

CANADIAN
Mennonite

November 27, 2006
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Holy transformations

I grew up in the Philippines. Some of the many Christmas-time changes my Saskatchewan Mennonite parents found when they moved there were no snow in the air and no tradition of having or decorating a Christmas tree.

My mother came up with a way her children would still be able to enjoy that family event. She bought a seedling Norfolk Island Pine in a nursery and planted it in a pot on our porch. Throughout the year, this small plant sat outside with other houseplants. But come Advent, in it was brought to sit in a place of honour next to the piano. We picked off the insects that had made their home in the tree over the year. Its pot was wrapped in a royal blue blanket and the tree was soon shimmering with tinsel and glowing with Christmas lights brought from Canada. It was marvellous.

Christmas is a time of transformation. Ordinary things become extraordinary. From plainness, beauty. What was thought to be impossible becomes real. *"How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Mary said to the angel. The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God"* (Luke 1).

This holy child is the source of our hope and the reason for our faith. The same power that transformed Mary is our power too, able to transform us in our ordinariness and turn us into people filled with holiness and grace. Just as Jesus entered our world to minister to us, we are called to minister to others. Let us joyfully announce with the angels, *"I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord."*

—Tim Miller Dyck

Strengthen the links

Recently at one of our congregations, a pastor told me that his congregation valued its connection to the larger Mennonite church but that a sense of isolation and the opportunities and commitments of local ministry made those links hard to strengthen. But *Canadian Mennonite* was something that was able to bridge those gaps. "The Every Home Plan is working," he told me. "People get the issues and read them."

How we respond to God's love for us by being Christ's ambassadors to the world is a story we keep retelling in new ways in *Canadian Mennonite*. Moreover, the magazine brings you an Anabaptist viewpoint you won't find in other media. We provide news, engaging and challenging opinion pieces, and a place for Mennonites from all parts of the church to share their vision of church life together—and we do this through an average of 55 articles delivered to your door 24 times a year! The quality of the magazine our staff produces was recognized again by the Canadian Church Press this summer when we won six awards for our work in 2005.

We depend on contributions from those who desire to directly support this productive and effective ministry. As the end of the year approaches, would you remember us in your giving? Your gift ensures we are able to provide our churches with an Every Home subscription plan at 45 percent below cost. All donations are tax-deductible and can be made **using the envelope included with this issue**, by calling our office toll-free at 1-800-378-2524 ext. 221, or online at canadianmennonite.org/donate. Help us strengthen the links between us and God's work in the world and between one another. Thank you!

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All subscribers can get the complete contents of *Canadian Mennonite* delivered free by e-mail or view selected articles online. For either option, visit our website at canadianmennonite.org. The Dec. 18 online issue will be ready by Dec. 14.

Reminder

The next two issues (Dec. 18 and Jan. 8) are being published on a three-week cycle.

Cover: Artist and children's book illustrator Pat Stephens, of Durham, Ont., created the original artwork that graces the front and back covers of this issue of *Canadian Mennonite*. In it, she weaves the created and commercial worlds that tend to clash at this time of year. On pages 6 to 8, Dave Tiessen and Ferne Burkhardt consider the ramifications of "giving lavishly" or not at Christmas in light of God's "lavish giving" of Jesus Christ to the world.

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Taber, Alta.

Winning the last round: A Christmas story

My ability to guess the contents of the brightly wrapped packages under the Christmas tree used to annoy my father, a man who truly loved Christmas. He had been known to wrap boxing gloves and bricks inside boxes as disguises for much smaller gifts. As his family grew, so did his anticipation of handing out the Christmas gifts. Sensing his hurt, I learned to keep my predictions to myself.

In 1986, I married and moved to Vancouver Island. After 32 Christmases with my parents, our part-time jobs and the vagaries of December travel kept me apart from family for the next 10 Christmases.

Eleven years later, my family gathered for my youngest sister's wedding. As my husband Lloyd and I said our goodbyes and prepared to head west, one of my parents handed me a heavy parcel, saying, "It's your Christmas present. Don't open it until Christmas Eve."

Back on Vancouver Island I put the small but heavy box in a closet and gave it little further thought. Christmas was still six months away.

My world crashed around me early one November morning when my brother phoned. The results from Dad's tests had come back—lung cancer, both lungs, no treatment, just morphine at the end, six to eight weeks to live. Our biggest fear was confirmed.

By evening, all six of us children had talked to another sibling. I phoned Mom and Dad to tell them we all knew and that we were all coming home in two weeks' time, determined to have one last Christmas together.

"Do I have to haul that heavy gift over the mountains again?" I asked at some point during our conversation, which covered both Christmas and funeral arrangements. Although they had said I didn't have to, we included the heavy parcel when we loaded the car.



After the trauma of seeing my father on oxygen, of hearing his laboured breathing, of seeing Mom's stoicism, and after our initial tears, we settled down to small talk. I mentioned that we had stopped at a Ten Thousand Villages store to purchase one last Christmas gift. I prattled on about admiring the onyx vases, candleholders and bookends.

They both looked puzzled. Long-time supporters of Mennonite Central Committee and frequent volunteers at the thrift stores, they were familiar with the fair trade giftware. I was surprised they had never noticed the onyx. So I explained the subtle colouring and the smoothly polished surfaces, and concluded by saying it wasn't really "me."

By nightfall, all six of us—along with spouses and children—had assembled. A brother went out and bought the first Christmas tree sold in Taber that year. We made lots of noise as we struggled with the too-big tree. We laughed as we untangled strings of lights and swallowed our tears at the

sight of ornaments from our childhood. Dad coached from the couch.

We broke into small groups to talk before going to bed. Muted chuckles came from those remembering past escapades. Tears and hugs were shared as we came to grips with what the future had in store. We fought off funeral discussions, while knowing this would be our last time together before the decisions had to be made.

Mom knocked on our bedroom door before dawn. "I've called an ambulance," she said. In a daze I went room to room, waking the others.

We watched helplessly as Dad was wheeled through the early morning darkness. Mom and a sister followed the ambulance. Everyone returned several hours later, Dad with his first dose of morphine. The new reality began to sink in. Still, we had our turkey dinner. Dad bravely downed a few bites of what to him tasted like lead.

Having not slept the night before, he was too weak to play Santa Claus and the eldest son took his place. Eventually I had that heavy box on my lap again. I unwrapped it slowly; nestled snugly inside was a pair of onyx bookends. My mouth dropped and my eyes filled as I made my way to Dad's side.

"Daddy," I said, "The bookends are beautiful. And you and Mom had me convinced you didn't even know what onyx was."

His eyes twinkled brightly behind his perpetually smudged glasses as he enveloped me in a firm hug. "Fooled you, did I?" he said.

Our Christmas guessing game was over. He had just won the last round.

—**Judy Wilson**

The author, who lives near Nanaimo, B.C., was previously employed by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and Swift Current Bible Institute. Her father, Elwin H. Epp, pastored congregations in Alberta and Saskatchewan before his death on Dec. 22, 1997. The article was originally published by the United Church Observer as "A gift before going."

Persistence through faith

Some of my greatest lessons in faith have come from working as the music coordinator in a nursing home, where I lead a choir and visit individual residents and play music for them. One of those lessons is to persist in faith despite fear and doubt.

I have seen that music can be a healing tool that should not be underestimated. I believe music is inspired by God, and through music and my faith in God people can be reached, touched, comforted, inspired and have memories evoked. Being given such a wonderful tool, I learned to keep on despite inhibitions.

When I first started, I was extremely overwhelmed and intimidated. Part of my job was to get to know each resident by name...eventually. Not only that, but I was to initiate conversation or interaction, which generally consists of small talk, which I am not particularly good at or fond of.

But I truly believe that this job was a calling for me, an opportunity to utilize the gifts God gave me, and to make a difference in the lives of these residents. That belief alone got me through the early stages of fear—dreading going on the floor, procrastinating outside someone's door, taking as long as I could at menial tasks like photocopying, because that was easier and less nerve-wracking than making myself vulnerable to someone who may not even want to talk to me.

To add to this fear, at the beginning there were residents who physically or vocally expressed their disinterest for my company or music.

One resident would quickly cover her face with the book she was reading whenever I would come into her room. This behaviour, I was told, was not unusual. I am certainly not one who wants to make anyone uncomfortable, so I would often just leave her alone. But something told me to not give up on her. By continually popping into her room, and inviting her to hear my music, she eventually grew to be comfortable around me, and even attended a choir practice. Since then, when she

sees me she asks if I'm playing music, and she will sometimes follow me around from room to room. Sometimes she dances to the music!

Another resident came to the home very disoriented, uncomfortable and unsure of himself. He often complained of pains, and was very hard to talk to. He started attending choir, but I eventually had to meet with him privately because he complained a lot in choir and disrupted the other members. But as the weeks went by I saw drastic changes in him. He became more relaxed, walked more confidently, always had a smile on, and he even told jokes every chance he got. He now attends choir regularly, and even distributes choir folders for me—on his own initiative. That reminded me that it is never too late to change, and of just how powerful persistence can be.

A third resident was so far along in dementia, nurses actually laughed at me when they saw that I was trying to communicate with her. My first few visits were fruitless, as she was in her own world having conversations with people in her mind. At first I dreaded visiting her because it felt

the young prophets

so useless. However, after just a few visits of singing oldies to her, she started singing along, every note matching mine. When I'd applaud after each song, she'd thank me and say it sounded nice. I can't say for sure if it made a difference to her, but through music and endurance I found a way to connect with her, even if only for a short while.

I can't express enough how difficult this job was when I started, and how energizing, uplifting and rewarding it is now. Despite my personal doubts about my abilities and gifts, I trusted that God put me there for a reason, and that got me through all those awkward silences, misunderstandings and rejections.

From these experiences I will remember that God prepares us for the road we walk on, but we must persist in faith despite any forks in the road.

—Anna Loewen

The author is currently working as music coordinator at PeopleCare long-term care residence and is church organist at Trinity Lutheran Church in Tavistock, Ont. She and her husband Will, who is youth pastor at Tavistock Mennonite Church, are preparing to put on a musical that they wrote together.



Loewen

News briefs

Japanese churches decry nuclear test

A group of Japanese churches and Christian organizations has protested against North Korea's nuclear weapons test last month, but would like to see the United States have direct negotiations with Pyongyang. "Possessing nuclear weapons and carrying out nuclear tests go directly against the life that has been given to human beings," the National Christian Council in Japan said after U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice met Japanese leaders in Tokyo on the first stop of a north Asian tour in October.

—ENI release

Pope set to allow wider use of Latin Mass

Pope Benedict XVI is set to revive the celebration of the Roman Catholic mass in Latin, issuing a papal decree that could restore traditional forms of worship that fell out of use decades ago, according to an Italian news report. The Rome daily *Il Giornale* has reported that the decree, known as a *Motu Proprio*, would relax current church restrictions on the Latin mass, known as the Tridentine Rite. Under the new rules, priests around the world would be able to celebrate mass in Latin without the approval of a bishop.

—RNS release

Are we giving lavishly enough?

The Christmas season is again upon us. It has been since Halloween or even before. Many of us feel repulsed by the big business Christmas has become and by being encouraged—even prodded—into spending more money and giving more extravagant gifts than we want to. We do not like the barrage of advertising that encourages our children to think greater happiness lies in receiving the latest toy or electronic gadget.

On the one hand, I cannot but agree. We are an intricate part of a free enterprise, consumer society that expresses some of the worst excesses at Christmas. I know how TV and print ads tantalize children and put pressure on parents. I have struggled with guilt when we have “deprived” our children of some of the things they really really wanted.

On the other hand, I wonder if our giving is lavish enough. I grew up hearing my parents’ stories about the early years in Canada when their families were dirt-poor. Luxuries, store-bought clothes and toys were virtually non-existent. Yet on Christmas morning they wondered at the lavishness of receiving an orange, apple and pencil.

My childhood was much less poor, but my parents rarely splurged—except at Christmas. Then they would spend relatively lavishly on gifts we had given up hope of ever receiving. I anticipated Christmas with eagerness because I knew my parents would surprise us with lavishness.

In O’Henry’s great Christmas story, *The Gift of the Magi*, Della and Jim are a young couple in New York City. With Christmas approaching, each wants to show love and care for the other by giving just the right gift, but there is no money to spare. Both find the money for the gift they want to buy: Della sells her pride and joy—her glorious, long hair, and Jim sells his prized heirloom pocket watch. The beautiful irony of their sacrifices is revealed when Jim presents Della with the elegant, longed-for tortoise-shell combs for her hair and Della gives Jim a beautiful chain for his pocket watch.

The storyteller observes: “I have related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children...who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days,

let it be said that of all who give gifts, these two were the wisest.... They are the magi.”

O’Henry suggests that the magi who came to see the infant Jesus invented the “art of giving Christmas presents.” I think he is only partially correct. They were the first humans to respond by giving. But in the incarnation, God initiated the cycle of giving with the greatest, most lavish gift of all: his son, Jesus:

• *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.... In him we have...the riches of his grace that he lavished on us* (Ephesians 1:3, 7-8).

• *For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich* (II Corinthians 8:9).

• This sacrificial gift unleashes a new abundance: of grace (John 1:16; Romans 5:15-17); of joy (II Corinthians 8:2); of love, knowledge and insight (Philippians 1:9; I Thessalonians 3:12); of comfort (II Corinthians 1:3-5); of truth (Romans 3:7); of hope (Romans 15:13); of thanksgiving (II Corinthians 4:15).

Our response to this abundance is thanksgiving and generosity, indeed the desire to give as lavishly as we have received (II Corinthians 9:6-8, 11,13). The magi presenting their gifts to Jesus is an example of appropriate lavishness in responding to God’s good gifts. Another is the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, then anointed him with perfume worth \$25,000, a year’s wages for a labourer (Mark 14).

I believe that the gift of the incarnation calls us to live lives characterized by lavish generosity and to celebrate

I have struggled with guilt when we have ‘deprived’ our children of some of the things they really really wanted.

Christmas with lavish giving that is an imitation and symbol of—and a response to—the lavish giving of God. Do I, do we, give lavishly enough?

Every year two of our kids begin their Christmas wish lists with a Porsche or a Lamborghini. They ask in jest (I hope), but even if we could afford to buy them such a luxury sports car, would that be lavish giving? God's giving of Jesus was lavish beyond measure, not because it cost big bucks but because it was a costly sacrifice and because its value and benefit was priceless to those to whom the gift was given.

If these are the principles that guide our sacrificial giving, I suspect the dollar value of our giving may decrease as the lavishness increases. When my parents were growing up, money and even essential things were in short supply, so gifts that cost money were a sacrifice to give, an incredible joy and benefit to receive, and powerful lessons of God's gift in Christ. Della and Jim sacrificed precious possessions, powerfully lavishing upon each other profound expressions of love and care.

Most of us live quite comfortably. Given our affluence, it is hard for us to know how to give with sacrifice and great benefit. Perhaps the key is discerning what is hardest to give and what is of greatest benefit to whom we would give.

Kids still need toys, teens and young adults still need music and new clothes, moms still need new slippers, and dads still need new drill sets. We should never get away from giving "things" that cost money. However, I believe our most lavish gifts will be our most valuable treasures—our time, attention, caring and prayers.

What might such lavish giving look like? Perhaps like this:

- Giving your spouse a date on the first or third (or both) Saturday of the month for the next year.
- Spending a parent's birthday with them.
- Giving your friend tickets for the two of you to see a series of hockey games or symphony performances.
- Giving each child a coupon for a restaurant meal and outing of their choice.
- Giving nieces and nephews a banana split outing to Dairy Queen for

birthdays.

- Inviting loved ones to help you make a quilt for them.
- Without notifying him or her, offering a one-minute prayer on behalf of your loved one every day for the next year.

I could go on, but you get the picture.

As long as there is money to be made, Christmas will be overly commercialized. May this not "be-Scrooge" us into withdrawal and cynicism, but let us be imitators of God and be joyful practitioners of truly lavish giving.

—**Dave Tiessen**

The article was originally published in the Fall 2003 Messenger.



I believe our most lavish gifts will be our most valuable treasures—our time, attention, caring and prayers.

A Christmas of contrasts

Simplicity is not characteristic of Apostle Paul's writing.

