

CANADIAN MENNONITE

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EDITORIAL

Nature's fury and blessing

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

Bone-chilling blizzards, record-breaking deep freezes, ferocious winds, devastating floods, ice storms downing trees and power lines, leaving hundreds of thousands without heat and light.

Nothing gets our attention like the fury unleashed by nature across this country over the last six months. But we might as well get used to it. Scientists predict that climate trends will only get stranger in the future. It is the ultimate irony in our modern age, that with all the advanced technology and scientific knowledge supposed to give us safety and comfort, all we can do is wait and watch while the elements of nature interrupt our lives for a period of time.

If it weren't so disruptive, it would be amusing as our meteorologists dramatically show us their clever weather maps, complete with wind currents, jet streams and, yes, now the "polar vortex," so that we can anticipate, if not completely prepare for, the worst. And we trust that our sometimes crumbling infrastructure will deliver what we need despite the fury of the onslaught.

But our hopes crumble as roads and schools are closed, and our workplaces are shuttered for lack of heat.

We had faith in a system that often fails us, despite its claims of preparedness, and we wonder what our taxes are doing for us.



That's, of course, in our worst moments.

But wait, there is a silver lining for us Christians. "Giving thanks in all circumstances" can bring us blessings in disguise. You have a snow blower and your neighbour doesn't. This is the opportunity to be the Good Samaritan to those struggling with shovels and to carry on a conversation comprised of much more than "hi." A certain community bonding occurs.

You are forced to spend time with your family, instead of being the work-ethic-driven person who seldom finds time to gather round and listen to your children's stories or your spouse's aspirations. Your forced "sabbath" opens up a world you might have missed. You slow down and play games, listen to good music—experiencing not only the warmth of hearth but of home.

The nasty weather outside raises your awareness of the homeless in your community, forcing you to think about the "least of these" wandering the streets these cold nights seeking warmth and a bed. You think about your church/community's involvement in programs like Out of the Cold, and renew your commitment to look at this social ill with new eyes, taking a longer-term view of perhaps helping these persons find a job or seek treatment for mental health issues.

You read in the local newspaper that

the Out of the Cold program, growing in the Kitchener-Waterloo, Ont., area from one site to 11 in 15 years and seeing its numbers soar by 40 percent, had one of its sites forced to close its doors due to the high cost of meeting building code requirements for a shelter: things like a sprinkler system, more exits and fire-proof materials.

You know your own church, along with many others in an ecumenical effort, is part of the program, but you agonize with CEO Harry Whyte when he says, "The solution is not another church agreeing to shelter people one night a week, but governments and the community taking homelessness seriously."

You wonder if you couldn't do more to rally local politicians and other charities to put their collective shoulders to the wheel and save this site.

New appreciation grows for Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) and 250 dedicated volunteers who came to High River, Alta., last summer to clean up after a flood devastated the city of 13,000. And with the frequency of disasters occurring, you resonate with MDS transitioning "from emergency-response mode to long-term recovery, seeking individuals and groups to volunteer for a week at a time as rebuilding begins."

You wonder if this isn't a new calling to "bring the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven." This "calling" intensifies as you read Jim Wallis's new book, *On God's Side*, and squirm with his declaration that, "yes, the kingdom has come, and, yes, it has yet to be fulfilled in history. It is, therefore, 'already' and 'not yet,' meant to be lived now by those who follow Jesus as a sign and community and catalyst for the new order."

Yes, nature's fury has brought more than disruption, also blessing and new instruction.

ABOUT THE COVER:

A week after torrential rains caused floodwaters to reach about four metres, Palestinians use fishing boats to assist residents in retrieving belongings from homes along flooded streets in the Al Nafaq section of Gaza City on Dec. 18, 2013. See story on page 19.

PHOTO: RYAN RODRICK BEILER, MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

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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 •

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at canadianmennonite.org

You can read columnist Troy Watson's series on spiritual attunement online. Part 1 is at www.canadianmennonite.org/articles/attunement, with links there to the other parts.

Web-exclusive stories include: 'Congregations turn to compost for lessons on life, death and the environment', 'Ontario Mennonite community loses influential genealogist', and 'Micah Mission offers restorative justice to ex-offenders.'

Bread, acceptance and covenant

Understanding the Lord's meals and the Lord's Supper in relation to baptism and communion

BY JOHN D. REMPEL

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

Table fellowship is seen by some as a primal expression of hospitality, with the offer of food an opening of hand and heart to another. Table fellowship is seen by others as a primal expression of covenant, with the offer of food sealing an alliance of common purpose.

