

CANADIAN MENNONITE

December 17 2012

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EDITORIAL

Thank you!

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

As I write this last editorial of 2012, I am overcome with gratitude. First to my hardworking staff here in Waterloo I owe a big “thank you.” They closed the gap handily with one person short for the past five months while our managing editor, Ross Muir, took a five-month sabbatical. Barb Draper, our assistant editor, rose competently to the challenge, editing and placing stories, with never a complaint and always in good spirits.

Dan Johnson, our graphic designer, never failed us in using his visual imagination in designing pages from a rougher sketch than that to which he was accustomed, and marched the paper through production without a ripple. Sometimes our copyediting and proofreading could have come under heavier scrutiny, but overall the stories were presented in readable fashion.

Lisa Jacky, in circulation and finance, kept on top of address changes and worked through our government grant application as usual and our fall fund drive has moved apace as if we were at full staff strength.

Graeme Stemp-Morlock, our advertising representative, has sustained our ad dollar support and has come up with new ideas for increasing revenue at that level of our operation. Our regional correspondents have adjusted well to less direction from the home office in choosing stories and deciding on assignments

and worked well with me in directing those biweekly choices. Emily Loewen and Rachel Bergen, our Young Voices co-editors, were diligent and collaborative in choosing features and stories for their section of the publication.



And while there have been some tense moments such as receiving a “reminder” from the Canada Revenue Agency regarding “partisan” political comment in some editorials and stories, the executive committee of Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service has been wonderfully supportive and affirming through it all, checking in with their wisdom and encouraging me to take the story to our readers, in due time, so that you could be a part of the conversation this has engendered.

One of the marvellous outcomes of this issue has been the bonding of us as a faith community. Not only did I receive blessing and spiritual direction from the many denominational leaders I consulted in this matter, there has been a virtual outpouring of support, with few exceptions, from you as regular readers and subscribers to *Canadian Mennonite*. Just read the number of letters in this edition expressing passionately, in many cases, the encouragement to continue witnessing to our government in areas of justice that matter to us and that align themselves with our historic, core Anabaptist beliefs.

And while we didn't market the story to the public media, it apparently

touched a deep nerve in the Canadian psyche about the role of the church and its witness and the “chill” on the free press in the country's fundamentally changed historic role as peacemaker at home and around the globe. Not planned or promoted by us, that unexpected response, nonetheless, was surprisingly reassuring and showed that we have many friends beyond our denominational borders.

Most of all, it raised awareness, in our own faith community, about the importance of our witness to peace and justice in our troubled world. Many of you making personal donations in our fall fund drive have articulated a sense of urgency in continuing a push for peace. New donors have come forward, such as this one who, along with his donation, wrote: “I don't think I have ever written a cheque to you directly. However, it burns me that you might not be able to express our faith freely due to the ‘approach’ of [our government]. Suddenly I realize that you matter. Thank you for this.”

At a round-table discussion recently called by the Peace and Conflict department of Conrad Grebel University College on this story, one of the faculty leaders said the CRA incident presents an opportunity for us as a denomination to examine and discuss more fully our historic beliefs cited by the government in the areas of militarism, care for the poor and the stranger (immigrants) and care for creation.

These are heartening outcomes to a story that has grown legs far beyond my imagination as editor. While not everyone is happy with these responses, it has been a marvelous learning on a spiritual path that encounters some “ditches” along the way. ☺

ABOUT THE COVER:

Moath Al Laham of Al Doha, West Bank, holds a candle and a sign reading “We are all Gaza” during a vigil in Bethlehem's Manger Square in mid-November to mourn the victims of Israeli air strikes and to call for an end to the violence.

PHOTO: RYAN RODRICK BEILER, MCC

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Mission statement: *To educate, inspire, inform, and foster dialogue on issues facing Mennonite Church Canada as it shares the good news of Jesus Christ from an Anabaptist perspective. We do this through a regular publication and other media, working with our church partners.*

Guiding values:

Hebrews 10:23-25 • Accuracy, fairness, balance • Editorial freedom • Seeking and speaking the truth in love • Open hearts and minds in discerning God's will • Covenantal relationships and mutual accountability

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Online NOW!

[at canadianmennonite.org](http://canadianmennonite.org)

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Mennonite musicians raise funds for women's shelter:

EMILY LOEWEN, YOUNG VOICES CO-EDITOR

Discerning God's voice

Distinguishing the voice of God can be difficult

BY WENDY REIMER

The following articles are from a presentation by Wendy and Phil Reimer at Rockway Mennonite Church several months ago.



It has not become easier for me, over time, to discern the still small voice of God. I find it all a bit confusing and overwhelming. When am I doing the right thing because it makes me feel good and others will approve? When am I being led or placed by God?

In 1972 my family moved to India for a three-year term with Mennonite Central Committee. This was in the days before Skype and the internet and email—in fact we didn't even have our own telephone in our house. I was nine years old that first Christmas in India, and it was a different experience. There was no snow, no Christmas tree, no turkey, no large family gathering. My presents looked different too; they were laid out on a table in the living room on Christmas morning, and not wrapped in colourful Christmas paper. My Mom was a bit apologetic.

I was a bit disappointed, but the hand-sewn doll with multiple outfits fashioned from clothing I had outgrown, would become one of my most cherished presents ever.

After presents, my Dad urged us outside, in the sun, to sit on the hillside, but my sister and I were bickering and uncooperative. This wasn't the family moment my Dad had envisioned. I remember him chastising us for our behaviour, and telling us that this was, after all, Christmas morning, and that it was worthwhile to spend some time thinking about that.

This was the first time I recognized that the voice of God was not something that just “happened,” but it is a



Wendy Reimer works at a health clinic in Guatemala.



The medical team ran clinics in several villages.

relationship that you can put effort into cultivating.

In my teenage years our youth group attended a large Christian revival-style concert. The performers created an inspirational, emotional energy with their music and we were rocking out to God! At intermission, we were asked to put a hand into a pocket, and draw out whatever God led us to donate into the bucket being passed around. I emptied my pockets. When I told my parents the next day, they snorted and rolled their eyes. This led me to contemplate—what is the voice of God? When is the Spirit leading and when are you being manipulated into an emotional state so that you believe the Spirit is leading? How do you figure that out?

Last April I went to Guatemala with a medical team. We ran clinics in multiple villages, coordinated through small local congregations. I worked with a fine team. The leaders believe God led them to work in Guatemala, and they speak openly about that.

In one of the clinics I saw 11-year-old Sami whose complaint was, “I have a broken heart.” He was born with a heart defect. His father is a pastor, and the family had a prophesy that he would grow up to become a great missionary.

Sami is now going into heart failure. He describes waking up at night feeling like a cat is clawing his chest, as his lungs

fill with fluid. He needs surgery soon, or he will die.

I talked to John King, the group leader who lives in Guatemala, after the clinic. I told him that I couldn’t just walk away from Sami without trying to help him, and he told me that I should do what God was leading me to do. He feels that people are called to be at the right place, at the right time, to do the right thing.

When I came home, I was relating this story to a colleague, telling her how we were coordinating testing and referral so that hopefully Sami’s heart would be fixed in time. She said to me, “Why this kid?” I was surprised by the question and replied, “because his path has crossed mine.” Is reacting to moral proximity the voice of God?

It has not become easier for me, over time, to discern the still small voice of God. I find it all a bit confusing and overwhelming. When am I doing the right thing because it makes me feel good and others will approve? When am I being led or placed by God?

Is it right to volunteer time in a poor country, or is it wrong to fly there?

I try to discern the voice of God in my daily life, and to hand myself over to His guidance, through prayer and snippets of quiet meditation. But I am often distracted, busy, irritated, and tired, and just running on that hamster wheel of daily life—not in the best state for listening.

I actually find myself contemplating God most at work when I am talking with elderly patients. They slow me down. They are nearer the end of life, which leads to interesting discussions.

I am blessed with a group of Old Order Mennonite patients. By and large, they seem to have a different perspective on health and illness than the rest of us. They are calm and accepting of what life hands them. They have faith that things will work out alright. They don’t seem to be doing battle through life, and I try to learn from them.

Of course, this attitude also means they don’t seem too fussed about keeping their blood sugars down and therefore do not necessarily follow their doctor’s suggestion to skip the pie.

I also feel God’s presence and calming spirit in some obvious ways—a beautiful piece of music, the ribbon-like swoop of a flock of birds, a heart-felt prayer.

I’m not sure much has changed since I was a child. My relationship with God is still worth cultivating, and it is still hard to discern what the still, small voice of God is telling me. Perhaps the point is simply to keep questioning and struggling and learning with as good an intent as possible.

Wendy Reimer is a family doctor in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, and a member of Rockway Mennonite Church.

Learning from my *Grosspa* about the voice of God

BY PHIL REIMER

In my earliest recollection Jacob Janzen was 60-something. He was not the oldest person I knew and rather undistinguished. He came walking tiredly up the sidewalk to the house in his rubber boots and a *kepi*—the sort of hat factory workers wore in the 60s, not quite a ball cap, but billed with a pill-box sort of shape. This retired farmer had just come home from Pyramid Cannery where he worked as a labourer.



was a final hurdle. Grosspa was a retired lay minister and I figured he knew the inside track on what I needed to do to be accepted as a candidate for baptism.

His response was to tell me three stories; my role it turned out was not to actively practice

how to do something. Rather, my role was passive, to listen.

Jacob Janzen was drafted into the Russian Army Medical Corps in 1914. By 1915, he had been transferred from a hos-

withered beneath German machine guns was not enough, German howitzers then saturated no-man's land with a three-hour barrage. Jacob dove into a shell crater and waited until dark. The cries of the wounded had ended. An eerie silence had fallen over the battlefield, not even broken by the rattle of machine guns.

This was a dilemma. Jacob could not tell whose front was in which direction. There was a certain appeal to finding the German lines; he could surrender and end his part in the war. He prayed for a sign and offered to dedicate his life to the Lord's service if he would only be shown.

It was past midnight, still silent. The clouds above obscured any clues to direction he might have had from the night sky. So he hunkered down at the bottom of his shell hole, took out a cigarette and had a smoke. He stared upward, almost pleading as he watched the cigarette smoke rise above the crater, caught by a stiff breeze. Then it dawned on him, the west wind was in his face as he dove for cover. Now his decision was which way to go?

This was a dilemma. Jacob could not tell whose front was in which direction. . . . He prayed for a sign and offered to dedicate his life to the Lord's service if he would only be shown.

This man of average height was slightly myopic and balding. He lit up when he saw us calling him, "*Grosspa! Grosspa!*" He gathered us, young cousins and siblings, all on a sunroom couch, to marvel us with his brilliant "finger magic." Then, patiently, he waited as each of us clamored to master these skills. We were a raucous crowd on that couch, squealing with delight as one or another "got it." Amidst the din, as a three-year-old struggling to coordinate and mimic the older kids, a soft voice murmured, "*Noch ein mal, noch ein mal, noch ein mal und da* (try and try and try and there now, you've done it)." Laughter and joy followed as we rushed to the kitchen to a supper of Grosspa's chicken noodle soup.

I didn't know it then, but much later in life I began to understand what that soft and steady voice Grosspa used was all about. He certainly wasn't the only adult to use that stilling voice, but it was his voice that I connected with perseverance.

Years later, when Grosspa was in his 80s, I was a candidate for baptism. My witnesses had already spoken for me at *Bruderschaft* (Brotherhood), but there

pital train to a field medic. The trenches, Grosspa said, weren't as bad as the Allies seemed to think—at least not on the Russian front. Their trench lines never lasted long enough to get rat-infested. Instead, a single trench line, somewhere between three hundred metres and a kilometre from the Austro-German lines would be all that separated the Axis powers from mother Russia. Whole divisions were often lost to accurate German shelling on the 3-kilometre above-ground march to the trench. Once in place, German howitzers made the trench as dangerous as the charge across no-man's land.

It was after a Russian charge at the German lines that Jacob found himself in no-man's land. As if the attack that had

Six years later, the Great War had ended and Jacob was back in his home village of Tiegerweide where a Red Army unit was given the job of pacifying the 600 or so villagers. In August, 114 villagers were rounded up and imprisoned in the schoolhouse basement, a room of about 6 by 6 metres. Without food or water, they spent two nights. Men and women were packed elbow to shoulder with no room to lie down and no place for a bio-break.

Jacob was amongst those rounded up. On the first day some cried, others prayed and others rose to anger. By the second day the roomful of men and women had turned to prayer and song. The dawn of the third day of imprisonment was met with melancholy

songs—they were ready to meet their maker.

When the rifle butts slammed against the *Kellerloch* (outside cellar door), a pensive silence filled the room. Ten names were called and the *Kellerloch* opened. Hugs and promises followed the first ten out. Moments later, shots rang out as men and women were executed by a firing squad. In the cellar, the prisoners raised their voices in song, throats dry and cracked from thirst, but hoping the condemned might hear them and gain comfort in the final moments.

Again the rifle butts slammed into the *Kellerloch* and ten more were called. There were no tears; these ten were ready to meet their end. Volley by volley the shots rang out and the remaining prisoners knew their turn was coming.

The third group included Jakob. They were marched out, up the steps and down to a sand pit beside the Kurushan River, a place where Jakob had played and fished as a child. They were taken one at a time, hands bound and led to the sand. The first of his lot stood up, facing a commissar, who read the charge of Kulak! Capitalist! They were sentenced to death and the rifles barked. Then the second and the third was Jakob.

When it was Jakob's turn, he watched the firing squad as the commissar read the charges. Amongst them was a familiar face, a Ukrainian, who in years past had worked for the Janzens. "He is not a Kulak," the Ukrainian said, blankly.

"Is that true?" The commissar turned to the man in the firing squad.

"I know him. His family is landless," the ex-employee stated, staring back at Jakob.

The commissar turned to Jakob, "This is your lucky day Nemsky; you can go."

It turned out the firing squad knew just about everyone in Tiegerweide. After Jakob was freed, others spoke up for the next and the next.

"I think we've made our point," the commissar finally offered. "Go home. We know who you are," he added in a warning. The *Kellerloch* opened one more time and 84 more people staggered out.

As a rule, military units rotate duty. About two weeks later a new unit came whose ranks were strangers to

Tiegerweide. The new commissar was quick to demonstrate his control and this time 88 villagers were rounded up after sunset. They spent two nights in the cellar—men and women were hungry, thirsty, and afraid for those left at home without them.

At the break of the second dawn, rifle butts slammed against the *Kellerloch*. Ten names were called and ten villagers were marched to the sand pit and executed, one at a time as the remaining 78 sang hymns and prayed.

This time Jakob was amongst the second ten and the second of that group to be marched to the sand pit. As the commissar read the charges, and a silence fell before the firing squad was ordered to shoulder arms, Jakob remembered the shell hole he'd occupied in 1915.

He longed for another sign and recalled his decision to go back to the Russian Front. Not long after that decision he had been posted to an officers' hospital as an orderly. He held down soldiers as the surgeons cut off wounded limbs. When Kerensky came to power the hospital was converted to an enlisted facility, housing a thousand patients. Many were Russian and Ukrainian boys and old men and many were illiterate. Jakob gladly spent hours writing letters to wives and mothers for them, sometimes 50 or 60 letters in an evening.

Across from him, a voice in the firing

squad broke the stillness, "Jakovy?"

The commissar turned. "You know this man?" he asked the rifleman.