Theologian Tom Yoder Neufeld describes the opening of Paul's Ephesian letter as "one long, unbroken, deliberately exhausting recitation of how God has blessed us." The sentence breaks translators have added "rob us of the experience of running out of breath.... Language, even when pushed to its limits," he says, "is inadequate to do more than weakly express the wonder of God's love."

At the same time as I ran into Paul's "over-the-top" language, I bumped into "minimalist" thinking. A CBC radio interview with Jane Snyder from Erb St. Mennonite Church (December 2004) had the host puzzling over a "buy-nothing Christmas." On the same day, *The Kitchener-Waterloo Record* published a story with teens from Snyder's Sunday

school class talking about the "Spirit of Christmas [being] weighed down by 'mindless consumption.'"

At this time of year, we are bombarded with excess. Advertisements scream about "deals" too good to miss, perfect gifts we can't pass up, scrumptious foods we must have to entertain lavishly at a moment's notice. Our social calendars are overloaded, there are too many lights and decorations, and the *muzak* melts down into so much noise.

I thought about the first Christmas. Didn't God go "over the top" with heavenly beings appearing to key players in the drama and an angel mass choir announcing Jesus' birth? The most brilliant planet grabbed the attention of astrologers and kings, driving them across the desert. And surely the gift of God's Son was the most extravagant imaginable.

There is also a minimalist side. God chose a young girl with no recorded pedigree to give birth to the Son of God. The baby was born in a chilly cave. Mary wrapped him in bits of cloth and laid him on the hay. Shepherds—the lowest of the low on the social scale—were the first to hear the news, the first to visit. Soon the little family had to flee under cover of night to escape the king's wrath.

So many contrasts. Take note of them in the Christmas songs we sing:

- The big ideas: Emmanuel. Ransoming a captive nation—the whole world—in fact. Mega rejoicing!
- The small things: A simple girl. A baby. A manger. A little town. The silence of the stars and of a winter night.

Read Mary's "Magnificat" (Luke 1:46-55) for more contrasts, and a sense of balance.

We must celebrate Christmas and God's lavish gift with great joy. I'll fall into the trap of some excess—especially around food and wonderful music—but I will deliberately try to minimize "mindless consumption." I invite you to consider doing the same.

—**Ferne Burkhardt**

The author is news director for Mennonite World Conference. The article originally appeared in the Mannheim (Ont.) Messenger church newsletter.

Advent Peace Prayer: O come, O come, Emmanuel

Emmanuel, God with us,
Saviour to captives and prisoners everywhere—
at this celebration of your birth
be with each lonely soul
exiled behind bars.

Emmanuel, God with us,
Saviour to prison guards and wardens everywhere—
at this celebration of your birth
protect those with power
from temptations of tyranny.

Emmanuel, God with us,
Saviour to families and friends of prisoners—
at this celebration of your birth
cheer spirits with your Advent
in the darkness of every jail.

Emmanuel, God with us,
Key of David, who can unlock any door—
may we celebrate your birth,
finding you again
in every lowly prison cell.

—**Carol Penner**

'Refreshing winds' of worship

Beginning with this issue, Canadian Mennonite is running a three-part series on worship in preparation for the Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) Refreshing Winds conference in January 2007.

Below, renowned worship prophet Marva Dawn stresses that the church's famous worship wars will not end until congregants quit focusing on themselves and, instead, turn their attention towards God alone. Subsequent issues will deal with worship and bioethics (Dec. 18) and reflections on worship issues close to the heart of three CMU staff members (Jan. 8).

Worship is for God ...period

If worship is supposed to unify Christians, why is it tearing so many churches apart? That's a question that Marva Dawn thinks about a lot. "Worship can bring us together and unify us, but it's doing the opposite today," says the author of 20 books on a variety of church- and worship-related topics, including *How Shall We Worship? Biblical Guidelines for the Worship Wars*.

"The 'worship wars' have become so destructive," she says, adding that "it grieves me when I hear people say they don't like one kind of style or another, or they refuse to sing when a particular style that's not their favourite is used in worship. To me, that shows they don't love others in their church enough to sing somebody else's song."

According to Dawn, a teaching fellow at Regent College in Vancouver, there is no way to end the conflict as long as people think "worship is about the style of music I like. If a church is a community, then it needs to sing the songs of the whole community, not just one group."

Good worship, she says, "brings people together as we focus on God and praise God. And when we are reconciled to one another, we can become a reconciling people in the world, bringing others to God."

Dawn will address this and other issues as keynote speaker at Refreshing Winds, the biennial CMU worship

conference, to be held Jan. 18 to 20 in Winnipeg. The theme of the conference is "Worship as reconciliation."

Much of the fighting in the worship wars centres on music. But Dawn says it is a mistake to confuse musical style with worship. "It's not a matter of singing hymns or choruses. Any style can be used to worship God, and all kinds of music should be used in worship. But the music should pass some difficult tests in order to be useful: 'Is it faithful to Scripture?' 'Is it directed towards God?' 'Is it about God?' Too much music being used is about us and how we feel about God."

For Dawn, a good worship "feast" should contain a variety of musical styles—not just hymns or contemporary music. "Each style has its place in the church," she says, adding that Christians need the whole music of the whole church to help bring them together to worship God. The most important question to ask in planning worship, she states, "is not what style of music to use, but how we can best glorify God."

Dawn also worries that some Christians today confuse worship with evangelism. "The purpose of worship is not to attract new believers," she says. "That's our job, as Christians. We bring people to Christ, and then we bring them to worship. It's a cop-out to count on the worship service to do that."

The purpose of worship, she states, "is to honour God and give him the praise he deserves. Period. The focus is not on attracting anybody."

Her prayer is that "worship will form us to be a people who dwell in God's reign and then carry God's kingdom wherever we go—people who are equipped to reach out to the culture around us with words of truth and deeds of faithfulness. I pray that God will grant our churches such worship—for his glory and for the love of the world."

—CMU release by **John Longhurst**



Dawn

Christians need the whole music of the whole church to help bring them together to worship God.

Diversity is a given in our church. There are 43 congregations in Mennonite Church Canada that have neither English nor German as their preferred language of worship. There are age and demographic bulges that appear in virtually every congregation. There are significant vocational differences along with differences in educational levels within and among our congregations. There are differences of size and social location, each generating its own distinctive challenges. There are theological differences often expressed in worship styles, music and teaching. Difference is with us and within us.

Yet, in spite of all this diversity, we are one. I find in our congregations an amazing capacity to live with difference. Difference and diversity do not destroy the unity and the oneness we have with each other. In fact, in so many ways the differences unite us even more deeply.

In my visits to congregations across Canada, I have identified six gifts that unify us in spite of our diversity. Everyone I met in my cross-Canada listening tour is committed to these beliefs:

- We believe in God and are committed to participate in God's coming reign as it becomes evident on Earth.
- We believe that Jesus Christ has become the Lord of our lives and we have a profound commitment to learn more about what that means for us.
- We believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in our personal and communal lives. We believe that the Holy Spirit is with us and is teaching us faithfulness.
- We believe that the Bible is our source of inspiration for our faith and

Unity and diversity in the church

life together. While there are very different ways of reading and interpreting the Bible, I find a common insistence that the Bible is the foundational authority for our life together and for our individual discipleship.

- We believe in the importance of the church. There is a deep desire to be a people of God and to strengthen the church and make it more of what it was meant to be.
- We understand God to be a relational God, and we deeply desire to express our faith and witness to God in relationship with each other. We hurt when we bleed and when there is division, and we long for health in our spiritual community.

This common ground is very encouraging! These truly come from our walk with God and they come from the grace of God that is among us.

This is consistent with what we read in Ephesians. Our task is not to create unity but to “maintain” the unity that comes from God. Ultimately, we are not the authors of unity: God is. Our differences will not destroy the unity that God generates in the church. And this is good news.

So why does it “feel” sometimes as though there is disunity? I do not believe it is a lack of common ground. Rather, I believe it is a lack of trust. Some of us don't

trust that the other is taking seriously the same common ground that is so dear to us.

When we differ on how we read the Bible for guidance in our lives, for example, we begin to suspect that he is not reading it at all, or at least is not taking it seriously. Or when the other understands things differently, we suspect that Jesus is not Lord of her life.

We need to work more deliberately at generating trust among us. It is my hope that we could all—regardless of what may be our theological training or preference—trust the sincerity of the other. My hope is that we can extend the hand of mutual discernment to the other, knowing that the ground we stand on is common ground. If we can do this, then we can talk and act openly, without fear that our deepest yearnings are suspect to the other.

It is my prayer that we can move toward such greater trust that will allow us to move toward greater openness and to experience the unity that is already fully present among us. May God bless and help us.

—Robert J. Suderman

David Martin, executive minister of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, left, and Robert J. Suderman, general secretary of Mennonite Church Canada, prepare to cut a cake in a surprise presentation at Mannheim Mennonite Church in Petersburg, Ont., honouring the last stop on the God's People Now! Listening Tour. “God's people have spoken—Congratulations!” reads the inscribed cake. Although the physical part of the listening tour has concluded, the implications are far reaching, says Suderman. “We have been blessed with an uncensored snapshot of the life and spirit, the concerns and needs of our church from coast to coast. The task of distilling, discerning and responding to what we have heard is a task that is now before us. We look forward to engaging what we have heard.”



MC Eastern Canada photo

Letters

Humans must live within God's absolutes

Many arguments concerning creation versus evolution, lifestyle choices or what belief system is right, lead me to ask myself who is right. Is what God has determined to be true more important than how I see it?

I am reminded of the fact that when I stand before God's judgment throne, I will have to give account of what I have done. This includes what I have believed and what I have practised.

If I have twisted the Scriptures to fit my understanding, or have believed what others have taught as true and yet in God's reality is not, then I will be at fault for believing a lie.

This section is a forum for discussion and discernment. Letters express the opinion of the writer only, not necessarily the position of Canadian Mennonite, the five area churches or Mennonite Church Canada. Letters should address issues rather than criticizing individuals and include contact information. We will send copies of letters referring to other parties to them to provide an opportunity to respond in a future issue if their views have not already been printed in an earlier letter. Please send letters to be considered for publication to letters@canadianmennonite.org or to Canadian Mennonite, 490 Dutton Drive, Unit C5, Waterloo, ON, N2L 6H7, "Attn: Letter to the Editor." Letters may be edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines.

Knowing this, the question becomes, "Do I search the Scriptures to discover God's precepts and judgments on the matter as God has determined, or do I try to fit Scripture into current thinking?"

Scripture makes it plain that God has absolutes. Each situation must be lived within those absolutes. Why is it so hard to accept what God says is right? Have we forgotten we are not our own but have been bought with a

price, that we are slaves of Christ and not our own master, or that we have given up the right to determine our own destiny?

When we believe wrongly, we hurt ourselves. Why then open ourselves up for disappointment and pain because we can't accept God's verdict in the matter?

—Simon Noordam, Noelville, Ont.

MELISSA MILLER



Family ties

In Luke's story of Jesus' birth and early life, we read that Mary "treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19,51). Like Mary, many people gaze with wonder at a newborn or loved child, treasuring and pondering God's acts. In this Advent season of waiting, we have the opportunity to wonder, to treasure what we have been given and to ponder in our hearts God's good gifts.

I love the Christmas season, and prepare joyfully with Christmas baking, tree trimming and lighting Advent candles. There remains in me an irrepressible childlike wonder of Christmas. As I ponder God-taking-flesh, I anticipate treasures and I am not disappointed. Born anew each year is the miracle of God entering the world as a vulnerable baby birthed by a young woman.

Early memories meld with my current hopes and practices. In the home of my childhood the Christmas tree glowed with multi-coloured lights. On Christmas morning my siblings and I awoke early and sat, often in silence or exchanging just a few whispers. We obeyed the rule: Do not touch anything until Mom and Dad are awake. The quiet, the lights against the darkness, the scent of the tree all led to me to ponder and to hope.

This Christmas will include the usual activities. I've begun the Christmas newsletter (which last year went out in July). Ingredients for my husband's famous fruitcake are stocked in the pantry. My immediate family has geared up for the overnight cross-country drive to join our extended families. We'll eat turkey, hug the

babies, go to church, catch up on each other's lives and unwrap presents. And we're imagining Christmas giving towards those whose needs include peaceful homes, safety from war and freedom from fear.

There's one major difference this year. With my grandmother's death, we are no longer a five-generation family. I will

miss singing carols with her and other family members on Christmas morning at the nursing home where she lived. As my grandmother joined in the singing I glimpsed another kind of wonder...that of long lives well lived, grounded in deep and abiding faith. The Gospel of Luke includes such hopeful voices. Simeon and Anna, righteous and devout elders who were eagerly waiting for God's redemption, sang out praises when they saw the baby Jesus.

Take a deep breath, gentle reader. As you inhale, take note of the space that forms within you. In these weeks before Christmas, allow Mary's experience to enter your space. As she welcomed God-become-flesh inside of her, open yourself to welcoming God again into your heart and your life. Ponder the beauty of babes and treasure the witness of the elders. Imagine, too, God's generous self-giving love poured out for the whole world. How might you and your family stretch yourselves, as Mary did, to carry Christ's life to those seeking light, peace and redemption?

Melissa Miller (familyties@mts.net) is a family life consultant, pastoral counsellor and author from Winnipeg.

Pondering the treasures

Ponder the beauty of babes and treasure the witness of the elders.

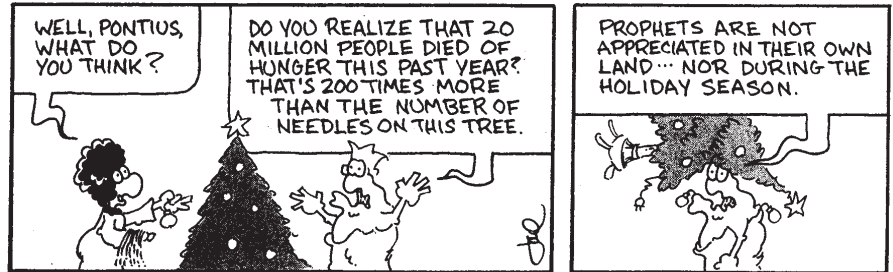
Downwardly mobile or holier than thou?

Aiden Enns' notion of countering conspicuous consumption with conspicuous non-consumption helped me put my finger on something that's been irking me in Geez and his *Canadian Mennonite* column, New Order voice ("Making affluence history," Aug. 21, page 18). It reminded me of a story from a friend of mine whose family prided itself in always sitting at the back of the church, unlike those self-important members who took the seats at the front.

Ah, the joy of being Mennonite. We can compete for recognition climbing the social/economic ladders in either direction.

As a believer who shares Enns' conviction that the downwardly mobile way is the right one for our souls and the planet, I am eager not to have this "New Order" he and other

Pontius' Puddle



prophets are giving voice to, reduced to the latest, trendiest way for young Mennonites to be holier than thou.

Let's not confuse the outward actions of selling all with the priceless pearl we are after. The latter is more of a mystery, harder to point to than a jar of home-grown pickles or a "dumpstered" pair of jeans. But it is there—the kingdom of love among us—a sacred space waiting to be inhabited. Some of us are finding doorways in the dumpster or in the garden. This is

good news indeed for a culture chasing down the blind alleys of the shopping mall and mammon's various other temples.

Rather than our non-consumption, what should be conspicuous is our authentic joy in reconnecting and reconciling with our creator and creation. Anything else is a Pharisee's phylactery, and nothing else will ultimately sustain us or draw others to live more with less.

—**Marcus Rempel, Winnipeg**

DARREN PRIES-KLASSEN



God, money and me

In my work, the fall is a busy time. Most weekends I am away from home visiting churches or attending meetings and conferences. During the week I am caught between paperwork at the office and spending quality time with my family. It isn't easy. Sometimes it is a real juggling act.

I am sure you can relate. Let's face it, we're busy! Work, kids, church, community, you name it. It is good to be busy. Busy people get things done, and getting things done is good. When asked, "How have you been?" the answer is never, "Oh, bored. I have nothing to do." We are much more likely to say, "Busy." However, if we are busy all the time, life becomes unbalanced. We pay the price with our health, relationships become strained and, most importantly, we run the risk of putting God on the sidelines of our life.