A debate is currently raging in Protestant denominations and post-Protestant movements about the nature of communion. We often talk about “open” or “inclusive” and “closed” or “bounded” communion. The former can refer to inviting unbaptized Christians or, more broadly, all who desire to come. The latter can mean only those who belong to the covenant of a specific congregation or, more broadly, to all who have been baptized as believers or confirmed upon their baptism as infants.

I think the term “inclusive” has too many meanings to be helpful. “Openness to outsiders” is a better description of what Jesus demonstrates in the gospels. His invitation is an act of hospitality to guests. Yet hospitality is not the same thing as belonging; the danger of setting baptism as the marker of belonging is that not all the baptized might be living in the Spirit; conversely, people who are not baptized might be doing so.

Then there is the question of whether Jesus’ message is one of abundance or of scarcity. The greatest of human fears underlying all others is that there will not be enough love to go around: If I, my family, my church or my country give away too much love, we shall not have enough for ourselves. This surpassing fear needs to be transformed if we are to turn from being hoarders of love and all the blessings of life, to being givers.

The fear of scarcity has often made the church into a defensive and selfish community bent on guarding what it has. Those, like myself, who make the case that baptism initiates one into the covenant that is renewed in the eucharist, have sometimes been motivated by a fear of scarcity. The heart of the gospel and of the New Testament meal narratives is the confidence that bread that is shared never runs out. We see this in Jesus’ astonishing act of

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The heart of the gospel and of the New Testament meal narratives is the confidence that bread that is shared never runs out.

PHOTO ©ISTOCK.COM/SUDANMAS



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making five loaves and two fishes into a feast for five thousand. The motivation for covenantal communion cannot be hoarding; instead, it must be vulnerability and generosity.

Tables of Jesus in the gospels

In Luke 15:1-3, Jesus is accused of preferring outsiders over insiders as his table companions. Those to whose social circle Jesus rightly belongs scorn him for welcoming sinners and eating with them. Like most of us, they insist that dinner parties are occasions for insiders, for people like themselves who carefully invite one another over in order to keep abundance within safe confines. There's an echo in this story of the laws of neighbourliness found in Deuteronomy 24, where special mention is made of aliens, people without a home or status who need food and company but who can't return the favour.

It is significant that all four gospels include an account of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Mark 6:34 tells us that Jesus comes ashore and stands face to face with a throng of people. He is moved with compassion towards people who are like sheep without a shepherd. He teaches them many things. Late in the day, his disciples urge him to send the crowd away before dark so that they can scrounge for food. The disciples are baffled when Jesus insists that they feed the multitude! As they stand helpless, Jesus takes the five loaves and two fishes someone has brought, looks up to heaven, blesses and breaks the food, then gives it to his disciples for the crowd. "All ate and were filled," Mark 6:42 declares.

Most of us have only recently related the meals of Jesus' ministry to the church's mission. We are struck by their unconditional welcome in contrast to the conditions that are set for the Last Supper. Some people want to substitute the meals of Jesus' ministry for the Last Supper as the model for communion. But if we go back through history to the early church, we see that it developed a range of bread rituals that carried on the Lord's meal ministry.

In the apostolic and early patristic eras,

the Lord's Supper was often celebrated within a larger meal, as had been the case with the Passover. Between the second and fourth centuries this "agape" was separated from the eucharist, but was still tied to Jesus' table ministry. Saying grace over a meal is a remnant of the agape. When we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest . . .," we invoke his presence at our sharing of food. Later, another bread ritual echoing the agape was practised in monasteries as an act of hospitality for guests. In the East, bread as a sign of Jesus' presence was given to worshippers at the end of the Sunday Orthodox liturgy. After the Reformation, the Moravians and Church of the Brethren practised the love feast.

Jesus' table fellowship at the Last Supper and in the post-Easter accounts is with people who had already entered the covenant, however frayed their loyalty.

Since the Middle Ages, symbolic breads have accompanied the celebration of the church year. The defining pastry for German Christianity is *stollen*, an Advent bread; for Italian Christianity, *panatone*, a Christmas bread; and for Russian Christianity, *paska*, an Easter bread. Funeral meals have a spiritual, as well as literal, meaning: We break bread in solidarity with those who grieve and also eat with them in the hope of the resurrection. Wedding meals have a similar symbolic density: We break bread with those who have made the covenant of love and our festivity anticipates the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The table of Jesus at the Last Supper and after his resurrection

Symbolically, the densest meal recorded in the New Testament is the Last Supper. There is a continuing dispute over whether or not it was a Passover feast. In any case, there is a Passover spirit to the story. It is hard to miss the implication that Jesus himself is the unblemished Lamb. Here, the implicitly religious gestures and words of Jesus' earlier table fellowship become explicit. The covenant established in Egypt is remade. This



PHOTO ©ISTOCK.COM/SMALL_FROG

sacred meal seals a mutual pact between the master and his disciples. By means of this venerable custom of a covenantal bread and cup, Jesus gives himself to his companions. This feast is the culmination of his life.

