edenpersonnel@gmail.com.



Youth learn about marriage and business in Burkina Faso

Staff

The Burkina Faso Mennonite churches held their big annual youth camp in Orodara during the last week of March. According to an update provided by Josué Coulibaly to Tany Warkentin, Mennonite Church Canada's liaison to ministry in Africa, the three themes covered over the five-day retreat were relying on God, developing an entrepreneurial spirit and preparing for married life.

Marriage preparation is a common theme at these youth camps, and entrepreneurialism has become increasingly important as young people seek creative ways to support their families.

Mennonite Church Canada supports entrepreneurial training and micro-loan programs in Burkina Faso through its Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission partnerships.

—With files from Mennonite Church Canada.



Youth camp photos courtesy of Josué Coulibaly.



Faith Story

Running toward Jesus

By Wendy Rankin

My faith story is one of conversion. I was not simmered in the faith like many people, nor did I have a lightning bolt experience where I remember the exact day and time I came to faith.

My dad was a Catholic conservative from Cape Breton Island and my mom was a Protestant socialist from Vancouver Island. They met in a car crash on the prairies, and I guess you could say the rest is history.

Those were the days when religious differences counted for a lot, and so religion was a major bone of contention in our household when I was growing up.

My only exposure to Jesus was the few months I spent in the Salvation Army Sunday school in downtown Winnipeg when I was three years old, and the standard religious education in elementary school, which was still a thing in those days.

Religion was not a safe subject at home, but I was curious.

When I grew up and left home to go to university, I got to go to church with some of my friends. I really appreciated the opportunity to know that other people were curious and eager to think more deeply about life.

While many of my friends seemed to actually belong, I was hanging around the edges of faith, curious about Jesus, wondering and wanting to belong somewhere.

In my early to mid 20s, I attended a United church in Winnipeg. When I worked as a probation officer in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, I attended another United church.

I came to the realization one day that I was and wanted to be Christian, and so I experienced believer's baptism.

I probably would have kept going to my local church for years, sneaking closer to Jesus by increments, but God had other plans.

One day, I got a call at my office from a United Church minister I didn't know who served a five-point parish covering 8,000 square kilometres northwest of Portage la Prairie. I don't know how he heard of me, but he wanted me to work



Wendy Rankin. Photo by Aaron Epp.

with him as a lay minister on evenings and weekends, doing all the things a minister does.

At that point, I had only been baptized for a year. I guess you could say I was fearless—and foolish—because I said yes.

I was no longer hanging out around the edges; I was running toward Jesus at full speed.

That faith community enfolded me in love and acceptance, and motivated me to keep learning. After two years, I decided to go to seminary to learn more about

what I had been presuming to teach.

I had no intention of entering the ministry, but there I was, once again running full speed toward Jesus—not quite sure of what I'd do or see when I got to where I was going.

I was ordained in the United Church of Canada and worked in that denomination until I retired.

In later life, I married a Mennonite. Since 2019, we have attended Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

I revel in the fact that so many of the people in this church are sophisticated, competent and willing leaders in and outside of the church. On any given Sunday, there is a team of lay volunteers leading worship.

I revel in how the children are embraced and given meaningful jobs to do. It is also inspiring to know that Mennonites, in general, put their money where their mouths are, and finance significant projects locally and all over the world.

I appreciate Hope Mennonite's radical inclusivity, its active commitment to social justice and the fact that in many, many ways, its theology is like my own. It's wonderful to be part of a group that is running toward Jesus.

Neither of my parents really understood what happened to me, but they both found themselves running toward Jesus in their own right. When they died, they were members in good standing in their respective churches.

I'm grateful to the people of Hope Mennonite Church for letting me abide with them and for creating a place where I feel comfortable. Thanks be to God! ✎

Wendy Rankin was a United Church of Canada minister for 35 years.



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Clockwise from top left: 1. Dirk Willms rescuing his enemy, 1569. 2. Actor Rooney Mara in Sarah Polley's adaption of Miriam Toews' novel Women Talking. 3. Addlight Mudombo with a comforter she sewed by hand, Zimbabwe. 4. Mennonite baptism in Myanmar, 2022. 5. More-with-Less Cookbook by Doris Janzen Longacre. 6. Volunteers of North Star Mennonite Church, Drake, Saskatchewan, 2024. 7. Barn raising, Elmira, Ontario, 1949.

Photo credits, clockwise from top left: 1. Engraving by Jan Luyken in Martyr's Mirror. File from Mennonite Archives of Ontario. 2. Michael Gibson/Orion Pictures. 3. Meghan Mast/MCC. 4. Courtesy of Amos Chin. 5. A.S. Compton. 6. CM Photo. 7. Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

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