In an attempt to find balance in my life I reached for a book by Marva J. Dawn I had previously been too busy to read. In *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Dawn reminded me that the Sabbath is God's gift to people and that God meant what it says in Leviticus 23: 3. The Sabbath is a day of "complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work" (NRSV).

But I don't have time to observe a Sabbath day involving no work. Or so I thought until I took this passage seriously and listened to Dawn's explanation: "To cease working on the Sabbath means to quit labouring at anything that is work. Activity that is enjoyable and freeing and not undertaken for the purpose of accomplishment qualifies as acceptable for Sabbath time."

Sabbath: Use it or lose it

How easy it is to like or dislike others for what they can or cannot contribute.

What I did do the following Sunday was attend worship, help my daughter with homework, take a nap, make afternoon coffee, read the paper and watch a football game. I did no job-related activity or "to do" projects around the house. I confess I felt kind of lazy. However, the following week I felt energized and managed to get a lot done.

God's gift of Sabbath rest reminds us that God is God and we are not. Our efforts can never take the place of our God, who sustains us and provides for us, especially when we are resting. Although I didn't "do" anything on the Sabbath, God restored and re-energized me for the following week. I needed that more than I thought I did.

Sabbath rest allows us to appreciate people for who they are rather than for what they can accomplish. Throughout the week we are busy doing things for others and asking others to do things for us. How easy it is to

like or dislike others for what they can or cannot contribute. Sabbath rest forces us to look at people in the image of God and not measure them by what they can do.

In the coming weeks I will try to stick to observing a Sabbath rest. I'm not sure what activities I will or will not do, but it is my hope that through rest and prayer God's gift of the Sabbath will become

clearer to me. I am looking forward to Sunday, but right now I need to rest. I have things to do!

Darren Pries-Klassen is a stewardship consultant at the St. Catharines, Ont., office of the Mennonite Foundation of Canada (MFC). For stewardship education, estate and charitable gift planning, contact your nearest MFC office or visit mennofoundation.ca.

Bullying victims are ticking time bombs

Popular consciousness is only beginning to appreciate the damage that bullying can cause. Of course, most survive the jungle of the schoolyard with only minor scars, which has led many over the years to ignore the problem. There are some who disintegrate under the onslaught of bullying and commit suicide. And there are a few who absorb this negative energy until they eventually explode.

Bullying—often portrayed in terms of physical assault and schoolyard fights—is more often a matter of psychological warfare. The victims are socially isolated. Social isolation, something even hardened criminals fear in solitary confinement, can be traumatizing. For young boys it is especially insidious because it denies them the opportunity for learning social skills essential later in the contest for mates.

Social isolation freezes them out of that contest, which is an original purpose for bullying. Once the realization sinks in that this game is lost, it can add an element of primal rage to the long-standing resentment of society over this alienation. When imbued with this psychological poison, bullied victims feel they have nothing to lose. We don't need to look long at the history of past wars to see what can happen when disenfranchised people feel they have nothing to lose.

—Edward Mulcaster, Leamington, Ont.

Reader relates to 'transformative' article

I wanted to express how much I appreciated Aiden Enns' New Order voice column, "Love subverts the lingo" (Oct. 16, page 12).

I appreciated it because I identify with the discussion that he had with Simon, and his response to it. The way in which the conclusion of his article recognizes the humanity of everyone involved was inspiring. I have often wondered how to appropriately respond to someone who's views are drastically and completely opposite to my own. I wonder how often we all use "intellectual tricks" when challenged by others. I was waiting to see how he

would win his argument, and ended up seeing what he experienced instead.

The article was intense, unsettling, and emotional. I appreciate these types of articles—not just informative, but transformative.

—Jeff Martens-Koop, Saskatoon

Truth is a victim of Middle East war

Israeli TV showed an interview with the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert soon after the rockets began flying across the Israeli-Lebanese border this summer. He told how terrible things were, how terrorists made life hell for Israelis and were destroying cities like Haifa and Nahariya.

I was in Haifa two nights before that interview, having dinner on the sidewalk downtown. After dinner I drove around town, wanting to see the war ruins for myself—but not sure where to find them. But in all of my driving around, I was not able to find any damage.

Now, I'm sure that wherever the rockets did land, there is a destroyed building. Yes, people were killed and property was destroyed. It was dreadful. But to paint a scene so completely false, so exaggerated, does not honour the leader of a country.

Olmert is not guilty alone. TV coverage, newspaper and magazine stories—and even newsletters from non-governmental and church-based organizations—fell into the trap: How to get the attention of their audience?

Far too much reporting—accurate though it may be for what is actually being covered—remains distorted from the whole view. If the rest of the story were told, it would be less interesting. Who really needed to know that the largest part of Israel was not affected militarily at all, and that people went about their normal routines?

No wonder most tour and study groups panicked and cancelled their trips. Those who came couldn't believe that it wasn't the way they expected. My point is that, by telling only one part of the story, the rest of the world was painted a scene that was false by its incompleteness. Once again, truth was a victim of a war.

—Glenn Edward Witmer, Jerusalem, Israel

Author responds to letter writers

Readers who have responded to my piece on intelligent design ("Pointing us to a loving God: The paradox of natural selection," May 29, page 6) have added valuable dimensions to the discussion of this very controversial topic.

David Wiebe reminds us of the importance of avoiding deism at the one extreme and "God of the gaps" on the other, and this is what I tried very hard to do in my article. I emphasized the immanence of God in creation, but expressed reluctance to resort to miraculous explanations. I did not rule out miracles as such because I am a Christian and gladly accept the reality of the resurrection.

Denyse O'Leary and James Wagler don't like my discussion of irreducible complexity (IC). Unfortunately, IC is not something that can be conclusively settled by evidence either way.

Michael Behe, who coined the term, believes intuitively that the bacterial flagellum is irreducibly complex, but he can never be sure. The other side can tell stories about how the flagellum can be reduced in small steps to simpler machines (such as the membrane pump I mentioned in my piece), but we can't be sure either that all the small steps that are needed can be proved.

We have to go by an overall impression we get by long and intimate contact with nature in the laboratory. My impression of a certain messiness and "ad hoc-ness," particularly at the level of the complete genome of plants and animals, tends to lead me away from IC and from intelligent design in general.

O'Leary does not respond to this view of molecular biology at all. My view is supported by Francis Collins, the evangelical Christian who is the head of the Human Genome Project, in his recent book, *The Language of God*.

The final sentence of my piece was highly underdeveloped and should not have been used in the title, which I did not choose. However, as a Christian I insist on the idea that what we find in nature must be consistent with the love of God. I was trying to point to our ability to understand nature to some extent as a clue to the presence of God.

—Glen Klassen, Winnipeg

Winnipeg

'Mennonite humour' explored at Winnipeg Writers Festival

What's so funny about Mennonites anyway? A lot, it would seem, based on the ready smiles and responsive laughter of about 150 mainly Russian/*Kanadier* Mennonite people who listened to three Mennonite writers with southern Manitoba roots—Armin Wiebe, Anita Horrocks and David Elias—read from their works and address the “Mennonite humour” question at a recent Winnipeg Writers Festival event hosted by Canadian Mennonite University (CMU).

The mainly grey-haired audience caused Wiebe to comment that if he'd known they would be so “mature,” he might have chosen to read a family gathering story instead of “The

Moonlight Sonata of Beethoven Blatz.” The unpublished story about a 90-year-old grandmother sharing with her grandson memories of her past romantic experiences did evoke hearty laughter, however.

For Wiebe, what's funny about Mennonites is that non-Mennonites perceive them as a dour and serious people. “We laugh within our own group,” he said, just as other religious or ethnic groups do. For example, he found Hutterites “hilarious” when he taught on a colony for a year. And, he added, “I imagine Muslim women under their burkas have a good laugh



Photo by Leona Dueck Penner

A hundred-and-fifty mainly Russian/*Kanadier* Mennonite people listened to three Mennonite writers with southern Manitoba roots—Armin Wiebe, Anita Horrocks and David Elias—read from their works and address the “Mennonite humour” question at a recent Winnipeg Writers Festival event hosted by Canadian Mennonite University (CMU).

on occasion, too.”

Horrocks and Elias agreed. “We're not different from other groups when

Prairie Humour: Low German Mennonite Style

Exploring the idea of “Mennonite humour” was not unique to last month's event at CMU. Peter Penner of Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, spoke at a St. John's College event devoted to “lost prairie humour”; Penner said such humour frequently revolved around the “bravado of the victim.” Presented below are an example of Low German humour, a joke he told at a Mennonite congregation that failed to elicit any laughter, and a true story from his time teaching aboriginal students in northern Manitoba.

An “Old Colony” Mennonite bishop was standing on the front steps of his church one Sunday morning when a chauffeur-driven limousine with a passenger in the back, drove by. The bishop quietly commented in Low German to the men surrounding him. “*Jo, Schween and Harschofte faure hinge met,*” which roughly translates as, “Yes, pigs and nobility ride in the back.”

A Mennonite farmer was called to his final accounting and when he arrived at heaven's gate he was told by St. Peter, “We seem to have no record of you ever having given anything to the poor without wanting something in exchange. It would help if you remember even a single instance of genuine generosity that we might have missed.”

The farmer replied, “Well, the closest I ever came was when a beggar interrupted our Sunday noon meal after church and I gave him 25 cents in order to get rid of him.”

St. Peter didn't think that would do, but said he'd check with his boss. When he returned, St. Peter said, “I'm afraid the news isn't good. God said, ‘Give him back his two bits and tell him to go to hell.’”

In 1996, when we had just returned from South Africa, I was teaching a mathematics course for the faculty of education at the Sagkeeng First Nations Reserve, just north of Pine Falls, Man. One day when I was going to dismiss the class a few minutes early, the students suggested we talk for a few minutes about what it was like in South Africa during

the anti-apartheid struggle. I told them about how, because of Mennonite Central Committee's work with South African refugees, we were persona non grata in South Africa. Consequently, when we needed to travel across South Africa we would have to carry a letter saying that we were unwanted aliens and had been given 12 hours to cross South Africa. We would have to show this letter at every police and military road block along the way, where it would always get passed around and carefully read, none of the police doubting that this innocent-looking white couple was, in fact, a threat to the state.

At about this point in the story, a group of students at the back of the classroom started laughing uncontrollably. After the class, Norman, one of the giggling students, came up to me and apologized for their rude behaviour, saying that Mark had said something so incredibly funny they just couldn't stop laughing.

I, of course, wanted to know what had been so funny.

Norman replied, “When you said that you had carried a letter saying that you were unwanted aliens, Mark whispered, ‘So Mr. Penner was an Indian for a day.’”

it comes to being funny,” Horrocks said. Elias suggested that Mennonite humour is also “subversive. It subverts authority, it subverts repression. So it’s no surprise we’re funny—there’s a lot to subvert.”

As for where they find their humour, Horrocks—who writes books for younger readers—said that while she is not a Low German speaker herself, she hoped the language she celebrates and cherishes would add to the humour of the story. Also, she tries to “remember what it was like to be 12 years old, and how 12-year-olds think. I try to recreate the flavour of the kids I grew up with.”

For Wiebe, the humour “was determined by the character. If you imagine the character honestly, what is funny will be determined by the situation he or she is in, and will resonate with the reader. His point of view is not funny to him, but makes others laugh. And I was dead serious when I wrote about it,” he added.

It could also be that Mennonites have an obligation to be funny, Wiebe conjectured, given that Mennonites are among the most privileged special interest groups in Canada. “No other denomination has its own university in Manitoba. Is that because we’re funny?”

Then there’s that sort of “dual nature” Mennonites have to contend with, he continued. For example, when Peter Gzowski interviewed Wiebe some years ago, he had visions of horses and buggies and Rudy Wiebe’s novels in mind! Which can be funny, too, Wiebe added hastily.

Also, there’s the concept of being responsible for the weaker brother, illustrated by the story of a friend’s father who used to tell one joke after another. But then he stopped doing it, apparently because he had heard a story about a minister who told a joke during a worship service and found out afterwards that a person had not been saved that evening—because he was offended!

Elias added that in his own work “there is always an aspect of darkness” that surfaces in his writing, “dark humour” deliberately contrived through cartoon-like characters, which is the way he can “address serious questions.” And the presence of an

European volume of Global History Series released

Testing Faith and Tradition, the history of European Mennonite churches, has been released as part of the Global Mennonite History Series.

A project of Mennonite World Conference (MWC), this second volume in the series tells the story of Mennonite churches coming into being across Europe, endeavouring to remain faithful through nearly five centuries.

Much has been written about the beginnings of these fellowships. But until now, far less has been available about the years that followed. Frequent wars during the past 480 years strained these Mennonite churches immeasurably, especially when their governments battled each other. This volume recounts those tortuous and formative experiences.

Seldom have the distinguishing features of the Dutch, French, German, Swiss and Russian—and, more recently, the British, Italian and Spanish—Mennonite churches been examined. These churches’ cultural and historical differences are signifi-

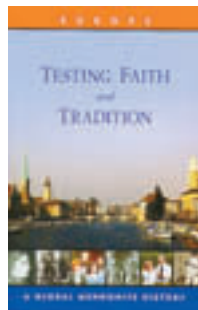
cantly unique, and they are a key part of the history told in these chapters by European Mennonite historians and church leaders. The *Umsiedler*, with their sheer numbers and religious vigour, are a current force included in this ongoing story.

Today, many of these Anabaptist-descended Mennonite churches throughout Europe are declining in membership, but they are not without reinvigorated faith and hope. Writers from within these various fellowships have contributed chapters to this frank and highly engaging story.

Hanspeter Jecker of Switzerland and Alle G. Hoekema of the Netherlands served as co-editors of this volume. John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder are the series editors.

Testing Faith and Tradition: Global Mennonite History Series, Europe is available from Pandora Press (pandorapress.com).

—MWC release by
Phyllis Pellman Good



Kitchener, Ont.

Mysteries of Grace re-issued as DVD

Storyteller Jack Dueck was born to Mennonite immigrant parents in southern Alberta. Growing up, he absorbed a vast store of indelible experiences and stories of humour, irony, and religion. The haunting songs—and the raw memories of his peoples’ sojourn—formed the core of his early years.

Ten years ago, Dueck presented the stories and music in concert form at

“omniscient narrator who controls everything [keeps you from taking] yourself too seriously!”

The evening, later described as “a fun event” by several people, concluded with CMU English prof Sue Sorenson, a Lutheran, acknowledging that she now understood Mennonite

St. Mary’s Church in Kitchener. The fundraising event for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) included CBC journalist Mary Wiens and a special choir led by George and Esther Wiebe from Winnipeg. The recorded event drew hundreds of people. Videos and audio CDs were sold across North America.

MCC Ontario has recently re-issued the program—*Mysteries of Grace & Judgement*—in DVD format. To order, call the MCC Ontario office in Kitchener toll-free at 1-800-313-6226.

—MCC Ontario release by
Anne L. Brubacher

humour better. Another woman of Irish background noted that she had enjoyed the humorous stories, which she described as similar in style to descriptions of Irish funerals she had grown up with.

—**Leona Dueck Penner**,
with files from **John Longhurst**

Winnipeg

Conscientious objection critiqued by history conference

When Canadian Major General La Fleche asked a delegation of Mennonites negotiating an alternative service program during World War II, “What will you do if we shoot you?” Jacob H. Janzen replied they could not be scared that easily.

He had “looked down too many rifle barrels” for that, Janzen said with some emotion. He had, in fact, twice faced a firing squad. “This thing is in our blood for 400 years and you can’t take it away from us like you’d crack a piece of kindling over your knee. We believe in this!”

Janzen’s words were recounted—and received with applause—at War and the Conscientious Objector, a history conference held last month at the University of Winnipeg. The two-day event featured a full program of diverse papers that illuminated the strength of historic Mennonite convictions about nonresistance, particularly in Canada during the Second World War.

More than 10,000 Canadian men served as conscientious objectors (COs) at that time, on farms, fighting forest fires, planting trees, and more. It was also noted that close to 40 percent of eligible Mennonite young men enlisted in the Canadian military.

Running through the well-attended conference was an undercurrent of anxiety that if “this thing” had once been thick in Mennonite blood, it might not be so any longer.

“I’m afraid many Mennonite churches [today] would not identify with this principle,” commented Harry Loewen, professor emeritus of the University of Winnipeg.