At this point, we encounter a surprising dimension to Jesus' table fellowship with significance for the church's practice. There is a unique dimension to the Last Supper in comparison to Jesus' other shared meals that consists of two aspects:

- **THIS RITUAL** is recognizably religious, even in the re-interpretation of its gestures, that is, understanding Jesus as the Passover Lamb.
- **THE COMPANY** is made up of people whom Jesus is entrusting with his mission.

While all twelve apostles abandon Jesus after his arrest, this meal is intended for those with whom he has entered into a covenant. Ultimately, all but Judas return to keep the pledge they have made. It is this covenantal aspect of the Last Supper that led the early church to set baptism and holiness of life as conditions for participation in communion. This practice is

already evident in the *Didache*, a church order dated well within the first century A.D.

Two last historic meal references from the early church expand further on what the gospel means by covenantal table fellowship. At the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem, three thousand people have welcomed the message of the apostles, been baptized and added to the household of faith. They devote themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer (Acts 2:29-42). The meal's logic of intimate fellowship is intensified with its immediate economic consequences. For the Jerusalem church, the sharing of bread was a rehearsal for the sharing of possessions.

A case of mistaken identity?

Are people today reacting to the principle of bounded communion or to its misuse? Self-satisfaction and self-righteousness quickly create insiders and outsiders. The past generation of Christians has worked hard to become humbler about our faithfulness, wiser about our judgments, and less reliant on class- and denomination-based stereotypes of goodness.

The push to make communion the unconditional ritual of acceptance forgets that the gospel already has a sacrament of initiation and inclusion: Baptism.

This has led to a tendency to "err" on the side of inclusion. God's grace is like that; so should ours be. But is this truth most profoundly expressed by inviting everyone to the Lord's Table? On the one hand, "*while we were enemies we were reconciled to God*" (Romans 5:10). On the other, "*Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*" (Romans 2:4). Putting all the weight on inclusion and none on confession runs the danger of pushing evangelism to the side. There comes a time for declaring one's loyalty. This happens through changes of belief and behaviour. Each of us grows into loyalty to Christ in different ways, some dramatic, others so quietly as

to be hardly noticed.

Baptism condenses and equalizes these different paths. It enacts our change in loyalty by means of the universal sign of initiation. Acting in God's name, the church confirms the inward and invisible working of grace with an outward and visible sign. Confusion in the meaning of the two foundational symbols is at work here. The push to make communion the unconditional ritual of acceptance forgets that the gospel already has a sacrament of initiation and inclusion: Baptism.

If the New Testament intends baptism to be the sacrament of initiation and inclusion, have we misused it and set conditions for it that misrepresent the good news? The faith that readies us to be brought into the body of Christ is not mastery of doctrine and maturity of discipleship. In the simplest terms, the faith baptism calls for is "forsaking all others" for Christ and his body. This suggests that most faith formation should follow baptism. There we discover what entering the covenant entails: worship, prayer, Bible study, and concrete acts of charity and justice. All of these commitments are grounded in our repeated participation in Christ and his body in communion.

Baptism is the sign that God has claimed us and that we have said "yes" to his claim. It is initiation into an apprenticeship with Jesus and those who have answered yes to his call. It's not that we are better than others, but we love much because we have been forgiven much (Luke 7:36-49). Members of Christ's body have been baptized not because they're good, but because they know they're loved. In our encounter with Christ and our sisters and brothers in the breaking of bread, this love reclaims us and sets us on the path of vulnerability and generosity. Without counting the cost, we share the bread we receive at the Lord's Table with the world.

A paradox at work

What light do Jesus' meal encounters shed on the much-asked question, "Who is invited to the Lord's Table?"

First, a word to those who see the Lord's Supper as a sacred meal of renewal for the covenant made in baptism. The unguardedness of Jesus' meal encounters with outsiders is so emblematic of his person and message that it cannot but shape the great ritual of those who follow him. The meals in Jesus' ministry are a metaphor for the message of grace, but they are also the medium of that grace. They are a metaphor for Christ's offer and our acceptance, our dying and rising with him in conversion and baptism (Romans 7:4).