"Da. That's Jakovy. He was much loved as a proletarian. While the priests would sleep, Jakovy went from bedside to bedside. He wrote letters for us when the reactionaries would not. I cannot shoot Jakovy."

The rest of the squad put down their guns and unloaded them. They had had enough.

"I think we made our point," the commissar finally said and again the *Kellerloch* was opened.

Jakovy was baptized at the tender age of 28.

The threads of Grosspa's stories amaze me more as I've grown older. Through them I've learned that rotten, terrible, undeserved things happen to people. I've also learned that how we live and what we commit to affects what holds our feet to the figurative fire. And finally, in the worst of turmoil, from stillness comes a persevering voice if we are of a mind to listen. ❧

Phil Reimer is a member of Rockway Mennonite Church in Kitchener. He works for the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs with the food manufacturing sector on environmental sustainability, and energy and water efficiency. Phil is married to Wendy Reimer.

/// For discussion

1. Wendy and Phil Reimer describe some instances when God intervened in the lives of Christians. Can you think of similar experiences that you or other Christians have had? Why might they be difficult to talk about?
2. When do you most feel the presence of God? How do we distinguish between the still, small voice of God and our own thoughts and emotions? Can God lead us even if we are not aware of it?
3. What are the lessons to be learned from Phil Reimer's grandfather's stories? What do you think Phil means when he says, "how we live and what we commit to affects what holds our feet to the figurative fire"?
4. Do you find these stories helpful in your faith journey? How important is it to encourage each other to share such experiences? What is the best format to do this?

VIEWPOINTS

/// Readers write

We welcome your comments and publish most letters sent by subscribers intended for publication. This section is largely an open forum for the sharing of views. Letters are the opinion of the writer only—publication does not mean endorsement by the magazine or the church. Keep letters to 400 words or less and address issues rather than individuals. We do not countenance rancour or animosity. Personal attacks are inappropriate and will not see the light of print. Please send letters to be considered for publication to letters@canadianmennonite.org or by postal mail or fax, marked “Attn: Readers Write” (our address is on page 3). Letters should include the author’s contact information and mailing address. Letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Preference will be given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

✉ Continue the critique

RE: “POLITICAL REMINDER’ disturbing,” Editorial (Nov. 12, 2012, page 2).

I am not as ‘disheartened’ as Editor, Dick Benner, probably due to my not being as informed as he is about potential harm to *Canadian Mennonite*.

Canadian Mennonite writers must be doing something right to get this reaction from the present government. I agree that this “represents a ‘chill’ on free speech.” This government that came into office promising openness and transparency is actually the most secretive government in some time, with a great disrespect for Parliament—think proroguing parliament twice, producing a handbook on how to shut down committees during minority government, robocalls during the last election and more. Instead of debating critics of government policies in an open way, this government prefers to shut down criticism by defunding organizations that are alleged to have offended them—think KAIROS, MCC and others.

I am in complete agreement with *Canadian Mennonite’s* articles that raise concerns about excessive military spending, new harmful immigration policies, public safety and prison matters. These are proper critiques and represent the views of many readers. The writers of Young Voices articles should not be silenced either.

It is my hope that *Canadian Mennonite* will respectfully resist this attempt to silence its writers. To do otherwise represents a slippery slope to an unknown place.

MURRAY LUMLEY, TORONTO, ONT.

RE: “POLITICAL REMINDER’ disturbing” editorial, (Nov. 12, 2012).

It is highly disturbing and considerably chilling, but if what you write evokes this kind of response, then you are doing something right. “Speaking truth to power” does tend to lead to uncomfortable places, or, as my husband has sometimes said, if you really live the ideas expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, there is a good chance you’ll be crucified.

The ramifications are many. In what is perhaps a perverse attitude, I think I am pleased that what we believe appears to matter. I am thankful for your willingness to remind us that what we believe matters—even to letters of reminder from a fearful government. May we continue to hear you call us to be faithful.

WINONA SENNER, SASKATOON, SASK.

WHY DOES THE “political reminder” not surprise us?

Actually, one could hope that sooner or later the discriminating voice of *Canadian Mennonite* on issues of poverty, immigration, and militarism would elicit a response like the one Dick Benner describes in his editorial (Nov. 12, 2012). It has come sooner. Especially gratifying is the isolation of the contributions of Young Voices as offensive (Nov. 12, page 16).

We understand that this warning may create problems for the editor, not the least of which could be “I told you so!” from segments of the CM readership who are critical of addressing political and social issues as subjects for Christian discernment.

Nevertheless, we encourage the editor to continue his present policy, and not to submit to official bullying of this kind. A price may have to be paid, but it will be small in kingdom of God coin.

**WALTER AND RUTH KLAASSEN,
SASKATOON, SASK.**

THE QUESTION AT the end of your editorial, “Political reminder’ disturbing” (Nov. 12, 2012) seems like an invitation to comment. I recognize your dilemma of jeopardizing charitable status with all its possible ramifications as opposed to your calling as an editor to put principle above all.

You say your board has chosen to abide by the law, and I think that that is the prudent solution. However, I hope that your hard-hitting political commentary of 2011 will not be curtailed. I’m sure you’ve figured out ways of pointing to the government in power without specifically naming them by party, or calling our wayward brother “the government advocate” so that readers know who you mean. Hopefully that that puts you under the shelter of the law while still allowing readers to understand, sort of like the book of Revelation was

to its contemporary readership.

But if you must name names in order to function conscientiously, let me assure you that I for one will stand by you even if we lose our charitable status. Elections are one way to concretely express love for our neighbours, and that love we must proclaim.

Please carry on as you have been; we need you for God's sake!

RUDY WIENS, MISSISSAUGA, ONT.

RE: EDITORIAL, "POLITICAL reminder' disturbing" (Nov. 12, 2012).

Dick Benner asks his readers if they are disheartened. I'm not at all disheartened. I'm angry.

ROBERT MARTENS, ABBOTSFORD

RE: EDITORIALS, "INJUSTICE 'once removed'" (Oct. 29) and "Political reminder' disturbing," (Nov. 12).

It is going on 40 years that I have been waiting for a church leader to lay Christian theology on the line for us mortals so that it is understood by all of us. And I mean *all of us!* Disheartened? On the contrary! How else can we mortals strive to rise above our navel-gazing-selves?!

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

PETER HIEBERT, WINNIPEG

✉ Critique protected by Charter

EACH TIME I read an article in the *Canadian Mennonite* that had political implications, I applauded the direction it was going. Yet, I felt that the content and intent of the articles was going to be questioned by readers. Dick Benner, Rachel Bergen, Aaron Epp, Emily Loewen and others had the courage to express their convictions about prison reform, pacifism, altruism and social and environmental issues. This I applaud.

At the same time, I had this uneasy feeling there would be some kind of opposition. That it came from an agency of the government surprised me all the same. I thought the backlash would come from readers who voted for this government.

The current government has been cited for "contempt of Parliament." It arbitrarily shut down the Canadian Wheat Board, possibly illegally. It has been alleged to have some connection to the voter suppression robocall scandal. Members of Parliament and members of the press corps will attest to the muzzling techniques of the present administration in Ottawa.

I have always had empathy for Mennonite Church leaders who had to be utterly circumspect in the

preparation and delivery of sermons not to tread on political issues. Editor, Dick Benner, of *Canadian Mennonite* has indeed stepped on the serpent's head. It will be interesting to see what happens next.

Could it be that the Canada Revenue Agency will reverse its admonition when the forces that prompted the warning realize their stance is in violation of Section B of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which explicitly states, "that we all have the right to freedom of thought, belief, opinion, including freedom of the Press and other media of communication"?

As far as I know, we pacifists are still protected by the Charter.

RUDI A. SCHULZ, WINNIPEG

✉ Sound the trumpet against injustice

RE: EDITORIAL "POLITICAL reminder' disturbing" (Nov. 12, 2012).

Is this an example of what John was writing about in Revelation 13:16-18 about the mark of the beast? Will we silently submit to the beast so we can buy and sell, because otherwise it might be bad for business? God forbid!

I am not surprised that you should receive a warning of this nature. Groups like Kairos that received government funding have been instructed not be critical, or simply had their monies cut without warning. We must ask ourselves how we should protest government policies and how we as a collective body of diverse people can come together and share our concerns. Why is the government so fearful of what we discuss?

Years ago in 1937, here in Quebec, the government of Duplessis introduced the infamous Padlock Law. Duplessis simply labeled anyone not in agreement with him as a Communist. The results were unbelievable and a reading of the account reveals a terrible abuse of power.

At the same time William Aberhart tried this in Alberta, attempting to control the banks, the financial institutions, the police and the press. Fortunately people rose up and spoke up. The federal government struck down Aberhart's laws but Duplessis controlled Quebec in a cruel way. The fear of having their businesses, schools, newspapers, homes and churches literally padlocked silenced many people.

I believe that the leaders of the Mennonite Church should identify issues that are morally flawed and directly contradict what we as a faith community have professed for generations. They need to rally the members. We need to be visibly present on Parliament Hill and outside of the offices of Conservative MPs.

Years ago, we marched in Canadian cities and

publicly declared that we were not in agreement with unjust civil rights, the Vietnam war and the nuclear build up of arms. That was years ago, but the present cutbacks and other policies need to be radically addressed because they are equally unjust.

Who will sound the trumpet?

DAVID SHANTZ, MONTREAL, QUE.

✉ Editor gets what he deserves

RE: NOV. 12 editorial: Dick Benner, you are, of course, trying to do damage control regarding the government frustration with your attacks on them.

Quite frankly, you got what you deserve. When you blatantly state that you are saddened that the Canadian people have re-elected a Conservative government, how do you expect them to respond? And then to have a picture of Pat Martin in our paper, defending your anti-Conservative position, is a bit too much. Is this the man our editorial staff holds up as a model?

I do not agree with everything the Conservative party does but they have been elected by thousands of Mennonites. You have angered many of them. A few local businessmen want to meet with Willard Metzger soon to talk about this issue. We believe it is time for the paper to fly on its own funding. Those who want can subscribe to it on their own. The paper has become just too political.

JAKE AND JEAN REMPEL, WINNIPEG

✉ Give up charitable status

RE: EDITORIAL “‘POLITICAL reminder’ disturbing” (Nov. 12, 2012).

I’m sure it has always been the case, but it seems we have entered an era of increasing tendency of the government to use its power to exert control on the media and civic society rather than for the common good.

So here’s a radical idea: let *Canadian Mennonite*, along with other organizations that are feeling interference from government, voluntarily give up charitable status. Are we, as a relatively comfortable, largely middle class Canadian Mennonite constituency so ingrained in the patterns of “the world” that we cannot bring ourselves to support causes or institutions through charitable giving without a tax receipt (read government subsidy)? Or do our leaders in those institutions just assume that this is the case?

My pledge is to maintain or increase my financial giving—regardless of tax implications—to organizations that give up charitable status in order to be free of government restrictions that otherwise impede their work. If others are willing to make the same

pledge then the idea may start looking less radical and become downright workable.

ANDREW CRESSMAN, NEW HAMBURG, ONT.

✉ Faith healers trivialize illness

THE ARTICLE “An effective evangelist” by Carl DeGurse (Oct. 29, 2012, page 25) tells of the remarkable ministry of Katie Goetz from Winnipeg’s Douglas Mennonite Church. With her inimitable joyful enthusiasm she ministers to all people even those who have no interest in Christ, successfully communicating the love of Jesus.

Unfortunately, because she is legally blind, she was targeted by other evangelists who visited her and vehemently directed God to heal her. How awful!

I live with severe depression. When I spent six weeks in a mental hospital this past fall, I too was a target for healing. Some high-ranking servants of another denomination attempted to infringe on my privacy in the hospital and called my psychiatrist noting I was demon-possessed. They requested that he let them perform an exorcism. I had been in the hospital barely a week and was in very poor shape physically and mentally, too poor to even handle such a thought. My psychiatrist, a devout Anglican, gave them a firm “No.” Later he told me about it.

It really does not make you feel good when the illness is overwhelming you, affecting your life and thought patterns, and then some “hot shot” ministers believe you are not really ill, but rather demon-possessed.

In the article Katie was “perturbed” by those healers who came to visit her. For me I felt very angry and felt my illness was being trivialized for the sake of some heavenly credits for these would-be faith-healers. I wish to express my frustration with what Katie and also I have endured. Lord spare us such ignominy.

KEN REDDIG, PINAWA, MAN.

✉ Thank you *Canadian Mennonite*

IT IS WITH admiration of, and gratitude for, the way in which you create this paper that I am writing this letter of thanks.

The *Canadian Mennonite* is my best read. You bring to my attention so many issues, pertinent to my own faith journey. It seemed to be the place to go when I needed to vent my feelings about Enbridge. It is the place where I find the things other Christians struggle with in life and death issues. This is where we see the questions of daily living answered in the manner that Jesus would have us face them. You let us state our

views and help bring the thoughts of respected theologians to bear on the problems the ordinary person faces.

You also helped me to get in touch with others who commented about my attitude towards Enbridge. I had many very good comments about my letter. Thanks for publishing it.

Blessings to you.

**LEN WIEBE (AND PHYLLIS ALSO),
WINNIPEG**

✉ **Big building is wrong project**

RE: “MCC’s BIG building rationale not compelling”
(Nov. 12, 2012, page 11).

Thanks to Will Braun for stating so well what I could not have pulled together. I have been an avid, lifetime supporter of MCC and wonder how we could have arrived at a 12 million dollar building when poverty has still not gone away? I remember that in the past designated giving was not encouraged but I suppose I will have to continue that, as my heart is with those whose needs cause me to weep. If I could not feed my child, or my parents had AIDS, or war consumed all I loved, and I knew my affluent brothers and sisters just spent 12 million on stone and decor and technology, how would I feel?

**RACHEL SCHMUCKER, BALLY, PA.
(FORMERLY OF MARKHAM, ONT.)**

✉ **New MCC building is a tool**

I AM THRILLED that Will Braun is far more compelled by Mennonite Central Committee’s commitment to show Christ’s love to sex offenders than by the creation of a new building (Nov. 12, 2012, page 11). Thousands of others share his view, and so do I.

During early construction, I remember observing a faithful donor plunk a cheque on the counter while nodding toward the bulldozer in the yard saying, “And I do not want a penny of this donation going for *that!*” He was properly moved by what is, of course, the core of MCC’s service “in the name of Christ.” We absolutely will make sure his gift goes entirely to the gutsy, gospel-faithful work that Braun, and I (and thousands of others) expect from MCC. In fact, core to the project all along has been the conviction that MCC programs should be entirely unhindered by the creation of this ministry centre.

I am also glad to report that I am not consumed by this building but rather buoyed by the energy it brings to MCC and the broader Anabaptist community. Many in Ontario have generously embraced our

“Raising Hope” building campaign as they commit to making sure MCC and the seven other agencies that will share the facility have the infrastructure capacity they need for the next 50 years. This is much like our bold forebears when they first broke ground at 50 Kent Ave. in Kitchener 50 years ago when MCC needed an adequate home from which to operate. MCC Ontario will occupy about one third of the new building.

Relief, development and peace in the name of Christ is our core; buildings are but tools which need routine sharpening, and periodic replacement.

**RICK COBER BAUMAN, MCC ONTARIO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KITCHENER, ONT.**

RE: “MCC’s BIG building rationale not compelling”
by Will Braun (Nov. 12, 2012, page 11). The Board of Directors of Mennonite Central Committee Ontario is grateful that Will Braun is deeply committed to caring for and responding to the woundedness of the world, and that he recognizes that MCC does likewise.