The conference considered past models of conscientious objection (absolutist or pragmatic, separatist or integrationist), government reactions and women’s responses to the war. The three major Mennonite groups in Canada—Swiss Mennonites, 1870s Mennonites and 1920s Mennonites—

wished to present a united front, but reacted somewhat differently to the national challenges of war because of their own particular histories.

Mennonites were not the only conscientious objectors, however. Papers by several scholars about the Second World War history of the Doukhobors, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Quakers, as well as those influenced by the social gospel, gave a broader context to the

experience of Mennonite COs. Keynote speaker Thomas Socknat, professor at the University of Toronto, further broadened the context by placing CO history into peace movements in Canada.

A session on the theological basis of conscientious objection was, as one person put it, “the real meat.” Tom Yoder Neufeld of Conrad Grebel University College showed that the

Young CO left life as a U.S. marine behind

For Christian Kjar, 20, a U.S. marine who went AWOL and took a bus to Canada in October 2005, the CO journey has been a long and lonely one. Still awaiting refugee status a year later, Kjar, the youngest speaker at the conference, shared his story simply, without notes, which was transcribed by Canadian Mennonite national correspondent Leona Dueck Penner.

“I was born and raised in Santa Barbara [Calif]. As a young kid I was always interested in developing a moral character. I also thought frequently of the military, which I thought stood for values and ideals.

“I registered for the marines in December 2004. On the wall of the registry office there was a motto: ‘Honour, courage, commitment, integrity.’ When I saw that, it felt like I was stepping into a church! Obviously, this was where young men and women go to serve the greater good.

“But from the onset [of boot camp in January 2005], I knew it was stupid and foolish and wrong. This was not the place to go if you value human dignity. Instead, it was an extremely violent atmosphere where they train you to change a human being into an object by using phrases like ‘communist bastards’ and singing about stamping on Iraqi

children.

“It’s very difficult to go against the grain in that setting because it’s a group thing. So I kept trying to reassure myself that I could be a warrior. But I couldn’t let go of the fact that the intent was taking the life of a living breathing human being.

“When I was posted to Cherry Point [a Marine Corps base in North Carolina, in preparation for deployment to Iraq], it was eating me inside that I couldn’t express how I felt to others.

“Prayer and meditation were very important to me at that time. During a four-day grace period [before deployment], I had time to really reflect and come to grips with what my conscience was telling me. One day I opened the Bible at Deuteronomy 5 and read, ‘*Thou shalt not kill.*’

“After that I was honest with myself. I now knew what I didn’t want to be. Also, the just war thing didn’t work for me.... I knew there is no justice to be complicit in the suffering of people of differing faiths and origins, and was convinced that the U.S. government has failed utterly and miserably in preserving the dignity of human life in Iraq,

where thousands of people have died.

“Now I’m in Toronto involved in the Franciscan life. Still fighting lots of battles, but they’re more joyful. Feeding the homeless in a soup kitchen I feel now that I’m taking a greater part in helping humanity.”

—**Christian Kjar**



Kjar

distinctive peace position—historically a “reflex” rooted in an ethos of separation, ethnicity, obedience and “an unsophisticated use of Scripture”—faces major challenges today, with only the “dim memory” of conscription. Yoder Neufeld called for a theology not only of conscientious objection, but “conscientious engagement” in peacemaking.

David Schroeder, professor emeritus of Canadian Mennonite University, said, “We’re not called to make history come out right. [That’s] what Christ has already done. We’re called to be the church and to be Christian in the world.”

The event’s strongest contribution, perhaps, was its stories. Some were narratives that were so raw, moving, even guileless, that they could only be absorbed for further contemplation. [See sidebar story, “Young CO left life as a U.S. marine behind,” on page 16.]

Seoul, South Korea

Mennonites condemn North Korean nuclear tests

Along with 19 other organizations in the Global Partnership for Prevention of Armed Conflict, the Korea Anabaptist Center (KAC) recently signed a letter condemning North Korea’s recent nuclear tests. The statement also called for the U.S.—with whom a ceasefire is currently declared—to immediately engage in bilateral talks with North Korea.

Mainline South Korean churches, however, tend to respond quite differently. Since 1953, North and South Korea have lived in the tension of a ceasefire. Partly due to this tension, peace theology is not a popular perspective or topic of discussion for mainline churches in South Korea, says Tim Froese, executive director for international ministries of Mennonite Church Canada Witness and one of the founders of the Korea Anabaptist Center in Seoul.

Froese lived in South Korea from 1998-05. “The Just War theory is invoked readily, as are stories of Old Testament wars, in justifying what

Sam Steiner’s account of being a draft dodger during the Vietnam War, for example, probed at tensions or ironies around the practice of conscientious objection. Contemporary situations needing peacemaking also emerged, including concerns about the “hawkish” views of Franklin Graham, who was holding an evangelistic festival in Winnipeg on the same weekend. [See “Mennonites lead protest of Franklin Graham Festival,” Nov. 13, page 18.]

The conference was hosted by the Chair in Mennonite Studies of the University of Winnipeg and sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

—Dora Dueck

The article was originally published in The MB Herald.

many would see as the obvious need to defend one’s country,” he says. “The Christian faith is not seen as really offering any alternative response.”

The KAC is trying to change that. Since its inception, staff have worked with churches to help them “understand themselves with a peace identity,” says Cheryl Woelk, who coordinates education programs at KAC and who serves as head teacher at KAC’s English teaching ministry, Connexus.

Woelk and Jae Young Lee, the peace program director at KAC, say there is something everyone can do: Pray for the situation. In particular, they ask for prayers that “both governments and citizens refrain from responding in a sharp, reactionary way to the nuclear testing issue, that both governments and people learn more about the complexity of the issue from different perspectives before reacting in ways that increase the threat of violence and division among people, and ask that people not dehumanize the ‘enemy.’”

—MC Canada release by Dan Dyck

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Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Soccer steers teens to Christ

The Mongolian team ran off the field in Gothenburg, Sweden, victorious.

A goal scored on a penalty kick helped it defeat Swedish team Söderbärke GOIF to land in the top 16 in the Gothia Cup, a prestigious worldwide youth soccer tournament.

For coach Jardel da Silva, however, the true victory was not on the field, but in the players' hearts.

UB United, the first team from Mongolia ever to compete in the Gothia Cup, is part of an Ulaanbaatar soccer ministry through Joint Christian Services (JCS) International, the organization that enables Mennonite Church Canada Witness to send workers to Mongolia. Leaders have expanded the program, opening newer soccer clubs in the Xailastai and Sharhad districts of Ulaanbaatar and in Sukhbaatar Aimag, two days east of the capital. More than 150 youths are part of the

soccer programs.

"Part of what we are teaching is ethics and character training," says Marlow Ramsay, an administrator at JCS through Witness and its partner, Mennonite Mission Network. "That leads us to spiritual things: 'Why should you have good character?', 'Why should you do the right things?' There's got to be a reason."

The reason is Christ, says da Silva. "Our biggest goal is to lead them to Christ. Besides that, on the social part it's to keep them away from alcohol and bad behaviour like addictions and fighting. We give them a purpose to live their lives as healthily as they can."

The club offers Bible studies and English classes, inviting each participant to join. Not everyone comes, but playing time is not based on language study or on belief.

"They know we are Christian," da Silva says. "We don't force them to go to study or church.... This is a process. Maybe someday the seeds we plant will grow and bear fruit."

Some youths already are blossoming. Ankhaha, 17, came from a rough area of Xailastai. The soccer club gave him somewhere to go and he took advantage of the teachings there—both on and off the field. One day on the street a fight started. Ankhaha was involved. Another boy was beaten badly.

The victim's mother found Ankhaha at school. She threatened to call the police unless she was paid. Ankhaha had no money. But he had the soccer club. Club leaders decided to pay if Ankhaha agreed to work for the club, da Silva says.

Ankhaha was overwhelmed. He continued to return to the meetings and Bible studies and this time he truly listened. He became a leader, excelled in English class, and two years after soccer first drew him to UB United he decided to follow Jesus. He now attends a local church and plans to be baptized. He is an assistant coach and leader of the Xailastai club.

Other boys tell similar stories. B.



Members of UB United attend church in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, for a blessing the Sunday before leaving for Sweden.

Otgonpurev used to fight frequently. Now, instead of giving out bruises, he gives others news about Jesus.

The boys also spread interest in soccer. Their trip to Sweden this past summer has led to appearances on Mongolian television and radio stations, and increased interest in the club, especially when the team did well.

—MC Canada release by **Ryan Miller**, with contributions from *Horizons*

Horizons is a publication of Joint Christian Services International.

Winnipeg

Partners with God in creation care

When it comes to doing something to save the Earth, people should "pick one thing and do it." That was the advice keynote speaker Steven Bouma-Prediger gave to the more than 100 people who attended The Good Life on God's Good Earth creation care conference at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) at the end of September.

Bouma-Prediger, author of the book *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, told attendees not to allow the magnitude of the problems facing the Earth to become overwhelming or they would become paralyzed.

He went on to suggest that a good way to approach caring for creation is to "travel light, eat right, live well."

Also speaking at the two-day confer-

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Receipts issued for donations of \$20 and more.

ence was Peter Harris, director of A Rocha International, a Christian environmental organization. He said that the church failed to invest resources in creation care in the past because it had based its mission work on the wrong question. "The church has been asking, 'What do people need most?' rather than the proper question, 'What is most important to God?'" he said. For Harris, the fact that God cares about creation should be enough to make creation care a Christian priority.

He went on to say that the major flaw in the environmental movement today is its failure to recognize that "the roots of the environmental crisis lie in the human heart," and that people can only heal their relationship to the Earth when they heal their relationship with God.

Other speakers included Providence College and Seminary president Gus Konkol and CMU academic dean Gordon Zerbe. Konkol reminded attendees to avoid the temptation to

'The roots of the environmental crisis lie in the human heart.'

reduce the created order to a set of rules that they can manage. Zerbe talked about the Book of Revelation as "a tale of two cities, with different social, spiritual and ecological economies." He urged his listeners to see the apocalyptic text as an invitation to "a comprehensive disengagement with the evil ways of the world."

In addition to the presentations, conference-goers participated in workshops on topics such as species at risk, environmental refugees and the global food market.

For CMU associate professor of history and theology Gordon Matties, who helped organize the conference, the event was significant because it brought together various schools and organizations, and because "we were able to share with the wider Christian community the biblically based good news that we are partners with God in caring for creation."

—CMU release by **Dorothea Toews**

The author is a CMU student.

Akron, Pa.

MCC begins organizational review following resignation of executive director

The recent resignation of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) executive director Robb Davis has caused the MCC executive committee, which hired Davis, to add additional time to their already planned January 2007 meeting for gathering an "organizational consensus" about keeping the 86-year-old international relief, development and peace agency moving forward.

"While Robb's resignation has not stopped any of the day-to-day work of MCC in responding to those in need around the world, it does call us to a serious discussion about internal organizational structure and culture," said Ron Dueck, chair of the MCC executive committee.

Following a recent meeting, the MCC executive committee informed staff and board members that a review of Davis' resignation led to identifying internal governance and structural issues which led to his resignation and made it difficult for him to work within the MCC culture.

"Our goal is to move toward a comprehensive organizational consensus on the direction that we wish MCC to take in the future," Dueck said.

Some of the issues identified by the executive committee included the lack of clarity around the function of governing bodies, the role of the MCC executive director in the decision-making process, benchmarks of organizational success, and unclear lines of accountability within and between MCC entities.

The MCC executive committee will continue to meet over the next several weeks to complete work on hiring an interim executive director. Lowell Detweiler is currently serving as short-term acting executive director. —MCC release

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RITTENHOUSE EUROPEAN TOUR (April 25 - May 9)
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London, England

Mennonites rekindle faith of young man

What Tim Lawrence knew about Christianity did not make sense to him. Like countless young people growing up in the United Kingdom, Lawrence was brought up in an Anglican family but knew almost nothing about Christianity—so he looked outside of the church for a spiritual community.

“I was convinced there was more to life than the individualistic career achiever view peddled at school,” Lawrence told Vic Thiessen, director of the London Mennonite Centre (LMC) and mission worker with Mennonite Church Canada Witness. “So I explored transcendental meditation, holistic spirituality and Buddhism. But I just got more and more confused.”

Lawrence’s search led him to Cambodia, where a short-term volunteer assignment left a profound mark on his life.

“I knew I wanted to give my life to help bring an end to the suffering, violence



Tim Lawrence, left, engages Vic Thiessen, director of the London Mennonite Centre, in matters of faith.

and poverty in Cambodia,” he said.

It was there Lawrence met a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worker who “embodied the life I wanted to live and yet was a Christian.”

Lawrence became a Christian, and on his return to England he immediately joined a charismatic church.

While the church helped him grow in various ways, Lawrence had difficulty with its understanding of power and its lack of support for his understanding of the gospel as good news for the poor.

“Again I became disillusioned with church, eventually becoming bitter and angry at not being able to resolve my differences with my congregation’s vision and structure,” he said. “My compassion and faith were dying. I essentially got stuck.... The LMC helped get me unstuck.”

Hearing Stuart Murray Williams from the Anabaptist Network speaking at a conference led to purchases from the Metanoia Book Service, and to a Bridge Builders mediation course. Both are ministries of the London centre. During the course, Lawrence met and engaged Thiessen in conversation. More books and visits with Thiessen helped Lawrence understand his personal difficulties with church and to embrace a theology that finally made sense to him—one that was centred on justice and nonviolence.

“Through the LMC my faith has been rekindled in many ways,” said Lawrence, “and if I had to put a label on my faith at this time I would call it

Winnipeg

Convert Aeroplan loyalty points into ministry potential

Atightening of rules for Air Canada customers with accumulated Aeroplan reward miles could mean losses for people unable to use their points before they expire.

So Al Rempel, director of Resource Development for Mennonite Church Canada, would like to see those losses turned into gains for the church. He is inviting Aeroplan reward mile holders to gift unused air miles to MC Canada.

“There are a number of ways to enhance ministry if people with accumulated points would consider gifting their unused air miles to the church,” he said, citing the high travel costs for international mission workers sent on assignment.

“Using donated points we could fly international pastors to Canada for the IMPaCT program in Alberta next year,” he added, referring to the highly successful International Mennonite Pastors



Photo by Dan Dyck

Al Rempel, director of Resource Development for Mennonite Church Canada, is inviting Air Canada customers to gift their Aeroplan reward miles to ministry through MC Canada.

Coming Together project hosted in Manitoba this past June. “Using gifted reward miles will help better connect the church and its work.”

Interested donors can call Rempel or Hinke Loewen-Rudgers toll-free at 1-866-888-6785, who will help guide callers through the procedure.

—MC Canada release by **Dan Dyck**

Tampa, Fla.

Paraguay's first lady addresses MEDA convention

The highlight of the 2006 Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) convention for many of the 400 participants was the presence of Maria Gloria Penayo de Duarte, wife of Paraguay's president.

Duarte recounted the efforts of her husband Nicanor, who became president in 2003, to set a new moral course in a country where "corruption had become a way of life." He was assisted by several Mennonite businessmen whom he appointed to high-level positions and who "are showing it is possible to be in public office without contaminating themselves."

She also described her personal efforts to alleviate poverty through a charitable foundation which operates programs of nutrition, education and family restoration. Its holistic emphasis was modelled on Jesus, whose ministry covered spiritual, material and emotional concerns, she said.

"People have made fun of us, but

"Anabaptist."

Lawrence and his wife have since returned to Cambodia to follow his calling to work with the rural poor of that country.

"Tim is by no means an extraordinary case," said Thiessen. "I have spoken to many people in the U.K. whose faith has been rekindled through contact with the LMC. They frequently talk about it as 'coming home' to a faith they had always known, a faith with integrity. This is one of the ways the LMC is helping to revitalize the church in the U.K."

The London Mennonite Centre, opened in 1953 by the Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network. The centre is jointly supported by Mennonite Church Canada Witness and Mennonite Mission Network through staff and financial aid. MCC provides a grant that helps fund Bridge Builders.

—MC Canada release by **Dan Dyck**

through all of this the Lord has given us his hand," she said.

Duarte described herself as "a daughter of God" and an "adopted Mennonite."