But they are also the medium of his offer: In the eucharist the Lord offers himself in bread and wine. To be true to the practice of Jesus, doesn't our breaking of bread need to be open to "intruders"? When we resist intruders, are we in the grip of the fear that there will not be enough love to go around?

Second, a word to those who see communion as the unconditional offer of acceptance to either unbaptized believers or to all who come without regard to their response. To them, I would say that encounter always makes a claim. Jesus was able to be lavishly accepting and passionately engaged in making relationships right. Jesus' table fellowship at the Last Supper and in the post-Easter accounts is with people who had already entered the covenant, however frayed their loyalty.

The early church saw the meals in Jesus' ministry as a metaphor for the invitation to outsiders, and the church was soon filled with them (Ephesians 2:11-22). But the breaking of bread itself was reserved for those who had responded to the claim Christ had made on their lives in baptism.

A paradox is at work here. On the one hand, Jesus' way of meeting people involved the overthrow of convention, and the disregard for merit, status or the ability to return the favour. On the other, his presence announced God's reign and called for commitment to it. It is only when I know that I am invited "just as I am" that the call of grace and cost of

By means of this venerable custom of a covenantal bread and cup, Jesus gives himself to his companions. This feast is the culmination of his life.

discipleship win me over. Offer and claim, openness and call condition each other.

This paradox is expressed in the two types of table fellowship that Jesus practised:

- **THERE IS** an open table where nothing other than a willingness to meet is asked for.
- **THERE IS** a covenantal meal where those who have entered a pact promise one another solidarity.

Is there a bridge between them? The bridge is that encounter always makes a claim: It wants to make relationships right. The decisive factor is not whether one is an insider or an outsider, but whether one is willing to be changed. Jesus' openness to be with those whom religious people shunned is remarkable. But out of this encounter came a decision for or against him. Mary Magdalene said yes, while the rich young ruler said no. The gospel offers us the gesture by which we enact Christ's initiative and our response: It is baptism.

There are those who would agree with the preceding paragraph up to the final sentence; that is, that those who come to the Lord's Table must have become Christ's disciples, but they need not be baptized. In that case, aren't they setting their own terms for coming to Christ? Aren't they coming to a covenantal meal they have not yet joined?

How can we do justice both to the openness with which Jesus encountered people and the claim that this encounter made on them? If we follow the dominant exegetical and dogmatic tradition of the church, the Last Supper is the defining source of the Lord's Supper and the basis for bounded communion.

But other dimensions of Jesus' table sharing—the agape meal, the love feast, the monastic and liturgical bread rituals—are no less part of the gospel, yet their place in Christian tradition has been

marginalized. How might we life-givingly reclaim these symbols of Jesus' self-giving?

Modern expressions of fellowship over food

Two such expressions of Jesus' tables of generosity and fellowship in the feeding of the multitudes might be the potluck meal after church and in shelters where homeless people gather. The place of such meals in the life of the church could be deepened by framing the table fellowship with references to Jesus' feeding of the crowds, by inviting people we often forget to join in, by giving children a prominent place, by reminding one another that having bread is always a gift to be shared.

If there is a higher level of intentionality, such as Christians gathering in small study groups, environmental projects or peace education, the language and gestures could be more explicit with an invoking of Jesus' presence and a place for intercessory prayer. Another example might be a meal for people exploring Christian faith, with an "unseen guest" at

hand waiting to be recognized.

A yet higher level of intentionality might be an agape meal for candidates for baptism with their mentors, spouses or best friends.

All of these meals would gain in focus with the provision of seasonal breads from cultures of the people present, like *panatone* at Christmas or *paska* at Easter.

These forms of table fellowship all point beyond themselves to Jesus the Bread of Life whom we receive in the shared bread and cup of the Holy Supper. At the same time, the Lord's Supper points beyond itself to all those who are hungry, for whom God's promise is that bread that is shared never runs out. ❧



*John D. Rempel, a historical theologian with a specialization in sacramental theology, is director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre of the Toronto School of Theology and the author of *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism* (Herald Press, 1993). He is a former professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Theological Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.*

** Read Palmer Becker's communion reflection with the online version of this feature at canadianmennonite.org*

❧ For discussion

1. Does your congregation view the Lord's Supper as an open table for all or as a more restricted covenantal meal? Has this view changed over time? Do you feel comfortable participating in communion at a church of another denomination?
2. John Rempel says that when we resist welcoming "intruders" to our breaking of bread, it is because "we are in the grip of fear that there will not be enough love to go around." Do you agree? What is the paradox he sees in Jesus' table fellowship?
3. How would you explain the meaning of communion to a child? Why does the church have this tradition? What would happen if your church dropped this practice? Are there other rites or symbols that could carry the same message?
4. How important are meals and sharing food in the life of the church? What role do potlucks play? Is sitting at a table important or is eating from plates held in our hands the same thing? In what situations are we apt to miss the spiritual significance of eating together?