MCC is a large tent that invites and gathers in people of many different Anabaptist/Mennonite and other Christian groups, encompassing people of all ages and socio-economic classes. Such is the spirit of the Raising Hope initiative, to which Will has added a challenging, necessary voice.

We undertake Raising Hope with the very spirit that inspired our Anabaptist forebears to build the “old” 50 Kent a half-century ago. Their motive was—as ours is—to provide MCC with the tools it needs to grow its capacity to provide relief, development and peace in the name of Christ.

Rick Cober Bauman, executive director of MCC Ontario, has shown consistent dedication to the mission of MCC. His heart is in the ministry of MCC and his tireless work on Raising Hope comes at the direction of the MCC Ontario Board.

**KAREN CORNIES, BOARD CHAIR, MCC
ONTARIO**

✉ **How do we respond to hate?**

IN THE FEATURE article of the Oct. 29 issue, Carol Penner closes her thoughtful piece in this fashion: “We are called to love our neighbour near at hand, and love our neighbour once removed.” Suppose my neighbour near at hand hates me. Suppose my neighbour once removed despises me. And suppose my family is killed by one of these, and I am about to suffer their fate. Perhaps Carol Penner could be persuaded to write a follow-up piece, dealing with my hypothetical situation.

HENRY EWERT, SURREY, B.C.

✉ Clear thoughts are also important

NOTWITHSTANDING CARL FRIESEN'S sermon on "Culture and Character" (Nov. 12, 2012, page 4),

I suggest that what he has evidenced is exactly what Rene Descartes said: Mr. Friesen has thought (well, I might add), therefore he is. Good article.

PETER ANDRES, CHILLIWACK, B.C.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

A gospel shaped for me?

PHIL WAGLER

There's no end of hand-wringing these days in our churches of how to keep young adults interested. The "next" generation is leaving the church faster than hockey fans from a lockout and we're all asking why. Don't get me wrong, it's crucial to follow this unsurprising trend (#weshouldhaveseenthiscoming), but there is also a subtle danger: we may shape a gospel *for* a generation instead of seeing a generation shaped *by* the gospel.



Two distinct challenges face the Church in every age. First is the challenge of passing faith from one generation to the next in a way that is faithful to the message, relevant, and founded in Tradition (the living faith of the dead—which young adults are generally eager to embrace), as opposed to tradition (the dead faith of the living—which young adults have always tended to vomit out like lukewarm borscht).

The second challenge is how to en-flesh or incarnate the faith within a generation. A survey of the generations in our pews (or chairs, theatre seats, or chaise lounges) shows that each found a way to en-flesh the faith for their times. Not surprisingly, given the pace of change and increasing priority of self over community, each struggles to learn the language of the next, while each following generation seems determined to name whatever came before it as unpalatable bunk.

So, to begin moving us beyond

generational navel-gazing, let me ask a few questions:

- Forget the label of your generation and ask: how well do I know the stories and spiritual journeys of people both older and younger than I?
- Forget your preferred form of "church" and ask: what is at the heart of the forms of the gospel I see cherished in those older and younger than me?
- Don't forget that you were a product of your culture before you were a disciple of Jesus and ask: Am I most interested in having a gospel shaped for me or am I yearning to be shaped by the gospel?

Next, we should take heed of *Hemorrhaging Faith*, a recent study on young adults and the Church that uncovered something unexpected: the decline in the church from childhood to teen is greater than the decline from youth to young adult. It may be that we adults—even young adults—are actually missing the point. So, opening my eyes and ears anew to all this has brought me to some new practical insights:

Get interactive. I have started inviting texts about the text during my sermon. This has been enriching and thought-provoking. Many texts I receive come from young adults who love this interaction. One text, arriving three days after a sermon, asked: "I am 16 and not a virgin: am I going to hell?" My guess is the privilege of engaging this private journey with my younger brother or sister in Christ

would not have happened any other way. Increased interaction and connection across all the ages is more important than particular forms.

Get real. One young adult confessed before our congregation that his faith was dormant until our church went through crisis. The stuff the older people were trying to make go away so we could be a "good" church again was the fertilizer nourishing the faith of this brother. Young adults want to be part of community that lives faith, not just talks or sings about it. We have enough drivel to fill their lives; we—and even younger children—need to be part of a people that models how to deal with life in the real world and has a message powerful enough to change it.

Get gospel. This is crucial. Get gospel, or get back to it. Young adults like everyone else including our children, need more than ethical instruction from the church. They need to hear what makes the Christian hope unique—in Christ, God en-fleshed his love and holiness, sacrificed himself for our sins, and rose from the dead inaugurating a new creation that cannot be stopped. We don't need to hear there is a really good religious teaching that can be shaped to our preference; we need to hear there is a hope for the ages that transforms those it touches by calling sin to account and offering hope, grace and a whole new kingdom in its place. We need this Good News and we all—including young adults—need to turn our attention toward shaping an even younger generation who seem to be growing up missing the point while the rest of us debate what the point is.

Phil Wagler turned 40 this year and was forced to remove "young" from his adulthood. He now knows nothing and longs for the time he did. You can reach him at phil_wagler@yahoo.ca.

✉ Attack lacks substance

RE: “MENNONITES DO not understand the holiness of God” (Nov. 26, 2012, page 10).

Walter Bartel, pastor of Harvest Baptist Church in Grande Prairie, Alberta, writes that Mennonites are

“shameful,” “off base,” and that most have “no understanding of the holiness and righteousness of God, let alone his love.” I find it odd that he makes these claims while simultaneously saying, “I do not know your background.”

MARK MORTON, KITCHENER, ONT.

VIEWPOINT

A funeral state of mind

BY CARL DEGURSE

At the risk of sounding creepy, I like the way we Mennonites do funerals. Specifically, I like the way people act during the funerals and for a few hours after funerals. If only we could stay forever in a funeral state of mind.

We don't speak ill of the guest of honour, which is an improvement on the way we sometimes speak about the living. This rule applies in both the formal eulogy during the service and the informal eulogies that arise naturally during the after-service lunch in the church hall, when tables of mourners reflect generously about the deceased over coffee and platz.

For example, mourners will praise the dear departed for using her gift of music to sing to the Lord, but tactfully avoid mentioning that many people felt she enjoyed the limelight too much for her own good, and, truth be known, she could get a bit sulky if she wasn't given frequent solos.

We forgive her trespasses. Yes, the belated forgiveness may be of little use to the silenced singer, but it's good for the rest of us to forgive, even posthumously. It's also heart-warming how the qualities we celebrate at funerals are never secular values such as money, power and status. She was rich in both wealth and physical beauty, but we ignore such shallow attributes. Instead, we focus on the higher realm. She and her husband adopted

a special-needs child, and she was an enthusiastic leader of home Bible-study groups.

At funerals, our minds sometimes wander and we find ourselves wondering what people will say about us when it's our turn in the box. What material will we provide our eulogizers? Such a

It's also heart-warming how the qualities we celebrate at funerals are never secular values such as money, power and status.

self-inventory is a wonderful result of the funeral state of mind because we discover, perhaps to our surprise, that anticipating our death has shifted our life priorities, at least temporarily. The promotion we were jockeying for, the 15 pounds we were trying to lose, the irritation we felt at our teenager's sassy backtalk, all seem of small consequence. Instead, we feel a warm flush of unconditional love for God and other people, the glorious state that is so easy to prescribe but so hard to maintain. We feel like rushing out to help someone, anyone.

Our zeal to act with love comes at an ideal time because our funeral pews are filled with unchurched people, family and friends of the deceased who might never otherwise enter a sanctuary. When I suggest that funerals are an ideal time to evangelize our unchurched

visitors, I don't mean we should have altar calls, or corner them in the church foyer and demand to know: “Have you been saved?” But, after all, they came to our church. The corpse on display is a stark reminder that we're all dying, it's just a matter of when. The unchurched guests are likely pondering mortality, afterlife and their purpose on the planet. Evangelism opportunities don't get more blatant.

The strangers are easy to spot when it's our church because we know the faces of the usual congregants. Our evangelism challenge: do we connect with the visitors, or ignore them and stick close to the same church brother and sisters we speak to every Sunday?

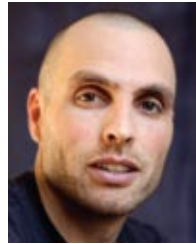
My personal heroes are those church members who leave their comfort zones and welcome strangers with a connection that goes beyond a handshake. They approach visitors before and after funerals and inquire sensitively about their relationship with the deceased. At the post-funeral luncheon, they might forgo their place at a table with their church friends and instead sit with strangers, showing a sincere interest in the lives of the visitors and compassion for the loss of their loved one. This makes it likely that the strangers would leave our church warmed by the reflected love of God. They've experienced the funeral state of mind.

DeGurse lives in Winnipeg and is a member of Douglas Mennonite Church. He wants his gravestone to read: “Now the adventure begins!”

VIEWPOINT

Is theology biblical?

BY WILL BRAUN
SENIOR WRITER



In our denomination the academic discipline known as theology is given a lofty position. But when I look at the influences that have formed me as a Christian, theology is just one among many.

Nonetheless it is primary in the training of our leaders and young people. It is the orienting force of conference worship materials. It is our most common way of approaching faith.

Theology can be defined in different ways but most definitions call it a “study” of one sort or another. That is to say, it is about “application of the mental faculties to the acquisition of knowledge” (Webster). Is that the optimal path to God? Is a head-first approach well-suited to most of us?

During my university days—which included theological studies—I recall passionately sharing some big thought with my parents. After listening for a while, my mom replied, with love and in Low German, which was saved for poignant moments: “you’ve gone to school too long.”

I loved exercising my mental faculties but I knew in my gut that Mom, who is a creative thinker herself, was right; I had drifted too far into my head.

I feel the church has drifted similarly, reflecting the history of Western thought over recent centuries.

For some people, the intellect may be the main way of experiencing God, and that is fine, but for most of us it is not. I feel that too much of what I hear in church contexts is aimed at my head. Bible college was more about being right than being loving. In church, I have often been admonished to “think about” the words of a song rather than just let the melody pour over me. The scriptures are

often presented as “texts” with words to be defined and knowledge to be acquired rather than the poetry of deep calling to deep.

The theological approach is tied closely to the Bible. We are people of the book and the thing we know best how to do with books, is study them. But does the Bible itself beckon us primarily to apply our mental faculties?

Intellectual understanding will be part of reading the Bible—study and thought is my natural inclination—but I am weary of all the years of straining so hard with my head to extract meaning from scrip-

I feel that too much of what I hear in church contexts is aimed at my head. Bible college was more about being right than being loving.

ture. I have found greater value in letting the basic, clear essence of a biblical passage seep into my being, or chanting the Psalms with monks in a chapel imbued with sacredness, or dwelling quietly on simple lines like, “all have received grace upon grace,” “I call you friends,” “abide in me,” “be still and know.”

Some people talk about praying the scriptures. I’m not sure yet what that means, but I am drawn to this different form of attentiveness to holy words.

The great literary scholar and intellectual giant Northrop Frye said, “the Bible should be read as literally as any fundamentalist could desire, but the real literal meaning is an imaginative and poetic one.” The Bible was clearly not put together as a decisive, coherent historical record, he points out. It doesn’t read like a theology textbook, or any other kind of

textbook. Many parts of it are obviously poetic and literary, aimed at more than just the intellect.

Of course, for Frye, as for me, this increases rather than diminishes the ability of the Bible to contain and transmit the profoundest truths, which are just as knowable to the imagination and spirit as the intellect.

Less reliance on the theological approach can increase the accessibility of the Bible and faith to those with less intelligence or access to education. This would include kids, people with intellectual disabilities and, in relation to school access, the poor—that is, the exact sort of people that scripture itself privileges. The Bible encourages understanding and knowledge but it also says God has chosen the foolish things to shame the wise.

I am sensitive to the fact that I am critiquing something to which very fine people have dedicated their lives. The theologians among us deserve recogni-

tion and gratitude for nurturing the minds, and in many cases also the souls, of the faithful. I’m simply suggesting an evolution in how church leaders are trained, how children are shaped and how Sunday mornings are oriented.

Poetic speech, rituals, visual beauty, silence and stories (which many theologians have become refreshingly fond of) are ways to expand beyond the head-first orientation. And of course music is perhaps the best, most accessible way. Lets create more space for beauty and wonder. Lets study less. Lets seek spiritual formation as much as knowledge. And let’s privilege the role of the least intellectually oriented people among us for there we shall find the mystery of Christ’s love. ❧

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Abdullah—Bedir (b. Nov. 13, 2012), to Assil Al-Hossani and Fouad Abdullah, Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Brenneman—Isaac Daniel (b. Nov. 2, 2012), to Dan Brenneman and Kristy Schlegel, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Doerksen—Dominic Blake (b. Nov. 16, 2012), to Christine (nee Nickel) and David Doerksen, Blumenort Mennonite, Rosetown, Man.

Friesen—Emma Marie (b. Aug. 15, 2012), to Kim and Shane Friesen, Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Friesen—Oliver James (b. Oct. 10, 2012), to Kendra and Scott Friesen, Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Heinrichs—Noah Kevin William (b. Nov. 7, 2012), to Ben and Mandy (Srigley) Heinrichs, Faith Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Matthies—Julia Thandiwe (b. Nov. 12, 2012), to Kristen Matthies, Rockway Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.

Morgan—Delevan Brooke (b. Oct. 18, 2012), to Hayley and Justin Morgan, Kingsfield-Zurich Mennonite, Zurich, Ont.

Ropp—Ellyce Nevaeh (b. Nov. 17, 2012), to Andrew and Wanda Ropp, Maple View Mennonite, Wellesley, Ont.

Sawatzky—Liam Carter (b. Oct. 19, 2012), to Taylor Sawatzky, Faith Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Marriages

Bosch/Nighswander—Tony Bosch and Emily Nighswander, Stirling Avenue Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont., Sept. 29, 2012.

Braun/Moar—Dustin Braun (Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.) and Melissa Moar at CanadInn, Winnipeg, Sept. 22, 2012.

Klassen/Naugler—Matthew Klassen (Sherbrooke Mennonite, Vancouver) and Trudy Naugler in Fredericton, N.B., Nov. 10, 2012.

Metzger/Thorn—Vern Metzger and Lorna Thorn, Stirling Avenue Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont., Sept. 15, 2012.

Penner/Peters—Cheryl Leanne Penner and Matthew Ernest Peters (Arnaud Mennonite, Man.) at Portage Avenue Church, Winnipeg, Oct. 21, 2012.

Deaths

Adams—Elizabeth, 79 (b. Nov. 10, 1933; d. Nov. 16, 2012), Kingsfield-Zurich Mennonite, Zurich, Ont.

Buhler—Abe, 59 (b. Nov. 9, 1953; d. Nov. 21, 2012), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Epp—Margaret (nee Lampshire), 66 (b. June 26, 1946; d. Nov. 23, 2012), Bethany Mennonite, Virgil, Ont.

Falk—Justine, 91 (b. April 16, 1921; d. Nov. 21, 2012), Blumenort Mennonite, Rosetown, Man.

Finnestad—Frieda Kroeger (nee Dyck), 84 (b. Jan. 31, 1928; d. Nov. 2, 2012), First Mennonite, Saskatoon, Sask.

Friesen—Jacob (Jake) P., 85 (b. July 4, 1927; d. Nov. 18, 2012), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Funk—Judy (nee Kasper) (Peters), 62 (b. Jan. 19, 1950; d. Nov. 25, 2012), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon, Sask.