"When I introduce myself as a Mennonite, people ask me if I speak German and was born in the Chaco," she said. "People are often confused about this. The true evidence of being a Mennonite is the faith."

Duarte also recounted challenges. Powerful economic interests were resisting tax reform, she said, and the press has ridiculed her, calling her "Mrs. Bible."

Needing each other

As a pastor, I was particularly interested in a seminar exploring the church-business connection.

"Why do we need each other?" asked Phil Ebersole, one of the seminar leaders and pastor of Peace Mennonite Community Church in Aurora, Col. Ebersole said that by the time he began his ministry he had picked up the sense that "business is not good" and "if a business is succeeding it must be doing something unethical." Ebersole commented on his immaturity and his need for transformation.

Marty Friesen of Diemo Machine Works in Arborg, Man., another of the seminar leaders, said, "If there had been a 'minister of business' at the area conference, I would have been on the phone often as we were coming up with the mission statement for our business." He wanted his faith to be integral to the plans for his company and was looking for help. Pastors and churches need to act as spiritual companions to all people, including business leaders, he suggested.

"The local congregation needs business people, and business women and men need the local congregation," stated Brian Bauman, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada minister of missions. According to him, gifts of strategic planning and the ability to take risks are gifts many business leaders have and they are also gifts needed in many local churches.



MEDA photo

Maria Gloria Penayo de Duarte, wife of Paraguay's president, was the keynote speaker at this year's annual Mennonite Economic Development Associates convention in Tampa, Fla. She also spent time talking individually with some of the more than 400 participants from 10 countries.

Annual report

MEDA president Allan Sauder reported that last year the organization served 2.6 million clients in 35 countries through microfinance and agriculture programs. A particularly strong performer was the commercial distribution of insecticide-treated mosquito nets to prevent malaria in Tanzania. Sauder said MEDA ended the year in the black, with donations rising six percent to \$1.8 million (US) and total revenues up 25 percent to \$13.7 million (US).

This was my first time at a MEDA convention and I was impressed with the energy and camaraderie I experienced. I was inspired by MEDA stories from partners far and near, and was moved by the many expressions of heartfelt desire to follow Jesus in all aspects of life every day. The inseparable connection between faith and leadership in business was repeated in plenary addresses and the many seminars offered.

—**Ilene Bergen**, with files from MEDA's **Wally Kroeker**

The author is a pastor at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont.

Abbotsford, B.C.

Prison ministry celebrates 40 years of service

Obeying Christ's call to visit those in prison is at the heart of the M2/W2 Association, which celebrated 40 years of ministry in British Columbia in late October. Celebration evenings in Abbotsford and Richmond recognized the association's four decades of service, which now includes other restorative Christian ministries.

The programs at Sevenoaks Alliance Church of Abbotsford and Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond featured music, drama, fundraising silent auctions, door prizes, and testimonies by former prisoners and volunteers of how their lives had been changed by participation in M2/W2.

A group of visionaries with a heart for incarcerated people began a Man to Man (M2) program in British Columbia in 1966 to relate to male prisoners at two different correctional

institutions. Forty years and some 3,000 volunteers later, M2/W2 has expanded to include women (the W2 aspect of the program). The association now includes P2, a crime-prevention parent mentoring program, and Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), which helps high-risk offenders who have been released into society.

According to Mary Reeves, community resource coordinator at the Abbotsford M2/W2 office, the association has experienced wonderful support from the local community over the years. Organizers were particularly pleased that 700 turned out for the



Attending the M2W2 Association's 40th anniversary celebrations in Abbotsford, B.C., were long-time volunteers Helen and Dan Nickel, former executive director Waldy Klassen, and John Vandenbrink, the association's first paid executive director.

Photo courtesy of M2W2 Association

Abbotsford event, when only 500 had been expected. "We feel God has really blessed us," she said.

Reeves added that although there are currently 400 volunteers in the Lower Mainland participating in M2/W2 prison visitations, there are

The joys of M2/W2

The joys of my M2/W2 experience are profound and rich.

My third M2/W2 friend, Romeo, whom I first met in 1984, was a lifer—with no mandatory parole for his crime of violence. Romeo continued his violent behaviour in prison, which meant numerous trips to the lonely, dirty and harsh "hole."

Even prison personnel would make a game of baiting Romeo. Romeo and I discussed this painful situation. Why not refuse the bait and deny the "enemy" the pleasure of getting you worked up? Well, it worked! End of fun!

When Romeo told me about the change, I referred him to Proverbs 25:22. Here, the wise counsel is to do good to your enemies, in order to "heap burning coals upon their head." He shook his head in disbelief, exclaiming, "That's in the Bible? Wow!"

Romeo now began his journey as a peacemaker. The prison personnel queried, "Whatever has happened to Romeo?"

From Kent Institution, he was moved progressively to less confining prisons—

Mountain Institution, Mission, Ferndale and finally the bonus, parole. While still at Ferndale, he was baptized at Cedar Valley Mennonite Church in 1994.

More good news. Romeo is presently living with a very kindly Indo-Canadian family in Abbotsford. Applying his gardening skills around the house, planting flowers, trimming the lawn and shrubs, the place has become the envy of the neighbourhood.

During a recent visit, I stood with him admiring his handiwork. Romeo came out with one of his gems, "Look at that, George. I own nothing and yet I have everything." He could have written I Timothy 6:6: "There is great gain in godliness with contentment."

Romeo's behaviour change had not gone unnoticed by his parole officer. At a recent parolee luncheon hosted by Corrections Canada, he was singled out as a model for other parolees. He has now been asked by his Corrections Canada supervisor to assist other parolees in their adjustment

to civilian life. One of his former fellow inmates was astounded at the change to the straight life: "Romeo, have you been run over by a truck?"

When I called to arrange a visit with him recently, he was most excited about a another "promotion." The assignment—visiting schools in the Mission and Abbotsford areas, accompanied by his parole officer, and talking to troubled youths about his life lessons.

Although he appreciates and empathizes with the youths, he tells them, "You may have difficult home situations, blaming your teachers, your parents, but you are the only one who can change your situation. You do not need to feel self-pity or mistreated. Take advantage of the opportunities you have in your home, school and community...and turn your life around."

Of that, Romeo—who has been awarded the Abbotsford City Thunderbird Award for public service—is a living example.

—George Epp

600 prisoners in the program, which means 200 are waiting for matches. "More volunteers are always needed," she says.

Wayne Northey, M2/W2 co-director along with Bernie Martens, said a book celebrating the association's first 40 years will be off the press shortly. Entitled *Whatever You Did for One... You Did for Me: Reflections from 40 years of Service*, the book will feature 44 stories of individual prisoners who have benefited from M2/W2. Both the book and a DVD featuring the visual presentation given at the celebration evenings will be available soon by visiting m2w2.com.

—Amy Dueckman



Photo courtesy of Agatha Klassen

In September, 14 former Voluntary Service workers who served in Twillingate, Nfld., in the 1950s, met in Iowa for their 50th anniversary. From left to right, back row: Howard and Bette Friesen, Eunice Kraybill, Susan Gibbons, Maurine and William Regehr, Erna Enns, Lois Gugel, Jack Neufeld and Ruth Glick; and front row: Agatha Klassen, Rita Schroeder, Erma Wiebe and Hedy Janzen. Over the years these VSers stayed in touch through several reunions and a round robin letter. At their most recent gathering they reflected on their experience as teachers and nurses a half-century ago, remembering their time at Twillingate as a stretching and growing experience where they came to appreciate another culture and a simpler lifestyle. They also spent some time singing "Newfie" songs.

Saskatoon

Bethany Manor hosts seminar on aging

John and Anne Neufeld of Winnipeg presented a series of talks on aging and mortality for the residents of Bethany Manor earlier this fall.

Aging and attitudes towards the elderly have changed over the last generation, the Neufelds explained. No longer are the elderly "put on the shelf" and considered useless. Instead, they are retiring younger, enjoying better health into their "golden years."

Despite this, the effects of aging eventually catch up with everybody, something the manor residents

could relate to. All elderly people are faced with grief, the Neufelds noted, whether it is the loss of eyesight or hearing, material things like a home, a loved one or a precious dream gone unfulfilled.

Manor residents were told that it is important for them to talk about their feelings and know that it is

okay to cry. As death approaches, many begin to think about it but often avoid speaking about it openly. The Neufelds encouraged their audience to live life to the fullest, put their house in order, make peace with everyone, update their wills, plan their funeral, and write their obituary.

—Emily Neufeldt

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Waterloo, Ont., Edmonton and Calgary

60 years of 'alternative shopping' experiences

As it celebrated its 60th anniversary last month, Marvin Frey was quite clear when he declared, "Ten Thousand Villages (TTV) provides consumers with an alternative shopping experience."

With a decreasing percentage of either shoppers or employees being Mennonite, he said TTV is helping consumers with a conscience to "make their home a statement" through the purchase of linens, jewellery, scarves, dishes and foodstuffs that directly benefit producers in the developing world. TTV has tripled in size and sales over the past seven years and the corporate plan is for the same to happen in the next seven years. New stores are being placed in areas where the current demographic of wealthy consumers with consciences shop.

Frey, the chief executive officer of TTV Canada, struggles with this, seeing the tension between consumerism per se and the need to provide a living to people in the developing world.

As TTV's sales continue to climb in both Canada and the U.S., talks are underway to sever TTV's connection to Mennonite Central Committee. Up to 1981, TTV was an independent organization, then called Self Help.

At TTV locations across Canada on Oct. 14, 60 years of service were celebrated by staff and customers alike.

Photo by Dave Rogalsky



Marvin Frey, the executive director of Ten Thousand Villages Canada is excited about the possibilities of providing "alternative shopping" experiences for socially conscious consumers as the organization heads into its seventh decade of operation.

Multi-talented volunteers provided musical ambiance, served cake and handed out helium balloons and bracelets as Edmonton's TTV store celebrated the organization's 60th anniversary and its own 20th anniversary. Store manager Joanne De Jong commented that both volunteers and customers seemed to enjoy the day, although she admitted they scared one woman.

"We decided to give a certificate away to the first person in the door at 1:15 pm.," she explained. "At 1:15 it was slow for awhile, but then a lady stopped and looked at our window display. She walked back and forth, then

finally came in. Once she got over her surprise—we had shakers and cheering—she was excited."

The two stores in Calgary were humming with activity as they found unique ways to mark the fact that, in 1946, Edna Ruth Byler, an American visiting MCC projects in Puerto Rico, made a \$5 purchase of locally embroidered linens to take home. She wanted to help these impoverished women provide for their families. Without a concrete plan or committee behind her, she began showing the goods to friends and neighbours and taking orders.

Sticky buns were served in honour of Byler, as it is said most visitors to her home have fond memories of her famous Potato Dough Buns (found on page 65 of the *More-with-Less* cookbook).

Evelyn Braun, one of the very original volunteer clerks at the Crowchild store 23 years ago, is still finding time to volunteer and was at the till for the anniversary.

—**Dave Rogalsky, Donita Wiebe-Neufeld and Charlene Baker**



Hosts Wally & Shirley Schmidt

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Winkler, Man.

Fall meeting highlights state of MC Manitoba

Emmanuel Mennonite Church—still smelling of fresh paint and new construction—hosted the fall delegate session of Mennonite Church Manitoba on Oct. 26. This meeting, precursor to the February annual general meeting, gave the 123 delegates from 38 congregations an opportunity to examine the budget before they set their individual church budgets.

MC Manitoba also took the opportunity to report on the progress of a study that it initiated in 2005, “Our health and our future.” Norm Voth, director of Evangelism and Service Ministries, shared some of the findings:

- The two age groups that represent the largest part of MC Manitoba are the 10- to 14-year-olds and 40- to 49-year-olds.
- Births are declining, deaths are increasing, and there is an upward trend in baptisms.

“Four themes or trends emerge from the church responses: responding to the current cultural context; where are the young people; dealing with conflict; and leadership development,” said Voth.

During the plenary discussion, the MC Manitoba board heard responses to the question of where to go from here.

“In what ways can MC Manitoba promote in our congregations Jesus’ invitation for us to love our enemies and his call for us to be peacemakers?” asked Brian Petkau of Carman Mennonite Church. “Could MC Manitoba promote and invite its member congregations to support the work of [Mennonite Central Committee] instead of Samaritan’s Purse or Operation Christmas Child?”

John Braun, pastor at Charleswood Mennonite Church, and Kerry Enns, member at Gretna Bergthaler Mennonite Church, asked that MC Manitoba help foster more service opportunities for youths and young adults.

The 2007 MC Manitoba budget calls



Pictured at this fall’s MC Manitoba delegate session were, from left, Edgar Rempel, executive director of MC Manitoba; Karen Schellenberg, pastor of Portage Mennonite Church; and John Klassen, who was thanked for his four years of service as director of Leadership Ministries.

for a 3 percent increase in giving from its member congregations. Delegates gave approval to the congregational giving budget and ministry allocation of \$750,844.

Two churches shared their stories.

Winnipeg

Manitobans learn to be ‘passionate’ in their faith

This year’s annual Mennonite Church Manitoba Equipping conference had a new look to it. Organizers took a different approach from the usual array of workshops that address a wide variety of church programs, realizing the fullness of the fall calendar and “the opportunity for spiritual renewal in the church,” said Bob Wiebe, director of Education Ministries. “It is an opportunity to look at new ways to talk about our faith and put our gifts to work in the church.”

Using the theme, “Roots and fruits of a passionate faith,” MC Canada staffers Arlyn Friesen Epp and Elsie Rempel addressed a small but receptive audience on Sept. 30 at Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship.

“Our image of God and our experience of God are at the root of our faith,” Friesen Epp told the participants in the morning session. “How can we bring the passion that characterized the faith of Paul and Timothy to our faith?” he asked.

Friesen Epp told listeners that God is a God of passion. “Jesus...came to ‘bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed,’ reflecting

Esther Krahn, who serves the Nordheim Mennonite Church in Winnipegosis with her husband, reported how their small aging congregation ministers to the whole community through its summer camp program, children’s clubs, Sunday school, Alpha Bible study program and shared worship services.

Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg has a new initiative: “Third usher.” Begun about two years ago, a small group from the church wanted to “link arms with our inner city neighbours,” said Linda Loewen. This group makes sure

a “third usher” is available Sunday mornings to greet the people who come in off the street, share coffee and baking with them, and accompany them to worship if they wish.

—**Evelyn Rempel Petkau**

God’s strong passion for justice.” God’s gifts of grace and forgiveness, God’s love of the world to the point of sacrificing Christ, and God’s joy over finding the lost all reveal a God that is radically passionate, he suggested.

A challenge to experiencing passionate faith in many Mennonite churches is allowing room for the expression of emotion. “Passionate faith embraces the cry and the laugh, the pain and the joy,” said Friesen Epp. “Do our tears and our joy meet in worship? Do we welcome each other’s emotional responses?”

According to Rempel, sometimes the language of faith has stood in the way of expressing passionate faith. “Authentic ‘God talk’ is part of being a Christian, but it scares many of us,” she said. “For a long time we thought of ourselves as ‘the quiet in the land.’”

Rempel outlined Christian disciplines that nurture the process of modelling and passing on a passionate faith. Not all these habits—such as meditation, fasting, simplicity, study, prayer, sacrifice, service and worship—are equally helpful to all. There are different learning styles and Rempel believes that if Christians can find those activities that suit them the best, “they can point you to the ways that it will be easiest for you to connect with and serve God.”

Eight worship options—each reflecting different learning and spirituality styles—were available for participants.

—**Evelyn Rempel Petkau**

FOCUS

Mission & Service

Footwashing provides lesson in spiritual ministry

Every Tuesday morning a handful of visitors enter the lobby of a local church in a downtown east side neighbourhood of Vancouver to sit for a while and soak

their feet in a basin of hot water, tea tree oil and Epsom salt. Many of these visitors have not slept in a bed for days or weeks. Others have had no change of socks or shoes for at least as long. Some come with blisters that have been raw for days or calluses that have grown thick and white through years of neglect.

When the smell is particularly pungent, some people tell me not to get too close. Others invite me over to see what toes look like without any nails. Invariably, as we get talking, one of them will pause for a moment, look at me, and ask me why on earth I am there attending to smelly, beaten-up, old feet.