—BY BARB DRAPER

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.

✉ Nelson Mandela: We all love a hero

POLITICIANS AND CELEBRITIES need saints to lean on.

And so it was this time around, that after Nelson Mandela died all the most important politicians and celebrities of the world lined up for interviews to say they had met him, had had coffee with him or had been at an important conference where he had spoken. They gave quotes of things Mandela had said. And much more. It was painful at times.

But where were they when Stephen Biko and Mandela were in jail? Where were they when Mother Teresa was starting out in Calcutta?

We should judge our prophetic voice on where we were when it counted. I for one am pleased to say that Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) was asking us to pray for the end of apartheid in the late 1960s, and as time went on told us to remember Biko and

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FROM OUR LEADERS

Addressing inner needs

DAVID MARTIN

Sometimes I find the relationship between church and business a little baffling. It seems that the business world is increasingly adopting Christian values and practices to run their organizations, including aspects of Christian spirituality. It appears that there is something about Christian practices that is good for business.

In his “Uncovering the blind spot of leadership” article, C. Otto Scharmer, senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, writes: “When I asked [William O’Brien, former CEO of Hanover Insurance] to sum up his most important learning experience in leading profound change, he responded, “The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener.”

Since when is business intruding into the realm of “inner being,” a favourite territory of the Apostle Paul? The truth is that there are some big-name business



consultants out there encouraging executives and senior employees to take a hard look at their inner life. It seems business is discovering that when employees are formed and shaped by spiritual values and practices, it can have a profound impact on the bottom line. When it comes to creating transformational change, people like Scharmer believe that it is only possible if leaders attend to their interior life and open themselves to a larger “presence.” Sounds suspiciously like the Apostle Paul’s emphasis on renewal of the inner self in Colossians 3.

So why is the church content to let others practise the very spirituality that it inherited? As it confronts a society that is becoming increasingly secular, the church seems to be flailing about trying to make itself relevant and, in the process, is often forgetting to practise the very things that can bring about the most profound change: attending to the inner life and listening for the presence of the Spirit at work within the world.

If pastors and church leaders want to be God’s agents of change in the church and have a transformational influence on society, then it is time we start paying attention to spiritual formation and the “interior condition of the intervener.” Attending to the quality of our spiritual life and allowing God to transform our inner beings is one of the most productive things leaders can do.

Transformation in a system will only take place when there is transformation in its leadership—deep, profound transformation that is only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit within the inner being of the leader.

What’s good for the leader is also good for the person in the pew. In our secular society, people within and beyond the church are begging for an experience of profound transformation that addresses their inner needs and helps them better participate in God’s agenda for transformation in their relationships, work and wider community.

Business and the church—it might sound like strange bedfellows—but maybe the church needs to start doing what’s good for business!

David Martin is executive minister of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

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Mandela. And long before Mother Teresa became famous, she and her sisters were working with MCC preparing emergency packages for flood and drought victims in Bihar.

Easy to love a hero. Harder to be prophetic.

JAKE BUHLER, SASKATOON

✉ A lament for the loss of a New Order Voice

I ADD MY thanks to Aiden Enns, who, as we learned from the editor's announcement in the Dec. 16, 2013, issue, is stepping down from his regular *Canadian Mennonite* column after eight years of poking the pompous and offering observations that are

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Fight or flight?

PHIL WAGLER

My city had a year of sorrow sadly stamped by the death of Julie Paskall on Dec. 29. It was Surrey's 25th murder of the year. The 53-year-old mom was randomly beaten to death in an arena parking lot where she had stopped to pick up her teenage son. While we can compartmentalize gang- or drug-related violence into the category of tragic but not unexpected, how are we to live in a world of senseless violence like this?

Two opposing thoughts ran through my head following her murder that are consistent with what psychologists refer to as "fight or flight." On the one hand, there is the desire to retreat into a more protected world in order to find safety for those you care about by any means possible. On the other hand, there is the desire to do something that will contribute to the healing of the city, to engage more deeply, or stand in the gap and fight for a different way. Which is the right thing to do?