Gingerich—Carl, 76 (b. Aug. 4, 1936; d. Sept. 5, 2012), Nairn Mennonite, Ailsa Craig, Ont.

Henderson—Evelyn A., 84 (b. Feb. 24, 1928; d. Nov. 3, 2012), Hague Mennonite, Sask.

Hoepfner—Henry, 91 (b. Sept. 13, 1920; d. Aug. 19, 2012), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Kroeker—David Peter, 83 (b. Oct. 24, 1929; d. Nov. 5, 2012), North Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Kuepfer—Emmanuel, 64 (b. Nov. 4, 1948; d. Nov. 14, 2012), Riverdale Mennonite, Millbank, Ont.

Lichti—Merv, 81 (b. Aug. 22, 1931; d. Nov. 15, 2012), East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Schellenberg—Bernard (Ben), 84 (b. Aug. 26, 1928; d. Oct. 31, 2012), Blumenort Mennonite, Rosetown, Man.

Schmidt—Lloyd, 76 (b. Feb. 12, 1936; d. Sept. 19, 2012), Stirling Avenue Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.

Thiessen—Susie (nee Peters), 101 (b. Jan. 27, 1911; d. Nov. 5, 2012), Zion Mennonite, Swift Current, Sask.

Pontius' Puddle



GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

BEING A FAITHFUL CHURCH PROCESS

The paths and ditches of Biblical interpretation

At the July 2012 Mennonite Church Canada Assembly, delegates approved Being a Faithful Church 4 for study. These articles are to stimulate further thought and discussion. For more information, visit www.mennonitechurch.ca and follow the “Being a Faithful Church” links.

Path # 8: We are part of a larger story of “God’s love affair with the world.”

BY WILLARD METZGER

Being a Faithful Church Task Force member

“Scripture calls us to remember that we are a part of a larger story of ‘God’s love affair with the world.’ The Gospel’s command to go and baptize and the invitation to remember the Lord’s Supper are prime examples of when we ‘do not forget’ how God has accompanied us. The yearning to know God is inseparably connected to ‘remembering’ the story of God, a story that we now acknowledge as our own.”

This is a path that is particularly missional in focus. The missional church discerns the activity of God and then aligns itself to that activity. Although the church is God’s premier vehicle for restoration and reconciliation, God’s activity is not limited to the church. God’s passion to restore a world in need of healing and hope is always active.

Scripture describes how God has been active in the past—from the creation narrative in Genesis to God’s redemptive initiative in the Gospels. Jesus also promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to help the community of faith remain active in God’s redemptive activity.

It is exciting to be reminded that we are part of God’s larger intent. When our efforts are aligned to God’s activity we



become an integral ingredient of God’s responsive recipe. From the wellbeing of the earth to the health of our relationship with God and one another, we become active participants of the continuing story of God’s love.

Scripture invites us not only to experience God’s love for ourselves but also to be an expression of God’s love for the world.

Path # 9: Knowing is inseparable from doing

BY WILLARD METZGER

Being a Faithful Church Task Force member

“Knowing” is inseparable from “doing,” “hearing” is inseparable from “acting,” and “praxis [practice] is indispensable for gnosis [knowledge].” Jesus’ hermeneutic also repeatedly indicates this critical connection between “works [erga] and faith [pistis].” In other words, on a hike we need to walk and not just sit on the path and contemplate the map.

Discernment can be intellectually active but remain practically passive. We can determine what a correct course of

action may be, but until we act on it there will be no practical impact. It is important to actively display the impact of our discernment.

This summer I witnessed the ceremony of the first woman to be ordained within the fellowship of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Congo (CEM). In conversation with CEM President Benjamin Mubenga, I applauded this historical event. He reminded me that the decision to ordain women had been processed several years earlier, however this was the first woman to actualize an earlier decision. It could be argued that the decision had not become real until this ordination.

Discernment can also be participatory. As we exercise our pursuit of faithfulness we may acquire a better understanding of what God requires of us. The understanding of faith for many in Scripture was not fully understood until it was accompanied by action. The disciples expressed and experienced faith as they began to pass out the small portions of food to feed the thousands (Matt. 14). They did not understand how the crowd of people would be fed until they began to distribute the food.

We too are invited to be transformed by faith as we proceed in faithful obedience. The full understanding of how God will work may not be fully comprehended until we are in the process of acting on that which is discerned to be faithful activity.

Path # 10: Scripture is a delight

BY WILLARD METZGER

Being a Faithful Church Task Force member

“Scripture is a delight that serves also for devotional refreshment and daily inspiration. The delight of Scripture is even greater when we can hike together rather than going out on a lone trek.”

When reading a letter from a lover or a beloved friend, the experience is more than an intellectual exercise of reading words. The letter contains deep relational meaning. It ignites emotions of endearment—both towards the author of the letter and from the author of the letter. Because of this, such a letter is often reread several times.

God’s people are especially nurtured by

Scripture. Like a cherished letter, reading Scripture is a relational experience. It contains words of the One we love and cherish. It describes sacrificial love for us. Reading and studying Scripture is more than an intellectual exercise. It is a deep communication of the soul. Because of this, any process that draws us to study Scripture is welcomed by God's People. The psalmist reflects this engagement well in Psalm 119, especially verses 97-104.

One of the benefits of a letter from a lover or a beloved friend is that it reminds us we are not alone. We are cherished and valued by another. The community of God's

people also supplies this. It counters the loneliness of isolation and provides a context of mutual support. It is often through the embrace of others that we more fully understand the embrace of God.

To study Scripture together as a community of faith provides the fullest experience of what God intended. First, we hear and reflect on the words expressing God's affection and love. Secondly, we experience God's love through one another. This provides a much fuller experience of the relational character of Scripture than reading it in isolation. ❧

Housing project visualizes new model of care

BY WALTER FRIESEN

St. Clair O'Connor Community
TORONTO

Over the last number of years the St. Clair O'Connor Community (SCOC) Board has reviewed and renewed its mission statement and constitution. Through these evaluations many questions were raised about this multi-generational housing project that currently has residents from young children to those over 100 years old.

The St. Clair O'Connor Community is a not-for-profit facility in Toronto developed in 1982 under the sponsorship of two Mennonite congregations. It consists of a 25-bed Long-Term Care section, 128

apartments, townhouses for families, a Supportive Service Program, an Adult Day Program, and an Elderly Persons Centre. It is supported by the Ontario Ministry of Health, the City of Toronto, Danforth Mennonite Church, Toronto United Mennonite Church, and private donations through the SCOC Foundation.

It has not been easy for St. Clair O'Connor to remain true to its mission and comply with new government regulations as the organization no longer has the ability to decide who can stay in the long-term care facility or which subsidized-housing

people were to live in its apartments. This was not the vision of the initial project and disturbs the current board members.

The present 25-bed long-term care facility faces the challenges of operational inefficiency and structural non-compliance with current government requirements. At its current size and location, redevelopment is not viable.

A steering committee of management, board members and representatives of the SCOC Foundation board have identified an innovative and viable model of care for persons in the later stage of life. This model would close the long-term care beds and focus on providing substantial care so that persons could continue to live independently.

The proposed model would expand existing supportive housing services and implement new assisted living services for high-risk seniors. It would include a two-bedroom apartment to accommodate temporary, short-stay convalescent care to seniors at SCOC and the surrounding neighbourhood. It would also include a neighbourhood service house where people living nearby could participate in an array of programs and services to support healthy aging. This model, consistent with the mission, vision and values of SCOC would enable people to live independently and enjoy a community of support.

Currently, the Board is looking to hire a person to spearhead this next phase. Much needs to be done including some physical reconstruction. ❧



Those who live at the St. Clair O'Connor Community enjoy good fellowship.

The healing power of forgiveness

Eden Health Care Services annual lecture series

STORY AND PHOTOS BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

Manitoba Correspondent

WINKLER, MAN.

Offering forgiveness is not easy. Forgiveness is not to be confused with pardoning, condoning or excusing a wrongdoing. It is not saying, "It's okay." Nor is it reconciliation. About 175 mental health professionals and lay people attending the fourth annual Eden Health Care Services lecture series on Oct. 11 learned that forgiveness is something that one can will oneself to do, not once but over and over again, "70 times 7" as a matter of fact. And it is good for your health.

Keynote speakers were David Weaver-Zercher, professor of American Religious History at Messiah College and co-author of the book *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy*, Cliff Derksen, father to Candace who was murdered in 1984, Dr. Randy Goossen, Medical Director of Community Health in Winnipeg, and Ted

and Mary Goossen, parents of Josh who died by suicide in 2001.

Weaver-Zercher, together with his co-writers, wrestled long and hard with what forgiveness means. Together they discerned that "forgiveness is a particular form of grace that resists the urge to revenge and is a commitment to overcome those feelings." The Amish at Nickel Mines extended forgiveness immediately when ten of their daughters were shot and five of them killed. "We discovered that forgiveness can be immediate," said Weaver-Zercher. "Some thought this must be wrong and inauthentic but I think there is a way of understanding that forgiveness can happen immediately. You have a choice how to respond: revengefully or not."

It took six and a half weeks before Candace Derksen's bound and frozen body was found and then another 26 years before the murderer was found and sentenced. Her father commented, "Wilma always said at press conferences, 'I am on the road of forgiveness and trying to forgive' and I would say 'I've forgiven,' but I had no idea what I was saying."

Cliff and Wilma Derksen made the decision to forgive the day that Candace was found. "That night there was a knock at the door. Mr. Stoppel, the father of a daughter murdered three years earlier, wanted to let us know what it was like to be the parent of a murdered child and what we could expect. His story was one of frustration, sadness, bitterness and anger. The consequences were ill health, not being able to work and broken relationships with family. We saw how unforgiveness will destroy us in many and various ways."

"It was interesting that the Lord had brought this man to our door at this time. It caused us to be proactive about forgiveness. Wilma and I looked at each other and



"Project Angel" one of Derksen's most recent pieces. Made with clay and a patina finish. "Candace had a secret. She had a destiny and escaped the pain of the torturer's rope rising in a flight to freedom. She defied death and continues to tell her story through us."



Cliff Derksen expresses healing through his art work. In his memorization of scripture he identified with Jonah. This piece is called "Escape Jonah" made from clay with a patina finish. "I was not happy with life and wished to escape. It made me crazy. Understanding Jonah was the beginning of my return to sanity. I have a very patient, understanding and forgiving God."

said we don't want to lose each other and we don't want to lose our children." But the next 15 years were a downward spiral for Cliff. "Fifteen years later I looked like Mr Stoppel. I had lost my camping ministry career. For years and years the suspicion of guilt hung over me and my life was crashing down around me." Cliff realized he was in danger of losing everything and turned to his Bible in desperation. As he committed himself to memorizing Scripture, his journey of forgiveness began anew. His journey exposed many areas where there was a need for forgiveness including his relationship with his father but also "what was I going to do with the situation that our case was still not solved?"

"I tried to look at life from (the offender's) perspective. I tried to humanize them. Would I be doing the same things if I was in their boots? I did this so that I could forgive but this situation was tough because I didn't know who this person was." When the offender was finally caught and sentenced in 2010, "the scenarios [I had imagined] were such that I felt compassion for this man. If there comes a time I could meet with him I would like to do that." Cliff acknowledges that it has been "a lot of hard

work, effort and determination.”

Forgiveness is not a “once and it’s done” decision. The urge to take revenge returns again and again and you have to re-commit yourself to forgoing vengeance, said Weaver-Zercher. “It’s a commitment to act in ways that don’t provoke those bitter feelings. It’s a decision and a process.”

“Forgiveness grows out of a seedbed of faith,” said Mary Goossen. In all the stories, a nurtured heritage of forgiveness was evident. Just as the Amish recite the Lord’s Prayer many times in a day with its emphasis on “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” and give solemn thought to their relationships before entering communion, the church can be the community where forgiveness

is taught and nurtured.

Randy Goossen examined forgiveness as a form of therapy. “The proponents of forgiveness therapy say it is really good for your health. It improves the symptoms of depression and makes a difference in blood pressure.”

“The first thing is to make a choice, a decision. The feeling will come later. . . Hanging on and ruminating creates its own issues. We realize some will hang onto their anger because it is part of their identity or because they fear it is too dangerous to go there.”

“If we are going to love one another, we are going to have to forgive,” said Derksen. “Unforgiveness destroys. Forgiveness is for the taking, so take it. It’s hard work but it pays off.” ☞

The sounds of youth

In praise of the Prince of Peace

BY ANDREA EPP
FORT ERIE, ONT.

On the eve of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario’s fall conference, the gymnasium of Niagara Christian Community of Schools in Fort Erie was alive with the sounds of youth. Darren Kropf, Community Engagement Coordinator for MCC Ontario, co-hosted the youth event, “Praising the Prince of Peace” concert with school assistant Jesse Robbins.

Mark Durksen, stage name Mark Danger, kicked off the show and set the tone for the evening. The unassuming 24-year-old

blond did not look like a typical MC until he hit the stage. Whether jumping to pre-recorded beats or pounding them out on the keyboard, Durksen’s abundant energy and enthusiasm put the “hop” in “hip-hop.” A member of St Catharines Scott Street Mennonite Brethren Church, he rapped, “Jesus came to serve, not to be served.” He speaks the language of today’s youth.

With simple props and no microphones, Theatre of the Beat engaged the audience in an intimate performance of “Commemorate,”



Theatre of the Beat performers John Wideman (left) and Benjamin Wert interact with 12-year old Matt Climenhage from the Trinity Life youth group during the performance of “Commemorate” at the MCC Ontario youth event on Nov. 9.

☞ Briefly noted

Patricia Shelly nominated as moderator-elect for MC USA

The Leadership Discernment Committee of Mennonite Church USA announced Patricia Shelly of Newton, Kan., as its nominee for moderator-elect of Mennonite Church USA. Shelly will serve two years as moderator-elect and two years as moderator and chair of the Executive Board. She will succeed the current moderator-elect, Elizabeth Soto Albrecht of Lancaster, Pa., who will succeed the present moderator, Richard Thomas, after the Phoenix assembly. Prior to joining the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA in 2005, Shelly served as a member of the Executive Committee for Western District Conference (WDC) (1985–1989), and later as WDC’s moderator-elect and moderator (1991–1993). She is professor of Bible and religion at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan.

—Mennonite Church USA



examining pacifism and the War of 1812. It was the first public performance of the piece, which had Southern Ontario actors John Wideman, Kimberlee Walker, Katie Cowie-Redekopp and Benjamin Wert interacting with the audience.

Husband and wife Shayne and Leah Brown front the newly-minted worship band Instead of Silver. Full-time associate pastor of Collingwood’s New Life church, Shayne said the band’s “goal is not money or fame, but to know God and make him famous.” Along with guitarist Andrew Bowins, bassist Matthew McGill and drummer Trevor Walker, the Browns’ alternating vocals had the audience on their feet singing every word. The band released their debut album this February.

Aisha Wiens and Ella Baswick, both 12, and Jessica Holman, 14, were glad they came out, saying the experience was “awesome” and “incredible.” They were with the youth group of Sherkston’s Trinity Life (Brethren in Christ) church. ☞

Many views, divergent understandings

MC Eastern Canada moves to sell Warden Woods Community Centre property

DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
TORONTO

The dispute over who owns the property at Warden Woods Community Centre here has been ongoing for 13 years and is perceived differently by some of the principals involved.