I smile at the question and we muse together about the weather, or about blisters, or about the stuff of life.

Some people tell me about the jobs they have had or how difficult it is to find work.

Continued on page 28



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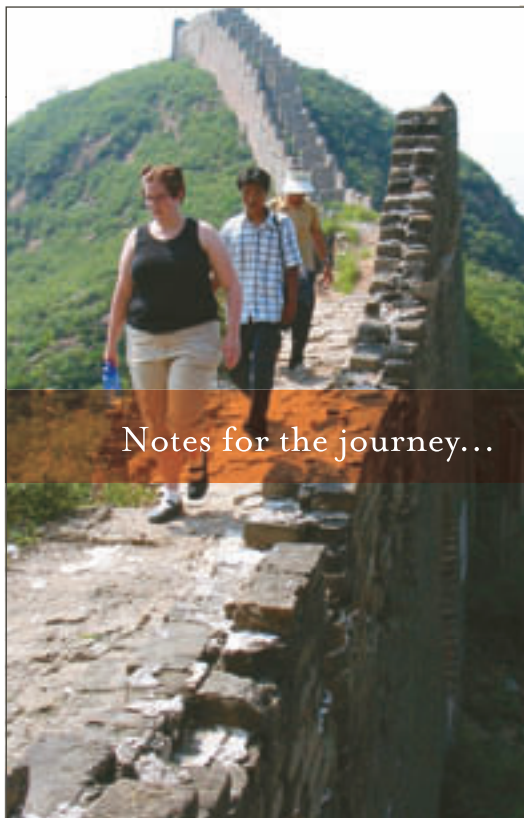
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Notes for the journey...



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Past, present, future all highlighted at CBC's 70th anniversary

Oct. 14 was a special day for Columbia Bible College (CBC) in Abbotsford, B.C..

Following the annual general meeting, a celebration of the college's 70th anniversary was held in Columbia Place. After a buffet dinner and some excellent choral music by the Columbia Singers under the leadership of faculty member Tony Funk, the program unfolded in three acts:

- Act I: Celebrating Columbia's Heritage
- Act II: Celebrating Columbia's Present
- Act III: Celebrating Columbia's Vision for the Future.

President emeritus Walter Unger presented the heritage piece, "The Columbia Story." Unger, who has served at the college for more than half of its history, high-

lighted the historic 1970 merger of the nearby General Conference Bethel Bible Institute with the Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute, creating Columbia Bible Institute, the first inter-Mennonite Bible institute in North America. He cited from one Mennonite publication that such a Mennonite Brethren/General Conference merger was "as unlikely as snow on a mid-summer day." But in 1982, this "unlikely" merger was sealed in a joint ownership agreement, he noted. A common commitment to Anabaptist distinctives provided the theological base for the merger and joint ownership agreement.

Following Unger's address, interim president Ron Penner recognized the many board members, faculty, staff and donors who had given so much over the decades to see Columbia develop into the school it is today.

A celebration of Columbia's present was highlighted by current students. Jason Harris, a third-year worship arts major, and Michelle Veeneman, a third-year caregiving and counselling major, shared their testimonies around the theme, "Why I am here." Worship arts faculty member Nelson Boschman and Columbia student musicians performed several



CBC photo

Current students at Columbia Bible College spell out the school's acronym with their collected bodies as part of 70th anniversary celebrations in October.

original selections.

Board vice-chair Randy Redekop closed the evening by sharing Columbia's vision for the future. With a campus bursting at the seams with more than 500 students, and residential facilities onsite for only female students, the obvious immediate need is for a large residential complex. Redekop said that seed money for such a capital project was going to be collected, with a full-blown capital campaign to follow in 2007.

The evening ended appropriately with the congregational song, "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow."

—CBC release

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Elmer Shantz, left, a member of the Waterloo Region Habitat for Humanity Steering Committee, chats with new homeowners Joyce and Robert Seymour at the dedication of a new five-plex project on Nov. 1. The Seymours are moving into the unit sponsored by nine local Mennonite congregations and Mennonite Foundation of Canada.



Habitat for Humanity photo by Ken Freeman

made them who they are.

I listen to these stories as I watch the caked grime and the dead skin break free from the aching feet in the water basin. And I think about how our feet tell the stories of our lives.

In these moments I think, too, of the bent figure of Jesus—kneeling low with towel, breathing in the stench of his disciples' feet, touching the filthy skin, scraping off what is dead, massaging what is sore, reviving what is numb—believing at all times in the beautiful.

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:14,17).

— **Jamie Spray**

The author served with Mennonite Central Committee's Praxis program as a summer intern. She is currently in Victoria teaching and pursuing further education in the area of international human rights and peace studies.

Footwashing *From page 26*

Others describe the challenges posed by heroin addiction, while a few confess to lives of petty crime. Some tell me about the bedbugs and the mice that live in their

hotel rooms, others of the loneliness and the importance of a smile. Some people tell me about who they were before everything fell apart or the children they have not seen for years but still love. Still others recount how their mistakes have



The MDS Commitment Continues ...

The 2005 hurricane disaster in the southern U.S. is the largest ever tackled by MDS.

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MDS HAS FACED CHALLENGES ...

- Supporting community leaders in rebuilding their organizations
- Finding project sites to house and feed volunteers among the extreme devastation
- Waiting for new building codes, permits, mitigation plans and authorization to begin rebuilding
- Waiting for residents to return home and decide their future plans and assistance
- Connecting with local long term recovery groups to conduct casework with our potential clients

- Recruiting sufficient project leaders, office managers, construction supervisors, crew leaders and cooks

THE MDS COMMITMENT CONTINUES ...

- MDS is responding at 11 project sites this winter, including two RV sites
- MDS continues to partner with local agencies and churches to serve community needs

MDS NEEDS YOU ...

- Your prayers for the hurricane survivors, volunteers and staff
- Your continuing financial support of this work done in Christ's name
- Your offer to serve as a leader, or to shoulder tap someone who can

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People&Events

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—

During its annual general assembly in early October, Meserete Kristos Church set new policy on the baptism of polygamous converts and women in leadership. The assembly approved a task force recommendation in favour of baptizing polygamous converts, but restricting them from leadership positions. Polygamy, a form of marriage in which a man has more than one wife, is common throughout Africa and in many countries around the world. A priority for evangelism played a role in the church's decision to baptize polygamous converts; del-

egates heard testimony from regional church leaders stating that the church's witness would be handicapped by denying baptism to polygamous converts, especially in Muslim areas. Policy regarding church members who take a second wife will remain the same as in the past: Their membership will be cancelled. Delegates also approved a recommendation in favour of women holding congregational office on the basis of gifts and election. This includes salaried offices such as evangelist, teacher and pastor, as well as unsalaried offices such as deacon and elder. Previous to this vote, there was no official policy, but tradition and custom discour-

aged the election of women to recognized roles in congregational leadership.

—MCC/Eastern Mennonite Mission joint release

Ottawa—On Nov. 10, 43 religious leaders from a broad spectrum of the faith communities from across Canada announced a joint signing of a Declaration on Marriage. Among the signatories was Bruce J. Clemenger, president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, of which Mennonite Church Canada is a member. "As different faith communities, we have come together to present to Parliament and society as a whole, our common view on marriage," said Clemenger. "The prime minister, by promising to hold a vote to re-open the debate on marriage, is giving Canadians an opportunity to have sober second thought on this issue. As communities of faith, we would welcome an opportunity to participate in reasoned and constructive public dialogue concerning the nature of marriage," he said. Also signing the declaration was Most Rev. Marcel Gervais, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Ottawa, who added, "Our appeal today is that law and public policy recognize the essential and unique importance of marriage as the union of one man and one woman for the security, nurturing and well-being of children. As religious leaders from diverse faith communities, we find common ground in affirming that the best interests of the child must prevail over adults' exercise of their liberty."

—EFC release by **Gail Reid**

Transitions

Births/Adoptions

Derksen—to Vickie and Lance, Grace Mennonite, Winkler, Man., a daughter, Quinn Sofia, Sept. 28.

Fox—to Melodee and Kevin, Waterloo North Mennonite, Ont., a daughter, Rachel Joy, Oct. 12.

Froese—to Gisela and

Peter, Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man., a son, Lucas Alejandro, Oct. 3.

Heidebrecht—to Andrea and Rick, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., a son, Simon Peter, Sept. 2.

Henderson—to Barb and Colin, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., a son, Adam Colin, in Orillia, Ont., April 26.

McMillan—to Gina Unger and Jeff, The Meeting Place, Winnipeg, a son, Hayes Unger, March 1.

Parra—to Dona and Daniel, Steinbach Mennonite, Man., a son, Santiago, Oct. 13.

Sawatzky—to Beth and James, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., a daughter, Ellery Ruth, July 8.

Schroeder—to Irene and Orlando, Steinbach Mennonite, Man., a daughter, Isabel Celeste, Oct. 22.

Siemens—to Jennifer and Werner, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., a son, Jacob Alejandro, Aug. 26.

Wall—to Tina and Jake, Faith Mennonite, Leamington, Ont., a daughter, Autumn, Oct. 20.

Marriages

Froese-Rensen—Daniel (Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.) and Sarah, in Port Colborne, Ont., July 29.

MacDonald-Jordan—Stuart and Tracy, Poole Mennonite, Milverton, Ont., Oct. 28.

Neudorf-Chalice—John and Megan, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Sept. 2.

Neufeldt-Braun—Peter and Edna, Coaldale Mennonite, Alta., Oct. 29.

Nicholls-Bergen—Shawn and Lisa, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Oct. 21.

Sawatzky-Bartel—Michael (Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.) and Melissa, in Saskatoon, Aug. 19.

Wall-Loewen—Dave and Maria, Niagara United

Continued on page 30



On Oct. 8, Greg Gaeddert, chair of the Bethel College board of directors, led the processional from Krehbiel Science Center to Memorial Hall, where Barry Bartel, left, was inaugurated as Bethel's 13th president. On the right is Ronald J.R. Mathies of Waterloo, Ont., who gave the commissioning address. When Bartel, a 1984 Bethel graduate with a triple major in Bible and religion, mathematics and peace studies, received the call regarding his appointment, he told a convocation audience of students and faculty the next day that his response was, "That's great—I'm thrilled and I'm terrified." His wish for all students, he said, is that they experience similar feelings as his during their time at Bethel—the excitement of being in "this special meeting place" and also "the challenge of being stretched beyond what you thought you could do."

Transitions *From page 29*

Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Aug. 12.

Deaths

Barrette—Robert Victor, 61 (b. March 12, 1945), Hunta Mennonite, Driftwood, Ont., Nov. 9.

Becker—Helene, 99, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Sept. 12.

Friesen-Thiessen—Helena, 73, Winkler Berghaler Mennonite, Man. (formerly of Steinreich, Mexico), Oct. 30.

Goertz—Alvine, 102, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Sept. 14.

Horst—David, 94, St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont., Nov. 7.

Nickel—Anna, 76, Winkler Berghaler Mennonite, Man., Oct. 5.

Pauls—Henrique, 65, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Oct. 9.

Penner—William W., 86, Winkler Berghaler Mennonite, Man., Oct. 6.

Pries—Anna, 92, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Oct. 21.

Rempel—Susan, 78, Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg, Oct. 22.

Steinman—Gordon, 85 (b. April 7, 1921), Cassel Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont., Nov. 8.

Wiens—Egbert Johannes, 68, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Aug. 3.

Wiens—Sarah, 93, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Oct. 16.

Baptisms

Ottawa Mennonite—Cameron Dick, Stephanie Fehr, Tom Friesen, Lily Rupp, Jan Schroeder, Chris Wiebe, Oct. 29.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes *Transitions* announcements within four months of the event. Please send *Transitions* announcements by e-mail to transitions@canadianmennonite.org, including the congregation name and location. When sending death notices, please include birth date and last name at birth if available.

School note**Canadians in Bluffton Sports Hall of Fame**

Bluffton, Ohio—Two Canadians have been named as inductees into the Bluffton University 2007 Athletics Hall of Fame. John Weber of Kitchener, Ont., and Howard House of Vineland Station, Ont., were both members of Bluffton's 1962 baseball team, which finished its record-breaking season with a 10-4 mark, including an 8-2 record in conference action. Coach A. C. Burcky led his squad to a first-place tie in the conference and was named to the National Association of Athletic Collegiate Hall of Fame at the conclusion of the season. The 1962 team was equally adept at the plate and in the field. The Beavers hit .323 for the year, while the pitching staff compiled a miniscule earned run average on the mound. Weber has previously been inducted into the Hall of Fame individually and on several teams. The induction will take place on Jan. 27, at a special ceremony in Marbeck Center.

—Bluffton University release by **Bill Hanefeld**

For rent

Openings for January! Student Housing in Montreal located within walking distance of McGill and an easy commute to Concordia. Experience community living and social action in a Christian and Peace Church context. www.residencema.ca; e-mail: experience@maisondelamitie.ca; phone 514-843-4356.

For sale

For Sale: Bethany Mennonite Church. Rural church building, contents and two-acre property near Watrous, Sask. Box 1120, Watrous, SK S0K 4T0. Phone: 306-946-2661 or 306-946-3497; e-mail: edith.fransen@sasktel.net.

Employment opportunities

Columbia Bible College announces a search for **PRESIDENT**

Columbia's Board of Directors is launching its search for Columbia's next President. Columbia is an accredited four-year evangelical Anabaptist Bible College on Canada's west coast with about 500 students. The president's role exists in order to lead the Columbia team in the fulfilment of its mission, to prepare people for a life of discipleship, service, and ministry. It is a full-time administrative faculty post with an initial two-year term.

Preferred Presidential Profile:

Character

- Demonstration of a passionate relationship with Jesus Christ and a commitment to an evangelical Anabaptist theology.
- Commitment to Columbia's mission, Confessional statements, and Statement of Community Responsibility.
- Demonstration of a deep commitment to the church, particularly as represented in the support of the mission, vision and well-being of both the MCBC and BCMB church families
- Membership in a church from one of these supporting conferences or a willingness to join such a church.

Competencies

- An earned doctoral degree in one of Columbia's teaching fields or in educational administration.
- Ability to provide effective administrative leadership.
- Ability to communicate effectively Columbia's mission and vision both to people within the college as well as various other "constituents."
- Ability to lead the college through fund development, both operational and capital.
- Post-secondary teaching and administrative experience.

Chemistry

- Ability to work with and provide empowering leadership for the Administrative Team, Faculty Council and the larger Columbia team.
- Ability to work effectively with a Board of Directors.

For a full list of qualifications and a job description, please consult our website: www.columbiabc.edu

Letters of application along with curriculum vitae may be sent, in confidence, to:

Brian Friesen, Board Chair
Columbia Bible College
2940 Clearbrook Road
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Applications will be processed starting Dec. 31, 2006. In accordance with Canadian immigration requirements, this advertisement is directed first to Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

Wanted

House sitters required in Rosethorn, Sask. Look after our house and cat while we are away on MCC SOOP from Jan. 1 to March 31, 2007. Enjoy the crisp, clean Saskatchewan winter air. Pay utilities only (ca. \$250). Phone 306-232 4275 or e-mail: g.epp@sasktel.net

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Mississauga Mennonite Fellowship is looking for a **half-time pastor** who enjoys preaching. To the extent that aptitude and time commitments allow, we welcome particular attention to pastoring our youths and young adults, keeping our fellowship connected to the conferences, and making us aware of peace and social concerns within our immediate and wider communities. Salary and benefits will reflect MCEC guidelines. Contact: Anna Wiens at rwien521@rogers.com or by phone at 416-252-2824.

Full-time Pastor

Valleyview Mennonite Church is located in the city of London (pop. 348,000), Ontario, in Middlesex County. We are presently looking for a full-time pastor and are inviting applications for this position. Interested candidates are asked to submit their resume to the MCEC office at 4489 King Street East, Kitchener, ON N2P 2G2. Attention: Muriel Bechtel.

**Richmond Park
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Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary seeks a full-time **Director of Admissions**, beginning Jan. 1, 2007, or when available.