That's not an easy question. As a follower of Jesus, I must employ discernment because it would seem there is a time for everything. Ecclesiastes reminds us of the reality of these life tensions: a time to cry and a time to laugh, a time to tear and a time to mend. Such wisdom normalizes our quandaries and teaches us to accept the conflicting seasons of life, but can't it



also lead to indifference and fatalism?

When we look at the life of Jesus, we find he too lived with this fight or flight tension. He seemed content to leave some places where opposition reigned, retreating to sunnier climes, and even taught his disciples to "shake off the dust" and not put up a fight where the odds are stacked against you. And then, conversely and gloriously, at the Cross he walked directly into the fray, submitted to the will of the Father and fought the good fight to the bitter end. Jesus seemed to read the seasons and know what was required of him in each.

Evil, too, seems to have its seasons. The Devil, beaten in his temptation of Christ, retreats for a more "opportune" time. This seems to indicate a perilous vulnerability to life that is a combination of the seen and the unseen, times when we have nothing to fear and times when we

When we look at the life of Jesus, we find he too lived with this fight or flight tension.

are seemingly stalked, at least spiritually. Evil seems to operate in the same fight or flight reality.

This becomes very practical in the cities, boroughs and sideroads we live in. How are we to discern when fight or flight is the right?

Human history is full of inspiring tales of both. We can applaud the courage of

both Bonhoeffer, who dug in and fought the Nazis in the Second World War, and the Mennonites, who retreated with the Nazis to escape the terror of the Soviets. Was one more righteous than the other?

In hindsight, we can claim the right to judge, but there was no hindsight in the midst of their moment of decision, just as there is no hindsight afforded us in the midst of ours.

So what are we to do? We must learn from history and weigh the options, and surely we must engage in the conversation of community. But as I ponder the season my own city is in, I am profoundly aware of my powerlessness and I am called again to the hope of prayer. Prayer aligns our hearts with heaven, cuts through the haze of our shortsightedness and connects our very earthly circumstances with the spiritual and eternal.

I see here that this is precisely where Jesus turned when Satan returned in his "opportune" time: he prayed and called

his sleepy disciples to pray with him. It seems so simplistic. And yet if we are to know what this season requires of us, ought we not begin there too?

Phil Wagler (phil_wagler@yahoo.ca) and his family live, serve and pray in the rapidly growing city of Surrey, B.C. He is the author of Kingdom Culture.

uncomfortably accurate.

It can't be easy being Enns. Our pews are full of people who put a priority on being nice and never hurting the feelings of their church brothers and sisters. But Enns chose the pew less crowded. He had the audacity to shout the truth as he saw it, even when he must have known he would disturb people who purse their lips and say things like, "Why can't we all just get along?"

It's not hard to offend people. Ask any teenage tagger with a can of spray paint.

But after reading Enns's columns and hearing his views debated within my personal church circles, I believe he did not aim to offend. I think his higher goal was to describe his honest vision of our church and, if you were insulted by his full-frontal frankness, too bad for you.

(Continued on page 12)

NEW ORDER VOICE

An ode to this printed page

KATIE DOKE SAWATZKY

I used to be the circulation and fulfillment manager for a small, independent, faith-based magazine. Ever-increasing postage rates and pressure to increase online presence were constant concerns. I regularly received e-mails from people who wanted to know if we offered digital subscriptions. Their inquiries often included some version of the following: "I'm trying to save paper and read more material online. You know, go green. Save the trees."

It's no shock that the ongoing digitization of everything has meant big changes for the magazine industry. And now, with Canada Post's phasing out of urban door-to-door delivery due to "the increasing use of digital communication and the historic decline of letter mail volumes," an online presence is fast becoming a mainstay of magazine publishing.

For *Canadian Mennonite*, an increased online existence seems inevitable. In his editorial, "What's ahead?" (Oct. 14, 2013, page 2), Dick Benner says the current way of delivering this magazine to households through the mail is "slow and archaic—and must change. Delivery of the content of *Canadian Mennonite* will slowly but surely change to more electronic and less print."



I understand the motivation for this shift. It's logical for journalistic outlets to keep up with the times. All the same, I worry that a move towards "less print" compromises the community of readers that is embodied by the printed pages of *Canadian Mennonite*.

If it seems a stretch to say that words and pictures on paper can embody community, that is only a sign of how removed we already are from print culture and its materiality.

Author and professor Alison Piepmeier writes about the embodied community of zine ("zeen") culture in her book

[T]he words on our pages don't require logging in, power cords and a hydro dam 500 kilometres away to be read.

Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism (New York University, 2009). Zines are small, homemade, handwritten or type-written magazines sent directly to readers by the creators through the mail or person-to-person contact. They revel in materiality: rough edges of glued paper, taped-on clip art, string-tied covers, envelopes with illustrations are all tangible, tactile traces of the creators' work. The materiality of the zine makes it "a site of physical interaction" between the creator and reader that cannot be experienced through a seamless and

immaterial online forum.

As Piepmeier explains, zine culture rejects the pressure of commercial mass media to digitize: "[R]ather than positioning their readers as consumers, as a marketplace, the zine positions them as friends, equals, members of an embodied community who are part of a conversation with the zine maker, and the zine aesthetic plays a crucial role in this positioning."

I know copies of *Canadian Mennonite* aren't handwritten or tied up with string. But when I receive a copy in my mailbox, it does feel like I've received a letter from a friend. The thin pulp pages embody the work of the writers, editors and staff who compile, lay out and distribute our stories. The materiality of each printed issue reminds me I am not merely a consumer of information, but that I am part of a community of people who also read these stories and turn these pages.

My response to those e-mails went something like this: "No, I'm sorry, we don't offer digital subscriptions. Yes, we consume paper, but the words on our

pages don't require logging in, power cords and a hydro dam 500 kilometres away to be read. We remain print-loyal and believe we connect with our readers more authentically through our printed issues."

So, dear reader, will you turn the page with me?

Katie Doke Sawatzky (katiesawatzky@gmail.com) lives in Vancouver. She is a section editor for Geez magazine, which still remains print-loyal.

(Continued from page 11)

I didn't agree with all the views Enns expressed in this magazine. When he wrote a few months ago about meeting Willard Metzger and he described the Mennonite Church Canada general secretary as "fancy" and carrying "middle-class ostentation," I thought the description didn't fit the Metzger I have met a couple of times and, even worse, it was irrelevant to any issue.

But most of his columns dealt with matters of faith, church policy and his personal struggle to live a radically Christ-centred life in a world that values money and power.

I've never met the man, but I think Enns would be an interesting guy to have in a Bible study group. I'm grateful to him for being a cheeky truth-teller and making us ponder what it means to be a Mennonite in Canada.

CARL DE GURSE, WINNIPEG

✉ 'Atonement' feature sparks Advent reflections

RE: "ATONEMENT," NOV. 11, 2013, page 4.

I have read the feature article several times and found it stimulated Advent reflections.

Assuming that all the atonement theories are partial, how do theologians synthesize them into a coherent whole? In Advent, I was reminded of John's account of the nativity, that *"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection are the clearest evidence of God's character and, therefore, the core of all Christian theology. How do these theories ground and nurture individual and collective responses to this concrete reality?

I wonder where the element of faith comes into the discussion? Atonement is a profound mystery, but it is our faith in atonement that provides the basis for life-giving decisions that are transformational and nurturing. It is the experience of redemption, reconciliation, right relationships, freedom and peace that validates the reality of atonement in the lives of the followers of Jesus. How do the various theories contain elements of these qualities?

Finally, what is the role of theologians in Anabaptist theology? My understanding is that classical Anabaptism removed authority from theological specialists and trusted interpretation to believers led by the Spirit and the Word. I would be helped if Derek Suderman and Jeremy Bergen, theology professors at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., explain how they deal with the ambiguity the atonement typology creates. As a retired sociologist, I suggest that ambiguity in everyday and religious life is a given.

We daily encounter ambiguous situations that require making choices. I wonder if theologians sometimes put the cart before the horse.

JOHANN FUNK, PENTICTON, B.C.

✉ Justifiable concern is behind many questions donors ask charities

RE: "ASKING CHARITIES the right questions," Nov. 25, page 8.

The average Canadian income is just under \$47,000 per year and is well below corporate executive jobs, government officials, municipal and city managers, and many Mennonite pastors. It should come as no surprise that the average taxpayer, employee, congregant and charity donor wants to see responsible accountability at all levels for how their money is spent. When it is the donor's own choice to donate to one organization or another, questions should especially not be seen as "problematic."

More often than not, it is high-income-earning executives and managers who are the first to defend their incomes with the statement, "[G]etting the best person for the job requires a competitive salary." This suggests that anyone not earning the big money is either not in a significant job position or not really a "quality/skilled" employee. At times, it is exactly those employees or volunteers who bring the most passion and compassion to their jobs in spite of the low-pay or no-pay situation they may find themselves in.

Regarding the use of the "best equipment" within an organization, I couldn't agree more. However, how an organization or corporation determines what is required and what is excessive is open for debate. Spending discretion is not always an organization's strong point if transparency is not in place. Only when careful, educated, proper decisions are made, will organizations be willing to open their books to critical examination and not engage in defensive posturing.