Aldred Neufeldt

Aldred Neufeldt, until April 2012 moderator of MC Eastern Canada, has lived in Toronto several times—1976 to 1988 and 2008 to the present. His memory and understanding of the Centre has always been that it was a ministry of the Warden Woods Mennonite Church, located in the same building.

Ginelle Skerritt, executive director at Warden Woods Community Centre had the same view when she was hired by the Centre nine years ago, that the building in which the centre operated had been built to house a Mennonite Church. In the intervening years her understanding has changed, thinking of the Centre and the building as a separate entity with the Mennonite Church renting space from the Centre, just as Roman Catholic and Muslim groups had.



Benno Barg

Hess pastored the Warden Park Mennonite Church (which later became Warden Woods Mennonite Church) from 1955 to 1986, and also served as executive director of the Centre for some of those years. Barg taught in the public school system for a number of years and worked for the Centre for 23 years, 12 of them as executive

director. He and his son Gerry, now living back in Kitchener, still serve on the Centre's property committee.

Their understanding of the Centre and the Church is that they were always separate entities, that the property was always owned by the Centre, and that the Church rented space from the Centre, even though the *title* to the property was held by MCEC and its predecessors. David Martin, executive minister of MCEC, believes that the plan for the Centre always included it being connected to a Mennonite congregation and with the closure of the Warden Woods Mennonite Church, the Centre no longer meets the requirements necessary for a nominal (\$1) sale by MCEC to the Centre.

Martin reports that MCEC's legal counsel and a historical study by Sam Steiner support the idea, held by MCEC staff and executive board, that the difference in visions and missions of the Centre and MCEC preclude a nominal sale. Anna Bowman, a Mennonite social service worker at the Centre in the early 1970s, believes that the Centre's original purpose was to "embody the gospel message to the whole community, to make whole . . . the whole gospel for a broken world." She, together with Gerald Good, a retired Mennonite pastor who served on the Centre board in the early 2000s, believe that the purpose of the Centre has not changed throughout its existence.

Joanna Wall, pastor of the church from 2005 until its closing in 2009, believes that "things have evolved" from a church mission project to an independent centre, and that positions around this have polarized

in strongly held views. She, together with Skerritt, believe that the MCEC constituency wants "to do right by the community at Warden Woods, but MCEC (leadership) also needs to do right by (the constituents of) MCEC.



Joanna Wall

"There is no answer that will suit or please everyone. It is critical for those who are not happy to not let this divide." The Bargs "cannot understand" why MCEC wishes to take the building away from the Centre and believe that if the building is sold at market value the Centre's work will cease. While Skerritt believes the work of the Centre would be threatened, fundraising would be attempted to raise the cost of the building and property.

This process has been underway for 13 years. In 1999 the Property Committee of MCEC recommended that MCEC "divest itself of all properties not directly used by its ministries." In 2002 MCEC was advised that "the charitable objects of MCEC are fundamentally different from the objects of the Warden Woods Community Centre." Warden Woods Mennonite Church declined ownership of the property, as did the congregations of York Region (Toronto and area). No non-Mennonite organization was found which could or wished to purchase the property.

In 2011 the delegate body of MCEC authorized the executive board to either lease the building to the Centre, sell it to the Centre, or sell it on the open market by April 2012. Before April 2012 discussion took place with the Centre, after which the Centre filed a court challenge to MCEC's position on the sale. With issues currently before the court, MCEC staff and board have been given legal counsel to not release the documents they have filed, including Steiner's historical study.

When interviewed, the Bargs, in possession of MCEC's submission, strongly disagreed with some of the material in the MCEC response to the Centre's, in particular "that the emphasis of this fund drive was almost entirely on building a community of faith in Warden Woods." Benno pointed to Craig Hincks 1995 "Living Words: A History of Warden Woods



Gerald Good

Church and Community Centre” (p. 81) that the Mennonite Church had provided “a non-sectarian facility for social service, community development, and ecumenical worship within a low-income public housing area.” Skerritt claims that the Centre Board had tried to communicate with MCEC staff and board but got no response and, with the April 2012 deadline looming, had to act to protect their assets and to “get discussion started.”

Interestingly, Martin claims that they felt that the Centre Board was failing to communicate with the MCEC board and were blindsided by the legal challenge.

Gerry Barg noted that there are four simple facts in this case: 1) the money raised to build the Centre was raised for the Centre, not the church; 2) the Centre still does the same work for which the money was originally raised; 3) the Centre and the Warden Park Mennonite Church, later Warden Woods Mennonite Church, were two separate entities, related but distinct and always have been; and 4) the

Mennonite community has been a witness to the community. The community is having a hard time understanding where MCEC is coming from “taking the building away after giving it to them,” though he clarified that the building was not *given*, the money was raised for the Centre, not the Church.

Martin hopes that after the first submissions to the court that the Centre and MCEC can sit down and work things out without a protracted and expensive legal battle. While he supports the work of the Centre, he does not believe it fulfils the MCEC Vision of “Extending the Peace of Jesus Christ: making disciples, growing congregations, forming leaders” and that MCEC cannot legally sell the property for a nominal value. While he appeals to a discussion with the Ontario Trustee to support this position, the Centre appeals to the same Trustee to support their position. ❧



David Martin

(the wise ones). He argued that these archetypes of manhood are neither accurate nor sufficient to an understanding of spirituality. He recounted how his quest for a more genuine spirituality led him to a study of the Biblical patriarch, Joseph, and ultimately the writing of this book. In his book he lifted out 10 metaphors which, he argues, can help modern men to a more healthy, wholesome spirituality.

Too often men have limited spirituality to Bible reading and prayer. Men gifted in these disciplines are the spiritual ones, the others are not. Further, we have created an erroneous distinction between spiritual and secular work. Church workers are involved in God’s work, the rest of us work for money. Not so! All of our work is to be spiritual work, done as unto God. Our work and our worship must be one.

Mennonite Men, a bi-national program of Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA, counts itself privileged to have been able to partner with Gareth in the publication of his book and in workshops/retreats across North America to encourage men to gather for fellowship and to re-examine and appreciate anew the rich spiritual gifts that are ours in Christ Jesus.

Men’s groups interested in having Gareth speak can contact him directly at Columbia Bible College or through Marvin Baergen, JoinHands Coordinator, Mennonite Church Canada (403) 256-2894. ❧

What makes a spiritual man?

BY MARV BAERGEN,
Canadian JoinHands Coordinator

What is a real man? Is it the body builder, the fix-it man, the athlete or the political leader? What is a spiritual man? Is it the monk bowed in prayer, a preacher in a pulpit, a knight in shining armor, fighting against the forces of evil in the world? Or is it a farmer spreading seed or a carpenter in his shop?

Gareth Brandt, instructor at Columbia Bible College and author of *Under Construction: Reframing Men’s Spirituality*, focused on these questions in addressing a group of about 40 guys at Trinity Mennonite Church, DeWinton, Alberta, on Nov. 10. Brandt demonstrated that the answer depends on our perspective, on pre-conceived notions of manhood or spirituality.

Brandt took direct aim at a general perception in our society among secular and religious thinkers of men as warriors (fighting for the right), lovers (rescuing a

damsel in distress), kings (rulers of our domain whether large or small) and sages



PHOTO BY HUGO NEUFELD

Mennonite Men sponsored a half-day men’s retreat at Trinity Mennonite Church on Nov. 10.

Riverton Fellowship Circle celebrates 25 years

STORY AND PHOTO BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

Manitoba Correspondent
RIVERTON, MAN.

In 1991, two vanloads of people from Riverton Fellowship Circle stopped at a small Mennonite native congregation in Oklahoma while travelling to a Native Assemblies conference in Arizona. “While I saw a rundown church building that needed repair, someone in our group saw something else. ‘I wish that we had a church we could call our own,’” recalled Neill Von Gunten, who together with his wife, Edith, pastored the Riverton congregation for many years. The dream of having their own church building was realized six years later.

Riverton, an hour north of Winnipeg on the shores of Lake Winnipeg, is an ethnically diverse community of about 500 people. It is a somewhat transient fishing community where northern First Nations students can come to complete their education or where northerners come to be closer to services. It became the home base for Neill and Edith Von Gunten when they began their work with Mennonite Church Canada’s Native Ministries program in 1976. From there they could access the First Nations communities of Matheson Island, Loon Straits and Pine Dock, often by toboggan or sleigh across the frozen lake.

By 1985 several Pine Dock residents who had moved to Riverton asked the Von Guntens to hold services in Riverton. A small group began meeting in the Friendship Centre boardroom. On Oct. 28, 2012, they met to celebrate that small beginning and give thanks for the past 25 years.

Worship always took place in a circle, explained Neill Von Gunten. “In a circle everyone is equal and welcome. One end of the circle is always left open so people can come and go.” A fellowship meal followed every worship service. Sunday school took place in the hallway.

During those years the church grew and was an important part of the community.

It hosted and sponsored Bible school students and voluntary service workers. The Fellowship hosted and attended the Native Assemblies of Mennonite congregations held in various locations cross North America. For many years the Fellowship held Native Camp week at Camp Assiniboia with up to 140 kids.

Once they began serious conversations about a church building of their own, fund raising started in earnest. “Our first \$500 came from the Hopi and Apache people in Arizona. The next \$500 came from an individual in this community. This seed money encouraged us greatly,” said Von Gunten.



Neill and Edith Von Gunten (left), Barb Daniels (centre) and Samuel Barga spoke about the importance of Riverton Fellowship at its 25th anniversary. A braid of sweet grass and open Bible are always prominent in the worship. The stones hold the names of those who have been a part of Riverton Fellowship in the past but have since died, “gathered to the Living Rock, ‘Ebenezer,” said Hilda Franz who spoke at the celebration.

“I want to clear up any misunderstanding,” said Von Gunten. “In Riverton there have always been rumours and stories but I want to make it clear that no money for the church building whatsoever came from Native Ministries of Mennonite Church Canada, Manitoba Metis Federation, Indian Affairs, or any government officials.” More than 200 volunteers came to help. When the day came to erect the walls, every business in Riverton sent workers out to help. Five months after the groundbreaking ceremony, Riverton Fellowship dedicated the new building.

The Fellowship has been an important part of the community. Dramas, choirs, more Mennonite Voluntary Service workers, annual country gospel jamborees, Christmas dinners with 60 to 80 guests, cultural celebrations and involvement in the local MCC thrift shop were ways they reached out into the community. In 2007 Riverton Fellowship became a member of MC Manitoba and MC Canada and in 2009 Barb Daniels was commissioned to pastoral care ministry. Riverton Fellowship has worked in partnership with Bethel, Sargent, Douglas and Home Street Mennonite Churches under the Partnership Circles program, a joint ministry of MC Manitoba and MC Canada. These churches continue to bring worship services to the Fellowship on a rotational basis.

This past summer Samuel Barga, a CMU student, worked in the Fellowship, leading worship and reaching out into the community. “I had no idea what I was getting into but I was convinced that God wanted me here. I came to give but I received.” Barga, who moved from Paraguay in January, said, “I practically got a new family here. This has been a life-changing experience for me.”

Barb Daniels said he breathed new life into the church that has dwindled to a handful of mostly older people. The church reflects the transient nature of the community, she explained. “The community also mistakenly feels that our church is mostly for native people.” She looks ahead with hope that the church will continue to be a significant force in the community and in the lives of the people to whom it ministers. ❧

Longtime activist dies

By **KARIN FEHDERAU**
Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON, SASK.

Howard Willems, a member of Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, passed away Nov. 8. A co-founder of the Saskatchewan Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization (SADAO), Willems spent many hours working to change legislation to allow information about asbestos content in buildings to be available to the general public. He also worked to spread awareness about the dangers of asbestos. Through his work as a building inspector, Willems was exposed to asbestos fibres.

To his dying breath, Willems continued

to advocate for the rights of those who might be exposed to the deadly fibres. One week before he died, Willems was interviewed for a local news story as the NDP presented a private members bill to amend the Public Health Act to make a registry of all public buildings that contained asbestos in Saskatchewan available to the public. This would benefit construction workers, building inspectors and First Responders.

“Howard did not let fears keep him from living. That was a gift to his own soul, a gift to our community and to all of Canada,” said Patrick Preheim, pastor of Nutana Park Mennonite. Following his passing, the Saskatchewan government announced it would create a voluntary registry to honour Willems and his efforts. A mandatory registry is still being considered. Willems was 59 years old. ☸



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☸ Briefly noted

New pastors in B.C. congregations

Several Mennonite Church B.C. congregations have hired new pastoral staff in the last months. Silas Chung began as pastor Nov. 1 at Chinese Grace Mennonite, Vancouver. Lydia Cruttwell, who had served as intern pastor at First United Mennonite in Vancouver, is now interim pastor there. At Peace Mennonite in Richmond, Jon and Brittani Gifford are serving together as associate pastors, Jon with youth and young adults and Brittani in family ministries. Transitional lead pastor at Living Hope Christian Fellowship in Surrey is Gerry Binnema, while Bob Boehr is serving as associate pastor and Josh Hooch is interim pastor for youth/young adults. Reece Friesen began Dec. 1 as associate pastor at Eben-Ezer Mennonite in Abbotsford, a congregation he served previously. At United Mennonite of Black Creek, Jordan Mohler is serving as coordinator of family and youth ministries.

—Amy Dueckman

GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Congolese flee as rebel army controls city

BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
Mennonite Central Committee

Many of the people displaced when rebel group M23 recently took control of Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo had already been displaced a number of times earlier this year, says an MCC worker

"It's not just this displacement," said Michael J. Sharp, who was in Goma at the time. "These are very vulnerable people who were already displaced multiple times. People are pushed further and further away from their homes and are increasingly vulnerable."

More than 250,000 people in the eastern part of the country were displaced from their homes and camps as rebel group M23 took control of Goma. These displaced people are among the latest to join the 1.5 million people in eastern Congo forced from their homes by decades of fighting among many different local and regional armed groups.

Sharp said M23 emptied the Kanyaruchinya camp, about six miles north of the city, of its estimated 70,000 people who had already been uprooted from their homes. Many followed the main road south toward Goma, seeking shelter in the city or continuing on the main road west of Goma to camps for internally displaced people (IDP) close to the town of Sake.

However, when M23 overtook Goma, the exodus of displaced people continued, including 345 families from North Kivu who had taken refuge at a school near Goma in the fall. MCC had provided them with basic food and household supplies. The exodus led many to Sake, only to be chased back to Goma, when M23 engaged the Congolese army in heavy fire there.

"Even though Goma was an area of



Mbonye Buhunda, 38, her husband and their six children, including Mapenli, 11 and Ishara, 13, pictured, have been displaced repeatedly.

fighting, once it calmed down, some people went there. People know it's a hub for international organizations," Sharp said.

In Goma, the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), an umbrella organization for 16 Protestant denominations in eastern Congo and an MCC partner, is responding to the needs of as many displaced people in the city as it can. With MCC support, they plan to provide food, water, and basic

household supplies to about 750 families. ECC denominations will provide spaces for the families to stay.

Already this year, MCC has contributed \$128,000 of locally purchased food and material aid for ECC projects that impact displaced people. In addition, through Canadian Foodgrains Bank, MCC provided \$393,087 for food, seeds and tools to support families in North and South Kivu who are hosting displaced people. ☘

Conflict in Congo affects Surrey resident

ANGELIKA DAWSON
Mennonite Central Committee B.C.