This person will develop, implement and monitor an overall strategy for recruitment of students for AMBS programs and oversee the director of financial aid. Qualifications include commitment to Jesus Christ and the mission of the Mennonite Church, ability to communicate well and relate well to others, strong attention to details, proven supervisory and organizational skills, ability to think strategically, and availability to travel 40-50 percent. Women and members of under-represented groups are encouraged to apply. To apply, send a resume, three references, and letter of application, by Dec. 8, 2006, to Ron Ringenberg, Vice President, AMBS, 3003 Benham Avenue, Elkhart, IN 46517, or ringenb@ambs.edu.

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**Associated
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Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary invites applications and nominations for **Academic Dean** to assume responsibility on July 1, 2007.

Candidates should be committed to Jesus Christ, the Scriptures and the church, embody Anabaptist faith and practice for witness in a post-Christian society; have vision for helping shape new modes of theological education; have successful teaching experience, preferably at the graduate level; and have supervisory, administrative and team-building skills. Candidates are required to hold a Ph.D or Th.D. Deadline for applications is Feb. 1, 2007. Send nominations, or letter of application with vitae, to J. Nelson Kraybill, President, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 3003 Benham Ave., Elkhart, IN 46517, or nkraybill@ambs.edu.

Position for Leading Pastor

Gretna Bergthaler Mennonite Church, located in Gretna, Man., is welcoming applications for the position of Leading Minister. We are a congregation of about 100 members located in a family-friendly small town setting. Ministry in our congregation is defined by its multi-generational character and by the fact that we are the only church in our community. By God's grace we have enjoyed long-lasting, positive relationships with previous pastors and look forward to establishing such a relationship in the future. The successful candidate will have an Anabaptist/Mennonite faith orientation and be gifted in preaching, teaching and visitation ministries. Seminary-level education will be considered an asset. We are a member of Mennonite Church Canada and follow MC Canada salary guidelines. Our preferred starting date is July 1, 2007. Please direct your inquiries to Kerry Enns, Congregational Chair, at 204-327-5891 (work), 204-327-6666 (home), or write to me at kgenns@mts.net if you prefer e-mail. Further information is on file with MC Manitoba.



Photo by Melissa Engle

The four-person Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) canning crew hit the road again this fall for an annual meat canning effort that spans thousands of miles, involves some 19,000 volunteers and produces more than a half-million cans of meat for people in need. This year's crew includes, from left, Eric Thomas of Pennsylvania, David Yoder of Oklahoma, John Hillegass of Pennsylvania, and David Martens of Winkler, Man. Last year's season yielded a record 566,322 cans of meat, which MCC ships to families in need across the world. This year, 96,000 cans prepared by canning volunteers were shipped to Burundi, where families receive meat in exchange for work planting trees.

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A Mennonite Church Eastern Canada special report

EXTENDING THE PEACE OF JESUS CHRIST

CONNECTING THE DOTS

God has been preparing an Anabaptist people for just a time as this. There are people who are lonely, frightened, isolated, confused, abused and tired in our villages and cities.

They look and sound like us. They have a rich cultural heritage. Many have been uprooted. Some are wealthy and others are poor. Young and old together are striving to do their best.

And just like us, they need a relevant Jesus Christ and an understanding faith community. They are our neighbours, colleagues and family.

God often chooses the unlikely, the shy, the not-so-well-known, to share the gospel story. I believe that is us—you and me—as Canadian Mennonites who are many colours, languages and cultures. When we muster the courage to respectfully share our story, we discover that the unchurched and the de-churched love it.

One new 60-year-old Canadian-Korean Mennonite recently shared with a smile on his face, “I wish God had made me a Mennonite when I was still young so that I would have more energy and time to share the Anabaptist story with others.”

“Connecting the dots” is about finding creative and caring ways to share God’s story. God is letting us Anabaptists know that “I need you to be inviting others to my celebration.”

I believe God would like us to invite others along on the faith journey. When people of Mennonite faith make contact with their community, build relationships in the community and gently invite our new friends to come, taste and see that the Lord is good, we are “connecting the dots.”

Please don’t worry about having the right answers, trying to convert someone or knowing the Sinner’s Prayer. God takes care of the heart stuff. You and I are just there to help “connect the dots.”

—Brian Bauman

The author is MC Eastern Canada missions minister.



Bauman

Photo by Brian Bauman



After his presentation on Anabaptist evangelism, Jeff Wright, the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference minister, seated spoke personally with a number of MC Eastern Canada leaders, including, from left, Ken Driedger and Bruce Weber of Zion Mennonite Fellowship and Doug Amstutz of Grace Mennonite Church.

CHURCH MISSIONS NOT AN OPTION

NEW HAMBURG, ONT.

Admitting that he has a “lot of ambivalence” with the word “missional,” Jeff Wright, the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference minister, told a group of Ontario pastors that if a church is not involved in missions it is not a church. “It’s just a Kiwanis Club of prayer,” he said.

Wright spoke to about 40 pastors at Living Water Fellowship as part of a two-day MC Eastern Canada seminar called “Advantages of Anabaptist Evangelism,” telling them that local churches—not denominational structures or para-church agencies—are God’s true mission agency.

According to Wright, church mission efforts began to decline when Jesus ceased to be at the centre of church life. “MC USA theology shifted from ‘Jesus-centred’ to ‘being nice to God and people.’” He also suggested that “human sexuality derailed talk of Christology, and we’re paying the price today.”

As the only growing MC USA conference, Wright was asked what the Pacific Southwest’s secrets were.

While the churches are short on programs, like Alpha or Venture Clubs, he said the development of “active and emerging leaders” was important.

Second, Wright said church growth is based “on relationship development in the world. We’re invited into the community and we celebrate what God is doing in our lives. The world is hungry for authentic expressions of community and serious discipleship,” Wright said. “We release people to serve the wider community.”

In conclusion, Wright suggested that Anabaptism is perfect for the postmodern, post-Christian age. “Anabaptism has lain fallow for 480 years—we lost the Protestant Reformation, you know—but God has planted us for such a time as this.... We have a gift.”

—Ross W. Muir

'GATHERING' IN THE EMERGING SHEAVES

KITCHENER, ONT.

Jim Loepp Thiessen's sermon was "Upside down living—enemies." A likely sermon for a Mennonite congregation close to Remembrance Day. But the Gathering, an emerging congregation in Kitchener, is not what one might otherwise expect. "Mennonite" showed up on the radar in one bulletin announcement and in the sermon. Retelling the Dirk Willems story from the Martyrs' Mirror, Loepp Thiessen's sermon referred to it as a story from his Anabaptist heritage.

His goal is to establish a church that is approachable by the un-churched and de-churched. This means more visual preaching, interactive worship, active engaging of the culture through use of film clips and cultural references, and less focus on denomination—all without decreasing an Anabaptist faith focus.

The Gathering is certainly an upside down place for Jian and Xiaoli Wang. Raised as atheists in China, the engineers immigrated to Canada in the late 1990s. Contrary to what they had been taught, they were amazed to find that people were going to church.

"If people are going to church, it must have some meaning," they note. So they started attending churches. Eventually they came across the Gathering's Alpha course. Billed as "a safe

place to explore faith," they attended and soon came to faith in Jesus. In the session focused on healing, they asked for God's help to conceive. Their daughter Grace was born earlier this year. Recently Xiaoli expressed a desire to be baptized.

The Gathering's priorities seem upside down. The congregation has been worshipping at the W.T. Townshend School for nearly two years. But worship is only part of its ministry.

"We've become known for doing free things," Loepp Thiessen says. On Thanksgiving Sunday, the Gathering cancelled worship

and served a free pancake breakfast to 185 from the community—one in a long series including free car washes, barbecues, movie nights and ice cream evenings.

Even Loepp Thiessen's call to the Gathering was upside down. After a long pastorate at Shantz Mennonite Church in Baden, Ont., he was seeking God's guidance. He desired to make the gospel free of cultural constraints—no expectations of what people know about God, church or the Bible—and free of monetary costs.

He knew God was pointing him towards church planting. One day while driving into Kitchener, he saw the sign for a suburban development, "Welcome to Crossroads—your new beginning."



Pastor Jim Loepp Thiessen talks with congregants at the Gathering, an emerging congregation in Kitchener, Ont. during the pre-service coffee time.

"It was as if God was saying it to me," he recalls.

God continues to turn the idea of church on its head. Many of the 50 to 70 people who attend the Gathering have no church background, or only a childhood Christmas and Easter connection. Now they are talking about changed lives with new priorities; about new peace, joy and freedom; and about things being turned upside down for them.

"This church isn't for everyone and that's okay," says Loepp Thiessen.

The Gathering isn't about replacing the kind of congregations people worship in, but in providing another place for people with a need and desire to draw near to God who makes everything different.

—Dave Rogalsky

**EXTENDING
THE PEACE
OF JESUS CHRIST**



Jian and Xiaoli Wang are pictured with their daughter Grace at the Gathering, a new emerging congregation in Kitchener, Ont.

UPCOMING MC EASTERN CANADA EVENTS

JAN. 13: Pastors, chaplains and congregational leaders event—"Young Adults and the Church," at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

JAN. 27: Young Adult Volleyball at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener.

FEB. 2-4: Youth Winter Retreat 1 at Countryside Camp and Conference Centre, Cambridge.

FEB. 9-11: Youth Winter Retreat 2 at Countryside Camp and Conference Centre, Cambridge.

FEB. 20-22: School for Ministers with Reginald Bibby—"The Role of the Church in Contemporary Canadian Culture," at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo.

MARCH 27: "Before the Wedding: Providing Pre-marital Counselling with Integrity" Workshop at Preston Mennonite Church, Cambridge, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

APRIL 14: Youth Bible Quizzing at Floradale Mennonite Church.

APRIL 25: Day of Quiet Prayer at Cedar Springs Retreat, Shakespeare, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

APRIL 27-28: Spring Annual Conference Session at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener.

APRIL 28: Youth Bible Quizzing Finals at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener.

PHOTO BY JIM LOEPP THIESSEN

LEARNING ABOUT JESUS

TORONTO

In a small, simple office unit of a warehouse in Toronto, IMC Eastern Canada's newest Lao church gathers weekly to worship and learn more about Jesus.

Lao Canadian Evangelical Mennonite Church worships in multiple languages such as Lao, Thai, Chinese and English. However, the many young children present are most familiar with English. Songs are printed in Laotian letters but also phonetically spelled using Latin characters on the overheads to make it easier for all to sing together.

The terrors of war and poverty are close to the surface here. Many at the church came to Canada from Thai refugee camps after fleeing from war in Laos. The Mennonite emphasis on being peacemakers really connects. "People's hearts have been filled with hatred, fear and vengeance. People in their own families killed each other!" Chinda Kommala said. "This is the only way for people to heal their wounds, their broken hearts. What Jesus teaches, it will erase those negatives from our hearts."

"The Anabaptist faith is the faith for the 21st century. Look at what is happening in the world! We need more Mennonite churches in Canada and around the world. Not only do we learn to live in harmony together in this world, but we are saved by the Lord Jesus Christ and will live in eternity," he said.

Being recent converts, church members have a wonderful excitement with discovering the teachings of Jesus at worship services and through home Bible study groups.

One member, Jin (Mei Kung Kua), used to think that Jesus was a white man's religion; the Lao were Buddhist. But when she studied the Bible and found a personal relationship with Jesus, she said she realized that Jesus is good for all nations because of the way he teaches. Sadly, her family and other Lao people still insist that Jesus is for white people only, she said.

Like others at the church, she is the only Christian in her family. Many church members wrestle with how to keep showing Christ's love to their families day-by-day but also to live as Christians.

"We really have to practise daily to show them that the way Jesus teaches is right," Jin said. "After I believe in God, I don't want to worship the moon or ancestors any more. That quite bothers my family. They don't like my new life. They think I was brainwashed by Christianity, but it is really a good brainwash to me. Jesus has shown me real peace. I know many people who still don't believe in Jesus find drinking, dancing, and gambling is the true happiness. I am glad that I don't have to get into those kinds of activities to find joy after I have let Jesus come into my heart."

—Tim Miller Dyck

Canadian Mennonite thanks Lao Canadian Evangelical Mennonite Church for translating this article into Lao.

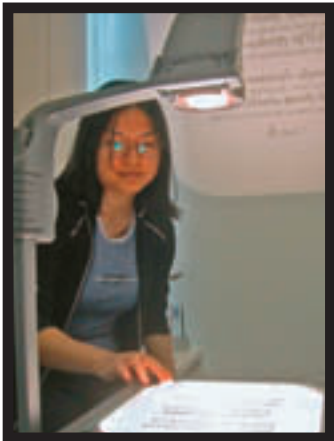
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EXTENDING THE PEACE OF JESUS CHRIST



Joanna Kommala helps lead worship at Lao Canadian Evangelical Mennonite Church in Toronto.

ຄວາມໝັ້ນຄົງຂອງສິ່ງຄາມແລະຄວາມຍາກຈົນເກີດຂຶ້ນໃນ ລັດກໍກະທົບກະເທືອນອອດພວກເຮົາເຊັ່ນກັນ. ຄົນໃນຄຣິສຕະຈັກສອນຫລາຍມາຈາກສູນອົບຮົມປະເທດໄທທີ່ໂຕນໜີ້ຈາກປະເທດລາວ ຍ້ອນການປ່ຽນລະບອບໃໝ່. ຄວາມເຊື່ອຂອງເມັນໃນໃນໄດ້ເປັນເຖິງການສ້າງສັນຕິສຸກ (ເອົາຄວາມ ຮັກແລະສາງສັນຕິສຸກຕໍ່ກັນເປັນຫລັກ, ບໍ່ແມ່ນເອົາຄວາມຮຸນແຮງໃສ່ກັນ) ຊຶ່ງນີ້ເປັນຄວາມປະທັບໃຈຂອງພວກເຮົາ.

ຕາມຜູ້ນຳໃນຄຣິສຕະຈັກ ຈີນດາ ກິມມະລາ ກ່າວເຖິງ, "ໃນໃຈຂອງຄົນທີ່ຜ່ານຫລືຍຸໃນ ສິ່ງຄາມກໍ່ເຕັມໄປດ້ວຍຄວາມກຽດຊຶ່ງ, ຄວາມຢ້ານ ແລະຄວາມຢາກແກ້ແຄ້ນກັນ, ແມ່ນກະທັ່ງຜູ້ນຳອົງກັບຍັງອັກກັລິງ. ໂດຍທາງຄວາມເຊື່ອໃນອົງພຣະເຢຊູ ຄຣິສແບບເມັນໃນໃນ ຈະສາມາດຢືນຢົວຄວາມເຈັບປວດຫລືຈິດໃຈທີ່ແຕກຫັກຂອງຄົນເຫຼົ່ານີ້ໄດ້ທາງໂຕ. ຫລັກຄວາມເຊື່ອແບບນີ້ຄວນ ຈະຖືກນຳສອນຄົນໃນຍຸກນີ້ແລະຕັ້ງກັນໄປ ຈຶ່ງມີຈາລະນາເບິ່ງວ່າມີສິ່ງ ຄາມຍັງເກີດຂຶ້ນໃນໂລກປະຈຸບັນນີ້. ດັ່ງນີ້ແທລະພວກເຮົາຕ້ອງການໃຫ້ ຄຣິສຕະຈັກຂອງເມັນໃນໃນນີ້ຂຶ້ນຢູ່ທົ່ວໂລກ, ບໍ່ແມ່ນພໍພຽງແຕ່ການເຊື່ອແລະຢູ່ດ້ວຍ ກັນແບບສິ້ນຕິເທົ່ານັ້ນ, ແຕ່ການເຊື່ອແລະວາງໃຈໃນອົງພຣະເຢຊູຄຣິດກໍ່ເປັນເຫດໃຫ້ ພວກເຮົາມີຊີວິດອັນຕລອດໄປເປັນນິດເຫັນພຣະອົງ".

ການເຊື່ອຂອງກຸ່ມນີ້ກໍຍັງໃໝ່, ນອກຈາກມີການນະມັສການແລ້ວພວກເຮົາກໍຍັງມີຮຽນພຣະຄຳທີ່ຕາມບ້ານຮ່ວມກັນ. ຍິງຄົນໜຶ່ງໃນກຸ່ມຊື່ວ່າ ກຸງ ກວີ້ ກ່າວວ່າ "ເມື່ອຍົກເລີກຈາກຄວາມເຊື່ອເກົ່າ ໃນຄອບຄົວກໍ່ເກີດໃຫ້ມີຄວາມບໍ່ເອົ້າໃຈກັນບາງຄັ້ງ ເພາະການມາເຊື່ອພຣະເຢຊູຫລືເປັນຄຣິສຕຽນນີ້, ຄົນລາວເຮົາຖືວ່າ ຈຸດປະສານຂອງຄົນຜິວຂາວ. ນາງກໍ່ເປັນຄົນລຽວໃນຄອບຄົວທີ່ເຊື່ອໃນພຣະເຈົ້າເພື່ອນກັບອີກຫຼາຍໆ ຄົນໃນຄຣິສຕະຈັກຕ່າງໆ ທີ່ປະເຊີນບັນຫາ. ພວກເຮົາຕ້ອງພະຍາຍາມໃຊ້ຊີວິດໂດຍການປະຕິບັດໃຫ້ ຖືກຕ້ອງຕາມພຣະເຢຊູໄດ້ສອນສິ່ງ. ນາງກໍ່ເອີຍຄິດເພື່ອນກັບນຳຄິດສະຕຽນເປັນສາດສະນາຂອງຄົນຜິວຂາວ. ແຕ່ເມື່ອນາງໄດ້ສຳພັດຄວາມຮັກຂອງພຣະເຢຊູເປັນການ ສ່ວນຄຳຕົວແລ້ວ, ນາງຄ່ອຍເອົາໃຈວ່າພຣະເຢຊູເປັນພຣະເຈົ້າອົງທຽວແທ້ສຳຫຼັບທຸກຊົນຊາດ. ແຕ່ພໍາເສຍດາຍທີ່ຄວບຄືມແລະ ອີກຫຼາຍໆ ຄົນຍັງບໍ່ສາມາດຮັບຄວາມເປັນຈິງນີ້ໄດ້. ນາງກ່າວອີກວ່າ " ຫລັງຈາກໄດ້ມາຮັບເຊື່ອພຣະເຢຊູຂ້ອຍກໍ່ເຊົາຫວ້າຍເດືອນ, ຕາວ ຜິສາງນາງໄມ້ຕ່າງໆ ສິ່ງນັ້ນທ້າໃຫ້ຄອບຄົວບໍ່ຄ່ອຍພໍໃຈ. ພວກເຮົາຫວ່າງໂບດໄດ້ລາງສະໝອງອ້ອຍ. ສິ່ງທີ່ບໍ່ອ້ອຍແລ້ວ ມັນແມ່ນການລ້າ ງທີ່ດີເພາະພຣະເຢຊູຄຣິດໄດ້ໃຫ້ອ້ອຍພີ່ຍັກ ສັນຕິສຸກທີ່ແທ້ຈິງ. ສຳລັບຄົນທີ່ຍັງບໍ່ທັນຮູ້ຈັກກັບພຣະເຢຊູ, ກໍ່ມີຄວາມໝັ້ນຄົງວ່າການເື່ອເຫຼົ່ານີ້ເປັນຢາ, ການສັ່ງສິນເຕັມລຳ, ແລະການພະນັນເປັນບໍ່ແທງຄວາມສຸກ. ອ້ອຍຕິໃຈທີ່ອ້ອຍບໍ່ຕ້ອງເພິ່ງພາ ສິ່ງເຫຼົ່ານີ້ເພື່ອຄົນຫາຄວາມສຸກ ຫຼັງຈາກທີ່ໄດ້ໄຫວພຣະເຢຊູເອົ້າມາໃນໃຈຂອງອ້ອຍ."

ນາງ ໂຈແອມນາ ກິມມະລາ ຊ່ອຍສາຍເພງຢູ່ຄຣິສຕະຈັກຂ່າວປະເສີດທີ່ເມືອງ ໂຕຣົນໂຕ

Mennonite Church Canada

Advent prayer requests

As Advent approaches, give thanks for signs of new life and new ministries wherever you are. Remember especially:

- Dan Nighswander and Yvonne Snider Nighswander, Witness workers in South Africa ministering with Bible teaching, leadership development and HIV/AIDS support to the African Initiated Churches. They are currently meeting with church leaders and connecting with the work on the ground in the Pietermaritzburg area. Continue to pray for the situation of poverty and crime in many places in South Africa and for the Nighswanders as they adjust to being far from friends and family in Canada.

- Cliff and Natasha Dueck, Witness Workers in Ukraine, write, "We want to rejoice! Our church is soon to decide on ordination for Tim and Vasya. Both of these young men have been ministering alongside me for the last few years. It feels good to be at this point in the ministry and I would like to ask you to pray for them and for the church during our three months of discernment, which started on Oct. 15. Tim and Vasya will be leading the church without us for the next month, which will give a better indication of their readiness. Praise God for these two leaders and pray for the...process as the church discerns their readiness for church leadership."

—Hinke Loewen-Rudgers

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

Church planters discuss challenges

On Oct. 21, a church planter network met for the first

time. Each participant gave an image of a mission person: enzyme (catalyst), abbess (providing opportunity to discover God), Joshua (who walked into the water before God parted it), a Levite (going into the unknown), and Morpheus in *The Matrix* (who had to choose between the red pill—things will be different, or blue pill—go back to normal).

Along with these images of mission were different senses of calling: a blessing to the community, a friend, walking alongside, introducing others to Jesus, modelling a different lifestyle. In spite of these differences, the leaders asked themselves, "What am I supposed to be doing in my context?" Making faith relevant to the world was a common priority.

Ways of connecting with others were shared: being a blessing to the community means free events, such as a carwash or neighbourhood party; and going to where people are or bringing them to the church. Some wondered if success should be measured by counting conversations rather than conversions.

Church planting within other cultures brings different challenges. Christianity is seen as a "white man's God." Converting to Christianity may be interpreted as betraying family and culture. In the Asian culture, any free event is noted with suspicion; up front sharing of faith in a revival meeting works better.

The church planters have a sense that they are hesitant to share about Jesus, since the name of Jesus has been hijacked, giving a wrong impression of who Jesus is. Speaking about a relationship with Jesus sounds like foolishness, but new Christians have a sense of "wow" when they first embrace the Christian faith. A challenge for church planters who grew up hearing the words of Jesus is to reclaim a passion of the gospel story.

Mennonite Church Manitoba

Education Ministries restructures roles

Roles within Education Ministries have been reassigned.

The director of Summer Camp and Youth Ministries and the director of Education Ministries were formerly both responsible for camping, youth, young adult and equipping responsibilities.

Now, youth, young adult and equipping responsibilities will fall under the auspices of Leadership Ministries, with a staff person to be hired in the new year. Youth-related responsibilities will be covered on a casual basis this fall by Elisa Barkman.

Camping ministries, including the summer program, will be assigned to the new position of director of Summer Camp Ministries. Bob Wiebe, former director of Education Ministries, will be director of Summer Camp Ministries. The Education Ministries Reference Group will be replaced by a Camping Ministries Reference Group.

Mennonite Church Saskatchewan

Churches discuss MCC business

Forest Grove Mennonite Brethren Church in Saskatoon hosted the annual general meeting of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Saskatchewan this year.

From Nov. 3 to 4, delegates from both Mennonite conferences looked at issues of interest for both local and overseas programming.

Prior to the meeting, MCC board vice-chair Scott Siemens sent a letter to the delegate body about a decision regarding the board chair. John Elias had finished a three-year term with the board and was

supposed to be replaced, but the board felt that his leadership was needed to see some specific projects through to completion.

"There are a number of critical issues facing our organization in the coming year... where it would be invaluable to have strong continuity at the head of our board," wrote Siemens in the letter.

Because of this, former procedures were changed and no one else was nominated for the position of board chair. Elias was voted in for a second three-year term.

A large part of the meeting was spent discussing four questions in an effort to get direction from delegates on MCC issues both home and abroad. Delegates looked at interfaith bridge-building and working with people of other faiths in service; what important needs should MCC address in future programming; how to encourage more people to be involved in MCC programs; and finding ways to maximize the potential of the new MCC Centre.

Mennonite Church Alberta

IMPACT plans proceeding

People are getting excited about the possibilities of International Mennonite Pastors Coming Together (IMPACT) coming to Alberta in 2007. The project, a program of MC Canada Witness, brings international pastors to Canada to spend time with local pastors and foster awareness of the global Mennonite church.

The program focuses on one province each year. In the first year, 2006, it was in Manitoba.

MC Alberta's Congregational Leadership Committee and MC Canada Witness are planning to integrate the event with the

Continued on page 38

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annual theological studies week held at Camp Valaqua. Currently, the committee is hoping to bring international pastors to five or six Alberta churches.

Nominations sought for committees

MC Alberta executive and committees met in Calgary on Nov. 4 to connect with each other and plan ahead for the annual delegate meetings to be held in Lethbridge next March. The nominating committee is working to provide candidates for a number of positions in 2007, including moderator, treasurer, two Camp Committee members, two Missions Committee members, and one member for the Community Life Committee.

Anna Marie Boyes, chair of the Nominating Committee, can be reached at daboyes@shaw.ca.

Mennonite Church British Columbia

Draft covenant approved in principle

Delegates to the Mennonite Church B.C. special sessions on Nov. 4 grappled with a proposed new structure of ministry and in the end came closer to building a draft covenant statement for approval by individual churches.

The meetings at West Abbotsford Mennonite Church were the next step after the previous special delegate session in June, when delegates overwhelmingly approved the proposed Identity and Purpose; Vision; and Beliefs

and Commitments statements.

First on the agenda was discussion of the statement on priority actions, drafted by the Steering Committee following a June 3 meeting. These priorities include healthy churches, Christian witness, Christian education, Christian camping, communications and support structures.

The organizational structure was also approved, with all committees and programs organized to fit into one of four categories: Faith and Life, Church Health, Christian Witness, or Support.

Discussion of the revised draft covenant sparked discussion, with common commitment to the following areas a priority: essential doctrine and practice, meaningful worship and fellowship, shared ministries, discernment process, local church discernment, and

mutual accountability.

The draft covenant was approved in principle, with more refinements to take place before being voted on at the annual delegate sessions in February. Churches will then have the opportunity to study the implications of the covenant and decide whether or not to agree to sign it. On May 27 a special joint worship service will be held to celebrate unity and commitment as members of MC B.C., and will include signing of the covenant.

Unless otherwise credited, the articles in TheChurches pages were written by: Leona Dueck Penner (MC Canada), Dave Rogalsky (Eastern Canada), Evelyn Rempel Petkau (Manitoba), Karin Fehderau (Saskatchewan), Donita Wiebe-Neufeld (Alberta), and Amy Dueckman (British Columbia). See page 2 for contact information.

DAVE BERGEN



From our leaders

With the steam locomotive of Christmas careening wildly down the track towards us, one might suppose this column should carry some of the annual admonitions to Christians about the season—about how, amid all the hustle and bustle, we shouldn't forget the real meaning of Christmas; or how, with all the commercial hype, we should remember the very un-commercial nature of the real Christmas event; or how, in the presence of armed conflict in so many places in the world, we need the Prince of Peace more than ever.

Perhaps I should say all those things, but I won't. I'm not quite sure how I have become so jaded, because the messages are in fact true. And shouldn't I, as a Christian, always be seeking the truth? Yet year after year when I hear those things preached from countless pulpits and printed in innumerable magazines, I want to turn them off. I want to stop hearing what I know to be true.

And now as I think about it I believe I may have a clue why. It is because so many of those who, with noble intentions bring to our awareness the sorry state of our Christmas celebrations, fail to give us any real handles with which to correct the situation. They tell us that we ought to be thinking, feeling and acting differently than we are, but they give us little guidance in making changes.

So I'm going to be so bold as to suggest some alterna-

Christmas alternatives with substance

Tell someone you know how the message of Jesus has been good news to you....

tives with substance. I encourage you to try them out. Perhaps they will help you to recapture some of the heart of the celebration:

- Tell someone you know how the message of Jesus has been good news to you, how you have personally experienced the transforming power and grace of God.
- Write letters to your favourite Christian politicians, reminding them of God's call to Christians to live as peacemakers in all we do. Promise to pray that they

may be guided by the Spirit of God's peace in the difficult leadership roles they hold.

- Visit one person in hospital or at home, bringing with your presence the message that God does not abandon humanity, no matter what our condition.
- Make at least one of your Christmas gifts this season and so give something of yourself. It will challenge your creativity and convey something of your uniqueness to the recipient a purchased gift would not.

There! You have my suggestions. I didn't promise they'd be easy, but they are simple, and I invite you to take them seriously. Pray for the courage and faith to follow through, then tell someone else what you did and how it worked out.

May your celebrations this Christmas season be filled with peace, joy and love.

Dave Bergen is executive secretary of MC Canada's Christian Formation Council.

Calendar

British Columbia

Jan. 19-20: "The mind of Christ" learning weekend for Vancouver area Mennonite churches, at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond. Speakers: John J. Friesen, Gary Yamasaki, Tim Rogalsky and Chris Huebner.

Feb. 10: B.C. Women in Mission special business session at Bethel Mennonite Church, Aldergrove, 2 p.m.

Feb. 23-24: MC B.C. annual delegate sessions. Location TBA.

March 16-17: Youth workers conference at CBC.

March 24,25: Lenten vespers with Abendmusik Choir, 8 p.m. Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, Abbotsford (24); Knox United Church, Vancouver (25). Donations to Menno Simons Centre.

Saskatchewan

Dec. 16: A Buncha Guys Christmas concert, Shekinah Retreat Centre, at 7:30 p.m. Special guest Darrell Bueckert on marimba.

Dec. 17: RJC Chorale Christmas concert at Knox United Church, Saskatoon, at 7:30 p.m.

Jan. 26-28: Senior high retreat at Shekinah Retreat Centre.

Feb. 23-24: MC Saskatchewan annual delegate sessions, at Western Christian College, Regina.

Manitoba

Dec. 21-22: MCI Christmas concert, Gretna, at 7:30 p.m. (21), 1:30 p.m. (22).

Jan. 18-20: CMU Refreshing Winds conference on worship and music. Keynote speaker: Marva Dawn, author of *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship For This Urgent*

Time. Visit cmu.ca for more information.

Jan. 5-7: MMYO young adult retreat at Camp Koinonia.

Jan. 19-21: MMYO junior youth retreat at Camp Koinonia.

Jan. 29: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate open house.

Feb. 2-4: MMYO senior youth retreat at Camp Koinonia.

Feb. 9-11: MMYO junior youth retreat at Camp Moose Lake.

Feb. 20-21: CMU winter lectures with Robert Russell, professor of theology, Graduate Theological Union. Topic: "Science and theology." Visit cmu.ca for more information.

Feb. 23-24: MC Manitoba annual delegate sessions at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

March 4-7: "Sharing the faith in a pluralistic and post-Christian society" conference at CMU. Speaker: Joe Boot of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries Canada.

March 8-10: MCI musical production of *Les Miserables*.

March 9-11: MMYO junior youth retreat at Camp Moose Lake.

March 23-25: MMYO junior youth retreat at Camp Moose Lake.

Ontario

Dec. 9,10: Menno Singers present "Christmas Meditations"—Zion United Church, Kitchener, at 8 p.m. (9); Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, at 7 p.m. (10).

Dec. 14: Rockway Mennonite Collegiate Christmas concert, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m.

Dec. 16, 17: Pax Christi Chorale's Christmas concert featuring Vaughan Williams' *Hodie*, 7:30 p.m. (16), 3 p.m. (17), at Grace Church-on-the-Hill, Toronto. To order tickets, visit paxchristichorale.org.

Feb. 9-10: MDS all unit meeting at South Ridge Community Church, St. Catharines. For more information, call Rudy

Thiessen at 905-562-4324.

Feb. 21: Rodney and Lorna Sawatsky Lecture with Reginald Bibby, at Conrad Grebel University College Great Hall, 7 p.m.

March 4: Menno Singers present "By the Babylonian Waters: Bach and Lalande," at Zion United Church, Kitchener, at 3 p.m.

March 15-16: Bechtel Lectures with Sandra Birdsell at Conrad Grebel University College Great Hall, 7:30 p.m. each evening.

To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send Calendar announcements EIGHT WEEKS in advance of the event date by e-mail to: calendar@canadianmennonite.org

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