Leon Mvukiyehe is a man of prayer. It is the only tool he has as he considers the plight of his family who are caught in the conflict that has arisen in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo). His father has been sick for some time. In addition, Mvukiyehe, who works for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) BC, says his parents are also caring for his elderly grandfather, so they have been unable to flee.

"Aside from praying for my family and all those affected by the current situation there, there is not much else I can do," he says, but adds that this is exactly what his parents are asking for. "Every time when

I talk to my mom, dad and my other siblings, we encourage all of us to pray for one another and to stay connected with God through prayers."

MCC staff are also in prayer and are deeply concerned about the rapidly growing numbers of internally displaced people (IDP) in eastern Congo, due to intensified fighting in North Kivu Province.

Already burdened by more than 1.5 million IDPs, eastern Congo is now reeling as this most recent round of military activity is forcing another 250,000 people out of their villages or IDP camps and destabilizing life for the 700,000 residents of the provincial capital of Goma, many of whom

MCC PHOTO BY MICHAEL SHARP

are fleeing to Rwanda or south into South Kivu Province.

In the past week, Goma has become the focus of major fighting between a rebel military group and DR Congo national troops. Electricity and water supplies to the city have been disconnected. Mvukiyehe's parents have been living in a situation of siege ever since. His father's failing health requires him to meet with his doctor weekly but that is now impossible. In the brief moments when they've been able to leave their house in search for food they have found that there is little available. Banks, hospitals and businesses remain closed.

MCC is responding together with its

long-time partner, the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), providing food and humanitarian aid to IDPs. In this past year, MCC has also supported peace and reconciliation projects and is supplying food, seeds and tools for returning IDPs utilizing funds from a Canadian Foodgrains Bank grant.

To this, Mvukiyehe and his family add their fervent prayers and stand firm in their Christian faith.

"My family and I serve a living God. He has done many things in our lives and he still continues to," he says, inviting others to pray with him for peace in DR Congo and elsewhere. ❧



Leon Mvukiyehe (left) stands beside his father and daughter. Leon works with MCC BC but his parents and grandfather are caught in siege-like conditions in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. He is asking for prayer.

COVER STORY

MCC helps 120 Gazan families whose homes were destroyed

LINDA ESPENSHADE

Mennonite Central Committee

As casualties rose because of fighting between Israel and Hamas in mid-November, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) began sending emergency funds to help families in Gaza whose homes were bombed.

Ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip erupted after Israel killed the military chief of Hamas. Hamas fired rockets into Israel, and Israel has conducted an intensive attack from air and sea.

"In Gaza there's nowhere to go to feel secure," said Joanna Hiebert Bergen, MCC Palestine/Israel representative with her spouse, Dan Bergen. They are from Winnipeg and live in Jerusalem.

Gazans have very limited space to move out of harm's way and no safe shelters in which to take refuge. Israel controls and restricts the flow of goods and people in and out of Gaza, so Palestinians there are unable to escape constant bombardment by fleeing to another country or safer space. Getting medical supplies into Gaza is also difficult, even for the United Nations, Hiebert Bergen said. Hospitals are overcrowded and supplies are limited.

In Gaza, violence, poverty and unemployment are constant threats. About 80 per cent of the population is dependent on aid, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. MCC's partners work with programs that strengthen people's ability to grow their own food, earn a living and get an education.

During the bombardment MCC's partners risked their lives to determine need and to purchase and distribute supplies, supported by \$20,000 from MCC. They have purchased mattresses, pillows, blankets and kitchen utensils for 60 families in Khan Younis and 60 families in the Gaza City area.

A ceasefire came into effect on Nov. 21, but tension remains high in the area. ❧

MCC PHOTO BY RYAN RODRICK BEILER



In Beit Lahia, Gaza, on July 4, 2012, Palestinians walk near buildings that have not been rebuilt since the Israeli airstrikes in the 2008-2009 war.

The appeal of disaster

Despite its key role in Syria, MCC has to work hard for donations

BY WILL BRAUN

Senior Writer

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is uniquely positioned to provide aid in the hardest hit areas of Syria, where armed conflict has killed more than 20,000, forced over 400,000 to flee the country and brought hunger to 2 million. But a slow-onset, protracted war in a Middle Eastern Islamic country, with no matching funds from Ottawa and few media images of successful aid delivery, makes fundraising tough.

Bruce Guenther repeatedly expresses gratitude for the contributions that have come in—in excess of \$500,000 plus in-kind donations since February—but he says MCC is spending money as fast as it comes in and could use a lot more.

Guenther, who heads MCC's disaster response department, says raising money for Syria is harder than for Haiti or Africa. MCC's appeals related to the earthquake in Haiti and the 2011 drought in East Africa raised \$15 million and \$5.4 million respectively.

Why so much less for Syria, which is currently the highest priority disaster MCC is addressing?

Guenther points to several possible factors, among them the difference between a sudden and straightforward disaster (like an earthquake or tsunami) and a prolonged, complicated conflict (such as the one in Syria). Part of this difference is in media coverage, which necessarily creates much

of the context of MCC's fund raising.

Coverage of Syria focuses on political struggle not humanitarian disaster. Viewers are more likely to see rebels than refugees, political pundits than aid workers.

The fact that the Middle East is not generally associated with poverty in the way Africa is, may also influence giving patterns.

Though the situation in Syria continues to deteriorate, Guenther says the international aid community has a much smaller presence

PHOTO COURTESY OF FORUM FOR DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE AND DIALOGUE



In the region of Qalamoun, Syria, MCC is giving blankets to families who fled from Homs. The children's names are not used for security reasons. Donations to fundraising appeals resulting from catastrophic natural disasters tend to be more generous than to disasters caused by conflict.

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Briefly noted

MBs announce human resources director

WINNIPEG, Man.—Norbert Bargaen has been appointed human resources director for the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC). Bargaen is known in the MB constituency for his service as principal at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute, Winnipeg, (2000–2012); teacher at Mennonite Educational Institute, Abbotsford, B.C., (1991–2000); athletic director at Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, B.C., (1986–1991); and director at Camp Evergreen, Sundre, Alta. (1981–1986). Bargaen began in this new position in the conference on Nov. 19. —Canadian Conferences of MB churches

there than somewhere like the Sahel region of Africa where millions face hunger.

He emphasizes that MCC is “among those well positioned to respond” in Syria. “The nature of our church and interfaith partnerships are crucial,” Guenther says. “We have amazing partners that are integrating peace-building work [with aid]. . . . Here is the church standing for peace when they are under immense pressure to arm from one side or the other.”

The MCC response to date—including allocation of general MCC resources and funds from MCC’s account with Canadian Foodgrains Bank—totals about \$3 million. MCC will continue to respond as able. For more, see <http://mcccanada.ca/middle-eastcrisis> ❧



Lebane (left) and Umale (right) are part of a community group in their village in south-west Niger that identifies families who need emergency food assistance. Donors responded more generously to the funding appeal for the Sahel region of Africa (includes Niger) than for Syria.

Everyday disaster

An email interview with Sarah Adams, MCC representative for Lebanon and Syria, based in Beirut

BY WILL BRAUN
Senior Writer

On waking up to face crisis:

The first thing I do when I get up is check the news. As the page loads, I hope against hope that a miracle has happened overnight and the killing has ended.

Every day our partners wonder how they will make it through another day, and I usually wake up wondering what more we can do to help.

On talking with people in Homs, Aleppo and other crisis spots:

It’s heartbreaking and amazing. MCC partners and friends are getting kidnapped, shot at, having their homes destroyed. Men are being forced by both the army and opposition groups to take up arms.

Every story is different, but the same. People are suffering.

Everyone I talk to wants the violence to end.

The volunteers work so hard. They just dive in, [even though they] themselves have had their homes destroyed, lost their jobs. Still, they have nothing but passion to help their neighbours. They long for the day they will again walk their children to school, harvest their fields, shop at a neighbourhood vegetable vendor, gather together to celebrate a wedding or a birth. They are

committed to a peaceful Syria. Many verbalize that they expect they may die in the course of that commitment.

On her work day:

I usually work 12 to 14-hour days. The hours are irregular.

A call in the evening that a Syrian Bishop is in town and free to meet. A group taking part in an MCC-sponsored weekend trauma training. Early morning questions from the port about a material resource shipment. Calling in to a special MCC Canada event with constituents to offer them a perspective from the field.

Our constituents are giving great support. Any chance to connect with them is a privilege and a blessing.

Most of the time, I don’t even notice the hours. Our partners have been working without a break for months.

On prayer:

My prayer is for an end to the violence.

We know the suffering will go on long after the violence ends. But an end to the violence will bring hope.

In the absence of an immediate end to the conflict, I think God calls on us to bring hope in other ways. Through a warm blanket, a parcel of food, or simply a listening ear when life is overwhelming.

I also pray each day that one of the many neutral, committed, non-violent voices will rise up. It seems the majority of Syrians are committed to stopping the violence and finding a way for all voices to be heard—a way to build a shared Syrian future. But the media and world leaders take these average people out of the equation, instead giving voice to the extreme ends. I pray that a new voice of reason and non-violence will rise up and be heard.

MCC Saskatchewan hears about Global Family

By KARIN FEHDERAU

Saskatchewan Correspondent

SASKATOON

After a snowy start to the November weekend in which all Friday activities of the annual Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan meeting were cancelled, delegates on Saturday gave their whole hearts to hear about the programs and people of the past year.

Mariana Rivera Tinoco, from the Global Family program in Mexico, spoke excitedly about how people are helped in very practical ways through the program. The many people that she meets are responding to the love of God and yet, she said, the gift is returned in unsuspected ways.

"We are the receiver of the love of people in need," she said. "You can see how love is touching them even when you don't go there to preach."

What followed was the kind of financial report every delegate hopes to hear. With the help of a bar graph, delegates were shown how giving has increased. Money designated for disasters has been generously given and is higher than predicted. In provincial programs, thrift stores are doing well and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank activities produced revenue that exceeded

expectations.

In her report, Executive Director Claire Ewert Fisher painted a bigger picture for delegates to consider.

"As the world-wide ministry arm of the Anabaptist church, we are concerned about our relationship with our partners," she said. MCC is also attentive to local issues, she noted, listing environmental and Aboriginal concerns first. Other areas of service such as the Kids Club on Appleby Drive and the increasing diversity of newcomers to the province are also being taken seriously. For example, MCC helped to plan Prairie Prism, an event to educate the churches about the many new cultures represented in the area. And the number of young people getting involved in MCC continues to grow.

That the province has grown through thousands of new immigrants is no secret and was the topic for a workshop led by Elaine Harder. Henry Block, a workshop participant, spoke about his surprise in learning that there were 25 languages spoken in just his own neighbourhood, confirming the reality that the face of



Joel Kroeker knits while he and his wife, Heather Peters, listen at the MCC Saskatchewan meeting at First Mennonite Church, Saskatoon. Peters reported on their MCC term in Sudan.

Saskatoon is changing.

To give participants a sense of history, Arli Klassen, a transition consultant who has served with MCC since 1990, travelled back in time to explain how MCC was started and how the different programs developed.

The original intent of MCC was to organize and coordinate the relief efforts already going on in various Mennonite churches, she said. From those early attempts flowed a river of relief to many parts of the world helping Mennonites and many others. From programs on food and agriculture to feeding orphans and opening arms to refugees, MCC continues to build on the strength of united Mennonites helping those in need and building bridges between cultures.

Werner Wiens, from Winnipeg, launched an enthusiastic call to action for the Global Family program. Global Family, which began as an effort to care for orphans and has grown to include a strong educational component, is making a big difference in people's lives, said Wiens. He is a strong believer that education is the key to lifting people out of poverty as it increases the earning potential for the next generation, trains leaders, and can point the way for peace in areas of conflict.

As the annual meeting brought into focus the needs of different people groups and brought several Mennonite conference groups together, there was a sense of agreement that Mennonites, with the help of MCC, have a responsibility to help those in need to get back on their feet. ❧



Saskatchewan participants of the International Visitor Exchange Program (IVEP) read Scripture in their own language at the MCC meeting. From left to right, Norman Chura (Bolivia), Rebecca Davies, Stephanua Nugraha (Indonesia), Jackson Oyunga (Kenya) and Bonika Eab (Cambodia).

Hollowing out the Christian consensus

Rex Murphy comments on the condition of modern society

BY HENRY NEUFELD
VANCOUVER, B.C.

“The displacement of religion has taken a long time and Christianity is now off centre; it’s out of the spotlight,” said Rex Murphy.

“In the 1960s I was taught by nuns; they used the catechism and religious texts. We went to church twice on Sundays. When the framework is gone, when you tear down the moral/religious scaffold, what’s left? Other pseudo ideas will take its place,” he said. After 1965 the nuns were out of the school; the religious concerns were gone.

Murphy, speaking at lectures sponsored by Vancouver’s Regent College, is well known as an articulate and keen observer of the human condition. He is host of CBC Radio’s *Cross Country Checkup*.

Murphy described how the secular intellectuals of the 19th century mounted an assault on religion and pushed the Christian framework aside. “Life, death and the hereafter—the important things—are not discussed,” he said.

“Secularization involved freedom from Christianity; it’s the new religion, when you eradicate 2000 years of teachings.” The secular religion represents a loss of respect for traditions that have stood the test of time.

With the intensity and conviction of a prophet, Murphy lamented the loss of Christian values and critiqued the idols that have emerged.

“When you take away the anchor of 2000 years, you lose the connections of thousands of minds over the years. The great Christian framework is the basis for much of what we have; art, music, and literature.

“It’s ludicrous to put a nice coat on morality; we live in an age of hyper-tolerance,” Murphy said, “Christianity is seen as too rigid, too sentimental, too authoritarian.”

As an example, Murphy noted that in the late 1990s there was an “antique respect” for traditional marriage, yet three years later politicians pronounced gay marriage a basic human right—and the discussion

was over. “How did this change happen so rapidly? How do you turn the code upside down?” asked Murphy.

Murphy cited environmentalism and political correctness as examples of the new orthodoxy. “If you’re a denier of global warming, if you express yourself on that issue you will get abuse from scientists. If I disagree with Al Gore, I’m on the same plane as a holocaust denier. They attack religion, but now, under this new order, everything is rigid,” he said, asserting that the new secularists are much more hostile to dissent than Christianity ever was.

Murphy says there are too many unexamined assumptions; we have a new morality to justify things. Gay marriage, pluralism, diversity are the new dogmas. “All this openness is just a lot of wind rushing through,” pronounced the prophet.

The new religion includes environmentalism, human rights—the old moral order has been thrown out. “When you invoke human rights, you invoke the sacred,” he said. These are the religious doctrines of

our day, often incompatible with the spiritual/religious traditions of the ages.

Murphy noted the trivialization of issues; a human rights complaint is filed about not being able to smoke in a certain location. This, he said, is a mockery of human rights and parody real beliefs, and it pales in contrast to the horrors of the holocaust and Pol Pot.

In responding to Murphy, Preston Manning said the new “isms” of our day have pushed faith aside, and make a mockery of values and religion. “The struggle with evil forces must continue,” he said, noting that there is good and evil in each of the “isms.” He cited the example of the evil of the Roman cross being turned into a symbol of something good. ✎

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Isaiah 9:6a KJV

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Short-term assignment in South Africa

Mennonite Church Canada

Arnold and Joanne Hildebrand are serving as Mennonite Church Canada workers with the Anabaptist Network in South Africa (ANiSA) from Dec. 2012 to March 2013 in Pietermaritzburg, South

Africa. They will collaborate with Andrew and Karen Suderman who are also MC Canada workers with ANiSA. Arnold brings a passion for creation care issues



along with extensive experience from his career as an educator in the sciences. Joanne has a strong interest in languages and global education, which has been nurtured through her work with

Ten Thousand Villages. They are members at Grace Mennonite Church in Brandon, Man. Joanne will assist with the ANiSA library and resource centre and Arnold will work with ANiSA and partners on various projects. Joanne and Arnold previously worked in Lesotho under Mennonite Central Committee. ☸



MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE PHOTO



A Staten Island homeowner works alongside a volunteer from Walden, NY as Mennonite Disaster Service helps clean up homes damaged by Hurricane Sandy. A wide diversity of MDS volunteers came to help deal with the dirty, musty mess, including Amish and Mennonites from Lancaster County, PA, and all varieties of Mennonites from Delaware and the Philadelphia area. By the end of November, 225 volunteers had completed 30 jobs in Staten Island. The 800-mile-wide storm caused damage in ten states with 125 fatalities.



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ARTBEAT

BOOK REVIEW

New source documents in Mennonite history

Union of Citizen of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine (1922-1927): Mennonite and Soviet Documents. John B. Toews and Paul Toews, eds. Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, CA, 2011, 515 pages.

REVIEWED BY HENRY NEUFELD

What happens when an ethno-religious group feels their way of life is threatened? For over a century, before the October 1917 revolution in Russia, Mennonites in Ukraine had considerable independence in managing their own villages, churches, schools, and communities. As this way of life was threatened by a new Soviet regime, they sought a strategy for survival. And they prayed.

They discussed key issues including the future of their children's education, the threat of military conscription, and the loss of farmland. They organized so they could speak to the new government with one voice, calling their new organization, "The All Russia Mennonite Congress."

When seeking government registration, Soviet officials informed them that the new regime separated church and state. Since "Mennonite" signified a religion and represented counter-revolutionary thinking, it was unacceptable. As a compromise the group was called the "Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine" (*Der Buerger Holländischer Herkunft*).

This volume traces the work of the Union in the early to mid-1920s. It is rich compilation of documents from Ukrainian and Russian archives, as well as North American sources. Remarkably, the Union charter provided Mennonites with more power than any comparable group in Russia and was allowed to function with no Communist member on its Board. The Soviets wanted to integrate the Union with the Soviet co-operative system, but the



Mennonite constantly resisted. The Union was seen, not inaccurately, as opposing Sovietization.

Initially I approached this book with some skepticism, but I was fascinated by the original documents with intriguing details about those years. Primary sources are fundamental to historians and these documents, enhanced by

introductory essays in each section by the editors, are rich in detail and new insights. For instance the Mennonite Congress meeting in 1918 has lengthy debates about socialism and Christianity. "B.H. Unruh explains that Christianity has no direct relationship with any economic system, either socialist or capitalist." (p. 29)

The Mennonite Congress was concerned about education; teachers should receive an adequate salary with periodic wage increases and leave for further studies. There is a debate about whether arithmetic should be taught in Russian or German language.

There are clear statements about non-resistance: "Mennonites see it as a holy duty to serve the fatherland, but without the shedding of blood." (p.36)

B. B. Janz, the leader of the group, promotes non-resistance at a Congress meeting and is questioned: "What of the brothers who hold a different conviction?" (p.101) Janz demands that the group affirm non-resistance, or he will resign. Unanimously the group affirmed the principle and Janz remained as their leader, a crucial point in Ukrainian Mennonite history.

Feeding starving Mennonites and

emigration became major issues. Janz saw "...the sallow pale faces, the farm boys running after a cat or a dog for a meal..." (p.115) At one meal horse cutlets were served. Food reserves were seized or consumed, including seed grains.

Emigration was seen as an option because of starvation, limits on school instruction, land restrictions, military service, and the undermining of faith. Janz was persistent in seeking visas from officials in Moscow.

The barriers Janz faced were enormous: finding a country that would accept Mennonites; getting Soviet permission to leave; and the complex logistics of moving thousands of people. Janz's pleas to North American Mennonites reflect his desperation when faced with pressure for action from the Mennonite colonies.

Janz's efforts to get aid from North America and Europe intensified. In 1925 he wrote his American brothers: "Give these destitute people a new life." (p. 492) And in a prophetic comment: "The days will come when the consequences of your action will appear much more important than now." (p.492)

For five years Janz was, in effect, the Mennonite director of emigration. In constant demand from Mennonites seeking his advice, negotiating with authorities in Moscow, and extensive travel that kept him away from home.

As the Union nears its state-enforced end, Janz speculates about his future. "[E]verything seems dark as night. What pathway shall I walk? How shall I feed my family? What work will I have in the future?" (p.504)

This remarkable collection of original source material is a major contribution to the study of one of the darkest periods of Mennonite history. The Mennonites of that era faced bandits, a new and hostile government, loss of farmland, famine, a demanding 5-year plan, and a threat to an insular way of life. The documents describe, from various perspectives, the plight and the increasingly limited options available.

This book is an impressive tribute to B.B. Janz, a man of faith vision, and persistent diplomacy and his determined efforts to save his people. ❧

/// Briefly noted

Book and DVD tell story of aid worker killed in Afghanistan

Two years ago, the world was shocked when 10 aid workers were murdered as they returned home from an eye care clinic in northern Afghanistan. Jonathan Larson, a close friend of one of the ten, documents the far-reaching legacy of Dan Terry in a new book, *Making Friends among the Taliban*. Terry was an inspiring character who interacted with and cared for the Afghan people for almost 40 years. He had a deep love for Afghanistan and its people and was known for saying, "In the end, we're all knotted into the same carpet." In addition to the book, a documentary that explores Terry's life, work, and tragic death, titled *Weaving Life*, aired on ABC-TV stations this fall. The documentary was produced by Eastern Mennonite University in partnership with MennoMedia. Eastern Mennonite University film students, intrigued by Dan Terry's commitment and humility, embarked on their own journey to understand the story. Through interviews, Terry's photography, and their own artwork and video journals, the students discover the startling power of sustained commitment and what Terry called "fierce" love.

—KAREN CAMPBELL, MENNOMEDIA



/// Briefly noted

Toronto composer Stephanie Martin exports new music

New works by Toronto composer and York University associate professor Stephanie Martin were performed in Canada and the UK in December, spanning a range of styles and settings. "Winter Nights" welcomes the chilly season in a four-movement cantata featuring winter-themed poems, set for choir, tenor soloist and orchestra. "The Portinari Nativity" is an a cappella work newly commissioned by Ex Cathedra Choir of the UK with text by the composer's sister Cori Martin. "The Legend of the Bird" will be sung by the choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria B.C. on Dec. 23. The piece is scored for adult and children's choirs and tells the legend of a small stone sculpture of a bird on one of the cathedral's pillars. These performances of new works cap a busy fall for Ms. Martin in which three new compositions were premiered as part of the Barrie Colours of Music Festival, at which she was Composer in Residence.

/// Briefly noted

'Fierce Goodbye' airs again on ABC-TV

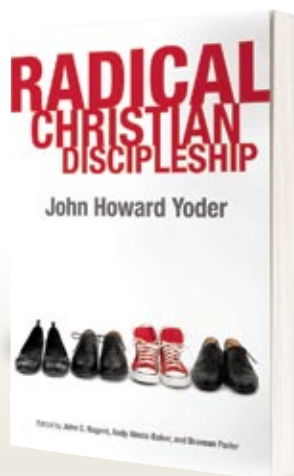
Fierce Goodbye: Living in the Shadow of Suicide, produced by the predecessor agency of MennoMedia in 2004 will be rebroadcast on ABC-TV from Nov. 18, 2012 to Jan. 13, 2013. The award-winning special, hosted by folk singer Judy Collins, shares the stories of five families along with mental health experts and theologians from various faith perspectives discussing changing views on suicide. Since 2004, over 3,700 copies of the DVD/Video have been sold. Suicide devastates family members for many years, and family survivors are at greater risk of suicide themselves. More information and resources are available at www.fiercegoodbye.com, or by calling MennoMedia at 1-800-631-6535 (Canada).

—MennoMedia

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Herald Press launches more titles as ebooks

MennoMedia

MennoMedia is converting key theological Herald Press books and Bible commentaries into digital formats to reach a wider audience with Anabaptist themes. The Schowalter Foundation of Newton, Kansas, has given a grant to help in that process. In addition, Herald Press is launching all new and forthcoming titles as ebooks.

In 2009, Ruth Stoltzfus Jost, of Harrisonburg, first approached Herald Press about getting into ebooks. With only one arm almost her whole life, she finds them easier to read. She is only one of millions now making the choice to access books on a variety of ereaders.

Stephen King is credited with truly launching the ebook phenomenon with a publicity stunt to offer his novella *Riding the Bullet* only electronically in March of 2000. By December 2011, 17 percent of adults had read an ebook in the previous year; by February 2012, the share increased to 21 percent, according to Pew Internet and American Life Research. Ebooks are generally much less expensive, and save trees and space.

"We want to make our books available digitally as a way to reach a wider audience," noted Executive Director Russ Eanes. The books chosen for the grant project include the Believers Church Commentary series, books by John Howard Yoder, Anabaptist and Mennonite faith and worship books, Classics of the Radical Reformation series, Polyglossia series featuring younger scholars, and the Christians Meeting Muslims series on interfaith dialogue.

Ebooks formats such as Kindle, Mobi, and ePub can be downloaded directly to Kindle, Nook, iPad and other compatible readers and tablets. ☘

Westgate students explore religious practices

AARON EPP

Special to Young Voices

PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMES FRIESEN



Westgate Mennonite Collegiate student Rachel Litz poses in a hijab with her friend, Adrianna Friesen. Each year, students in the school's Grade 10 Christian Studies class reflect upon a foreign religious practice for one school week.

PHOTO BY AARON EPP



James Friesen

Praying 25 times over the course of five days will change the way you look at God, yourself and others. Just ask Maddy Loewen.

This past June, the student at Winnipeg's Westgate Mennonite Collegiate took up the Muslim practice of praying five times daily as part of a project in her Grade 10 Christian Studies class focusing on world religions. The assignment was to reflect upon a foreign religious practice for one school week.

"On the last day, I realized that I have never prayed 25 times over a course of just five days," Loewen wrote in the reflection paper she submitted at the end of the project. "It was a pretty great experience. I felt a lot closer to God than I normally do. It made me think a lot more about others and myself. It made me become creative with my praying so I didn't get bored and wander away with thought."

Another student, Allison Janzen, fasted during the daylight hours to get a sense of what it is like for Muslim people to observe Ramadan, a month of fasting. Janzen recalls relying on prayer to help get her through times when she felt especially hungry.

"During my mini Ramadan, I got a glimpse into what it's like to be Muslim," Janzen wrote in her reflection paper. "Even though I did drink water during my fast, I had never tried fasting before, so it was something that I had to introduce myself to. During the month of Ramadan, for Muslims, they read larger portions of the Quran each day, to really make sure that the only thing that they take in during the day is the Holy scripture. I read parts of the Bible on some days, to put my focus

towards God."

Janzen added that what really amazes her is how Muslims do Ramadan.

"They don't show it off, and they don't go around telling people that they're hungry all day," she wrote in her paper. "They just do it, and it's kind of like a private thing, that doesn't have to be common knowledge."

James Friesen, who teaches the Grade 10 Christian Studies class at Westgate, says that students can choose from a variety of different practices from different faith traditions to complete the assignment. Some choose to eat in strict accordance with Kosher laws, and some join a service in a Synagogue, Mosque or Temple.

Others do creative assignments like creating and destroying a mandala—a geometric figure that represents the universe. Buddhist monks spend days creating mandalas out of sand and then destroy them after completing them to symbolize impermanence. Some female students wear a hijab for a week.

Insights like Loewen's and Janzen's are what make the project worth doing, Friesen says.

"The point is to just get a glimpse of why people have been doing [these practices] for so long," he says, adding that the project is also about recognizing differences between the Christian faith and other faiths, which hopefully leads to respectful dialogue.

"It would scare me if this [project] turned into [students] finding out we're all just the same," Friesen says. "We have these differences, let's explore them. That starts communication and conversation."

Friesen has been assigning the project for roughly the past seven years. He says the idea came from two students who came up with the idea of wearing hijabs for one week as a bonus assignment.

"I find the best ideas come from students wanting to do something a little extra—then you formalize and destroy it," Friesen says jokingly.

Since then, the project has become a key part of the Christian Studies class. Each year, students add their own ideas into the mix.

"I'm really excited about this," Friesen says. "It keeps getting better."

And for many students, it is an experience they do not soon forget. Loewen, the

student who prayed five times a day for one week, gained a lot of respect for Islam as a result of the assignment.

"Muslims build their whole day around praying to God," she wrote in her final report. "I felt a strong connection just after five days, so I can't imagine how they must feel if they have been doing it their whole lives!"

"I went into this project thinking that it wasn't going to be hard, and it wasn't. But what I found so interesting was how much I learnt about myself, others and the world."

To read three reflection papers by Westgate students, visit www.tinyurl.com/WestgateReflections. ☘

"It would scare me if this [project] turned into [students] finding out we're all just the same. We have these differences, let's explore them. That starts communication and conversation."—James Friesen

Challenging the Icon of Mary

Imagining the mother of Christ as a child, grandmother, and friend

BY BRANDI J. THORPE

Special to Young Voices

When I think of Mary, the chosen mother of Christ, I think of one iconic image. I think of the Catholic version of the eternal virgin on a pedestal. This doesn't seem right, and I am forced to try and redefine a narrative that has been typecast for centuries.

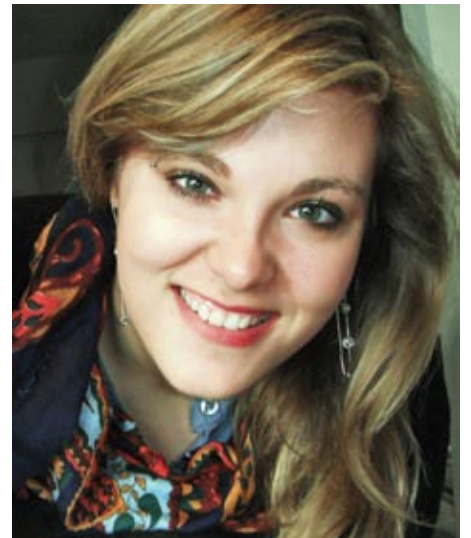
I have never been able to understand the story of Mary in its original image. It has always been delivered as a preset image, a singular perspective story. Since my first memories in youth, Mary has been a white woman in her 20s. She was unapproachable in her iconic virgin mother status. What I believe we have forgotten is that this poorly constructed icon is not even the beginning of her story, nor is it the end of it. In understanding that Mary outlived Jesus I realized that there was more to her story; I needed to challenge the narrative I had been handed. I just needed to embrace imagination and wonder.

Never in my youth did I imagine Mary as a fourteen-year-old Jewish girl in danger of being cast out and stoned by her family for being pregnant. Never did I picture this young mother fleeing to Egypt as a

refugee with a baby nursing at her breast, depending on her for warmth and safety.

I wonder if Mary had nightmares with so many possible deaths rallying in the shadows. Culturally speaking, her father could have killed her, or cast her to the streets, by default pushing her into slavery, prostitution or starvation. Joseph could have had her stoned for being pregnant before they were married. Herod was after the life of her child, and would not have thought twice about killing her as well. Mary lived under divine protection, and was pursued by human persecution.

I wonder at what kind of grandmother she became. Surely when Mary was around 50, and Jesus was 33 on the cross about to die, Mary was both mother and grandmother as she mourned and celebrated the sacrifice of her firstborn. I wonder how she taught her grandchildren. "Jacob, son of James" did she say, "your eldest uncle's name was Jesus, he came to save our people, and all peoples. Read and study his teachings, do as he instructed!" Did she say, "Rachel and Hadessah! You love the lepers just as your mother's brother, the



Thorpe

Saviour, did!”

I wonder at the stories Doctor Luke tells in the gospels. Many of them seem so intimately insightful, as though Mary invited him in for tea while the Spirit prompted her to speak.

I see Mary becoming old friends with Luke, if not before he arrived at her home to visit, certainly after. Her eyes are dark with age and joy, with wrinkles and laugh lines in her dark skin. Her curly hair is streaked with grey as she welcomes him with a hug. I see orphans, widows and the outcast in her home. Luke is moved by her insights, her mother warrior strength, her holy quietness and depth of courage. He was moved by the way Mary profoundly pondered things like treasure in her heart, to the point where he found it important to note in the scriptures.

I see her teaching a new spiritual heritage to those around her, giving birth to a new standard of storytelling. Mary is not an icon any more, she is my friend now. I can see myself at her table, with her as she teaches the children Jesus loved. What

is taught now is something different than what was taught before; it is a heritage of hope. The meek Mary I was told about, the one who pondered things with a shy un-touchable white face, is now a vibrant and bold lady who is my friend.

I never knew this Mary in my youth, but my heart knows her now, and she is more than an icon. In her brown face I look for my reflection, hoping that I, too, will be able to embrace my life's call with grace and courage as she did. She defied expectation as a virgin mother, and surely as a grandmother as well. Her son was a gift to her, and he became a man of the people. Jesus was tangible, loving and suffering with people. I can only image that his mother was as well, and love her more for it. ❧

Brandi Thorpe, a blogger for Young Voices, resides for a season in Kitchener, Ont. Searching for the stories that often go unseen, she imagines more for the church. Currently she researches church traumas and the epidemic of silence.



Mennonites learn about First Nations worldview

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RACHEL BERGEN

Young Voices Co-Editor
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELIZABETH SATORY



Brander McDonald teaches about the medicine wheel.

In preparation for next September's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Christians in B.C. gathered to learn about the First Nations worldview. Brander McDonald, Mennonite Church B.C.'s Indigenous Relations Coordinator, led an all-day seminar on Nov. 24 with more than 50 participants in order to educate them as a part of a two-session preparation plan and the start of a long-term commitment to reconciliation.

Participants found that the seminar could help them in their everyday interactions and understanding of Canadian First Nations peoples as a supremely relational people group.

Sophie Tiessen-Eigbake, the provincial service program coordinator for

Mennonite Central Committee B.C. attended the seminar, along with four International Visitor Exchange Program people and three service workers from Germany in order to help facilitate "opening and awareness building," she said.

Martin Harder from Bielefeld, Germany is a service worker at *Communitas Supportive Care Services* in Abbotsford and attended because of his interest in other cultures.

"You grow up in your own culture," he said, "This helps you rethink your own values."

Throughout the day, McDonald, who is Cree from Manitoba, explained the various facets of the Canadian First Nations peoples in a broad sense, recognizing that

bands are different and they have unique traits from reserve to reserve.

This was illustrated through a cultural questionnaire where participants were asked to choose what statement was closest to their own worldview and then guess what they thought would be closest to a Native worldview.

McDonald then explained how these would play out in everyday life and participants followed up with questions.

“These are value systems that seem so opposed to each other; however we can see that there are commonalities,” McDonald said.

While many Canadians have an individualistic worldview, First Nations people have a collective worldview.

According to Darryl Klassen of the Aboriginal Neighbours Program for MCC B.C., their community-focused worldview “is a value that’s brought to everything else. It’s in their DNA.”

“Everything is done with the view of serving everyone. We are all one in the family of God,” McDonald said.

The First Nations relational worldview even impacts the way they tell stories or speak publicly. What may seem like inconsistencies to non-Native people who believe things are black and white, for Native people, it is an attempt to be inclusive of all beliefs.

Something that helped the participants understand one of the issues that plague some Aboriginal people is their understanding of time and opportunities. They came to understand that issues like addiction, which is a huge issue in Vancouver’s Downtown East Side and on some reserves, First Nations peoples believe in grace and understanding, that the process

of healing is as important as being clean and sober and that people don’t just have one opportunity to heal.

According to McDonald, the Aboriginal understanding of time is not commodified or linear like it is for non-Natives, it is cyclical. In this sense, opportunities are likely to come around often, including opportunities for healing.

Time, relationships, and healing all go hand-in-hand for First Nations people, McDonald said. When it comes to the death or the pain of a loved one, “getting over it” isn’t what the mourning period is about. It is more about honouring the memory of that person by remembering them for the rest of one’s life.

The seminar also involved talking about the sacredness of the land, respect for elders, a view of relational justice, body language and differences in communication. All of this was important in order for participants to break down their pre-conceived notions about First Nations, to understand how to build relationships and bridges, and to take the tenets held by Indigenous peoples to heart in order to help them find healing for their own faith walk.

According to McDonald, Mennonite Church B.C. is called to the ministry of reconciliation. This is why they’re working to educate Mennonites in B.C. about the First Nations worldview so that they can participate in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

“We’re going to be here for the rest of the life of MC B.C.,” he said.

The second part of the education plan, which is set to take place in March, involves a primer on the Indian Residential School experience and the purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. ✎



Participants learned about the worldview of First Nations on Nov 24.

Calendar

British Columbia

Feb. 8,9: MCC winter banquet at Sardis Community Church, Chilliwack (8) and Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond (9). Contact MCC B.C. at 604-850-6639 or visit bc.mcc.org/whatwedo/events.

Feb. 8-10: Young adult retreat at Camp Squeah.

Feb. 15,16: MCC winter banquet at Bakerview M.B. Church, Abbotsford (15) and South Langley M.B. Church, Langley (16). Contact MCC B.C. at 604-850-6639 or visit bc.mcc.org/whatwedo/events.

Feb. 23: MCBC annual meeting and LEAD conference.

Apr. 12-14: Youth Jr. Impact retreat at Camp Squeah.

May 4: MCBC Women's Inspirational Day at Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church.

Alberta

Jan. 18-20: Junior High Snow Camp at Camp Valaqua. Contact your church youth leaders for registration information.

Feb. 22-24: Senior High Snow Camp at Camp Valaqua. Contact your church youth leaders for registration information.

March 22-23: Mennonite Church Alberta AGM at Menno Simons School. Guest speaker: Cheryl Pauls, CMU President.

Saskatchewan

Jan. 4-5: RJC Alumni Tournament of Memories.

Jan. 18: RJC Friday Night Live Youth Event.

Jan. 25-27: SMYO Sr. Youth Retreat at Shekinah Retreat Centre.

Feb. 3: Choir Concert at Third Avenue United Church, Saskatoon, featuring RJC Chorale, CMU Male Choir, Sonrisa and Buncha Guys.

Feb. 22-23: MC Sask Annual delegate sessions at Rosthern Junior College.

March 17: RJC Guys & Pies fundraising event.

May 11: RJC Open Campus Day.

May 11: RJC Spring Choir Concert, 7 p.m.

May 25: RJC Golf Tournament at Valley Regional Park.

June 21-22: RJC year-end musical performances.

Manitoba

Jan. 15: Grade 6 day at Westgate Collegiate.

Jan. 30-31: Westgate Collegiate junior high three one-act plays at the Franco-Manitoban Centre.

Feb. 1: CMU Campus visit day.

Feb. 6: Open House at Westgate Collegiate, 7 p.m.

Feb. 7-9: Worship + Imagination at CMU.

Feb. 21: CMU Open House for perspective students.

Feb. 28-March 1: revised dates, MCI Musical, "Fiddler on the Roof" at Buhler Hall, Gretna.

March 3: CMU Choral Connections.

March 15: CMU Campus visit day.

April 4: CMU spring banquet and fundraiser.

April 8: Jazz@CMU.

April 18-20: Westgate Collegiate senior high musical.

April 26: Cottonwood Youth Chorus spring concert.

April 27: CMU Spring concert featuring choirs and ensembles.

May 7: Westgate Collegiate fundraiser banquet at the Marlborough Hotel, 6 p.m.

May 29: Westgate Collegiate spring concert (gr. 7, 8, 9) at Bethel Mennonite Church, 7 p.m.

May 30: Westgate Collegiate spring concert (gr. 10, 11, 12) at Bethel Mennonite Church, 7 p.m.

June 9: MCI Saengerfest, worship 10:30 a.m., concert, 2 p.m.

June 11: CMU President's Golf Classic.

June 17-28: Canadian School of Peacebuilding at CMU.

July 29-Aug. 2: MC Canada Youth Assembly at Camp Assiniboia, Man.

Aug. 27: Westgate Collegiate annual golf tournament at Bridges Golf Club

Ontario

Dec. 31: New Year's celebration at Milverton Mennonite Fellowship with performances by Rescue Junction and Kingsway Quartet. Dessert extravaganza at intermission. Call 519-595-8762 for information.

Jan. 15: Rockway Mennonite Collegiate grade 9 information night, 6:30 p.m.

Feb. 9: Valentine banquet fundraiser

for Mennonite and Brethren Marriage Encounter with speaker Ruth Smith Meyer. For more information call 519-669-1005 or visit marriageencounterere.com.

March 23: Menno Singers concert, Bach and Zelenka at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Kitchener, 8 p.m. Ticket information at mennosingers.com.

May 11: Menno Singers concert,

Gospel with jazz combo at Floradale Mennonite Church, 8 p.m. Ticket information at mennosingers.com.

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.

Classifieds

Announcement

Parent Support Group: Announcing a bimonthly support group for Mennonite parents of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) persons in Southwestern Ontario. We provide confidential support, fellowship, resources and opportunities for dialogue in the Spirit of Christ. For more information please contact the following: rvfast@rogers.com, pmsnyderangel@rogers.com, or Roy and Mary Gascho, 519-742-1850.

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THE NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM produced by MennoMedia and BrethrenPress **IS ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS TO WRITE** for Preschool through Junior Youth age groups for 2014-15. All writers will attend an orientation April 22-25, in Milford, IN, USA. See Job Opportunities at www.gatherround.org. Application deadline Feb. 9, 2012.

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Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church invites applications for a half-time **PASTOR-FAITH FORMATION**.

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Applicants should be ordained or eligible to be ordained, with graduate work in an Anabaptist setting preferred.

Inquiries, resumes, and letters of interest may be directed to:

Henry Paetkau, Area Church Minister
Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
4489 King St. E.
Kitchener ON N2P 2G2
Telephone: 519-650-3806
Fax: 519-650-3947 / E-mail: hpaetkau@mcec.ca
Closing date for applications: January 30, 2013

ST. CLAIR O'CONNOR COMMUNITY INC. (SCOC) is a Not-for-Profit, Intergeneration Housing Project with Continuum of Care, developed under the sponsorship of two Mennonite Churches. SCOC is seeking applications for a **STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT MANAGER**. This dynamic individual will provide strategic leadership in the planning and implementation of the SCOC's Long Term Strategic Plan, including budgeting, financial planning, arranging funding, and management development.

Applicants considered will have a strong, commitment to the mission and vision of SCOC; understand the importance of developing strong relationships with community and funding partners. Ideally, the candidate will have a proven track record of involvement of a successful project that has undergone physical changes or redevelopment. Has an understanding of (MOHLTC, LHIN) funding opportunities, proven interpersonal skill in leadership, relationship building, communicating, and negotiation skills.

Closing date for application is February 15, 2013.
Job Description available on request

Please send resume to:
Susan Gallant, Executive Director
St. Clair O'Connor Community Inc.
2701 St. Clair Ave. East
Toronto, Ont.
M4B 3M3
Fax: 416 751-7315
s.gallant@scoc.ca

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAMP ELIM www.campelim.ca

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- Manage rentals including organizing catering if necessary
- Develop and maintain Camp Elim's exposure on the internet
- Coordinate the ground maintenance and facility upkeep

Skills Needed:

- Personal qualities of integrity, credibility and commitment
- Superior relationship management and communication skills
- Budget management skills
- The ability to work independently

Please forward your cover letter and resume to elim@sasktel.net before January 1, 2013, Attn: Doug Dueck, Chairperson, Camp Elim.

First Mennonite Church, Burns Lake, a small body of believers in northern B.C., is looking for a **PART-TIME OR FULL-TIME SERVANT LEADER PASTOR**. We desire to find a person who shares our vision and will work with us to fulfill it. Our ideal candidate will have an exceptional ability to inspire discipleship, outreach, and a desire to embrace our community, while holding firm to sound biblical doctrine. Our candidate will agree with the Confession of Faith in the Mennonite Perspective. Please send your resume or MLI to FMC c/o Wilf Dueck wedueck@telus.net or Ph 250-692-3455.



Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba is inviting applications for a **FULL TIME LEAD PASTOR** to commence in summer 2013.

We are seeking a person with a strong Anabaptist theology as well as ability to engage the congregation through worship and preaching. This person will have strong administrative skills and able to work with & lead a multi-member pastoral team. Our desire is that the successful candidate, along with the pastoral team, can enable and nurture the gifts of the congregation in order to enhance the overall mission of the church. Pastoral experience, along with a Masters of Divinity or equivalent is preferred. We are asking for expressions of interest by Jan 31, 2013.

Please send resumes to fdueck@mymts.net or contact Ken Fast Dueck, Search Committee chair @ 204-775-0219 for further information. For additional information about Bethel Mennonite Church go to: <http://bethelmennonite.ca>.



Last Christmas Eve, Todd Hanson encountered road blocks on his way to church in Chengdu.

Roadblocks for Christmas

Mennonite Church Canada
CHENGDU, CHINA

On his way to church last Christmas Eve, Todd Hanson found the police had erected roadblocks to facilitate crowd control. Hanson lives in Chengdu, China, where he and his wife Jeanette are Mennonite Church Canada workers, teaching and providing Anabaptist resources to Chinese students and church leaders.

He arrived an hour-and-a-half before the service began

PHOTOS BY TODD HANSON.



On his way to church Christmas Eve, Todd Hanson passed street vendors in Chengdu selling suit-case sized fruitcake.

and discovered the pews were already close to full, even though four more services were planned for the weekend. As he waited, cameras came out. Some people posed on the balcony with the sanctuary as their backdrop, while more adventurous subjects posed next to the pulpit. Stacks of “public use” Bibles and hymnals next to the entry, placed there for people who did not have or bring their own, were almost completely depleted. At seven o’clock, recorded church bells chimed out until the choir began to sing.

“I was surprised when the choir director asked us all to stand without telling us what we were going to sing, but for their finale, the choir performed the *Hallelujah Chorus*.”

Though the benediction followed, the service was far from over. Another choir, more ensembles, and even a bit of dancing, preceded the Nativity play.

“The angels were dressed in blue, but the wise men outclassed them with their silk robes—no terry cloth for these men of the Orient!” Hanson says. Song from the youth choir concluded the service.

In contrast to Hanson’s experience in Chengdu, in Sichuan Province last year Christians were dispersed by police while holding an “unofficial” open-air Christmas service, according to a report in *Christian Post*. The group’s musical instruments and sound system were confiscated. ☿