Only when organizations keep in touch with the reality of donors or employees, can there be an understanding of the justifiable concern behind their questions.

STEVEN PENNER, ALTONA, MAN.




Do you know of someone in your congregation not getting *Canadian Mennonite*?

Ask your church administrator to add them to the list. It is already paid for.

WOMEN WALKING TOGETHER IN FAITH

One step at a time

Women reconnect, walk into the future

By **LIZ KOOP**

Mennonite Women Canada

Across Canada, generations of women have been walking together in faith. As early as 1786, when Mennonites first began arriving from Pennsylvania, up until today, Mennonite women have found a sense of belonging by sharing with and caring for each other.

Historically, women did not have a voice in the church, and meeting together as a group was one way in which they could support and encourage each other, and work on projects dear to their hearts.

For many years, women also met during annual conference sessions. And later, they organized as separate provincial bodies to extend their connections and work on projects together. In 1952, this led to the formation of Canadian Women in Mission (CWM), renamed Mennonite Women Canada in 2009. Together, we can do so much more!

In the past decade, MW Canada has faced a number of challenges. In 2007, it was disheartening that B.C. Women in Mission decided to fold, followed a year later by Manitoba, mainly due to the lack of women willing to serve on the executive. However, Mennonite Church B.C. churches continue to host well-attended Inspirational Days and retreats, and in 2010, with the help of MC B.C., a new Women's Ministry was launched, which is now represented by Waltrude Gortzen on the MW Canada executive. We are grateful for this!

In July 2012, we were delighted that Elsie Wiebe of Morden, Man., volunteered to serve as a liaison for Manitoba women on the MW Canada executive, with the hope of helping them reconnect provincially and nationally. Her overview follows:



Elsie Wiebe

“The decision to disband Manitoba Women in Mission at the Enrichment Day in May 2008—after 47 years of active provincial involvement—was a sad day for many women who were committed to an organization that provided a means of service, spiritual direction, support, and wider social and fundraising connections through partnering with CWM. The main reason for the closure was declining

and aging membership, which made it difficult to fill executive positions.

“Thankfully, a number of the local womens groups have remained active and some have continued to support MW Canada’s mission projects. But sadly there has not been a provincial gathering since the closure, which inevitably is causing a disconnect among Mennonite women in Manitoba.

“To begin the reconnecting process, a letter of introduction was sent to every church, including an update from MW Canada and an invitation to those interested to participate in a planning meeting to consider next steps. There were a few responses, mostly from the honorary groups which expressed support but graciously declined participating in the meetings.

“Following a round of phone calls, e-mails and personal connections, a group of women from across southern Manitoba met last October for a conversation about past connections to Women in Mission, whether they and others from their church would be interested in reconnecting provincially, and, if so, how that could be done.

“Subsequently, we also met with MC Manitoba leaders to inform them of our intentions. With their support and encouragement, a follow-up meeting to further discuss topics raised and actions to be taken is being planned.

The expressions of interest in reconnecting with women across the province have been encouraging, but time is a factor for many. Hopefully, taking one step at a time, we will find a way to meet with a multi-generational group of women representing all MC Manitoba churches within the coming year.”

That is good news not only for Manitoba women, but also for MW Canada. As Kathy Giesbrecht, MC Manitoba associate director of Leadership Ministries, who actively participated in these conversations, put it, “The voice and energy that women offer has always been vital for the health and well-being of the church.”

And as our logo above indicates, we share her hope that “together we will discover anew ways of strengthening and supporting the lives of women in our congregations and in local, [national] and global communities . . . as we walk into the future with holy curiosity.” ✽



Please feel free to share your thoughts on these conversations with Liz Koop at presmwcanada@mennonitechurch.ca.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Ecker—Levi David Kenneth (b. Nov. 19, 2013), to Jason and Lindsey Ecker, North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Enns—Jack William (b. Nov. 30, 2013), to Tom and Leanne Enns, North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Falk—Emma Grace (b. Aug. 22, 2013), to Marvin and Kristin (Dyck) Falk, Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Keely-Dyck—Kathleen Nora (b. Nov. 12, 2013), to Andrew and Eimear Keely-Dyck, Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Mugosa—Gloria Kinja (b. Dec. 22, 2013), to Sylvie Mukabaha and Giscard Mugosa, Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Schorr—Kadence Emery (b. Dec. 25, 2013), to Kristin and Jonathan Schorr, First Mennonite, Calgary.

Turman—Cecily Maria Christie (b. Oct. 9, 2013), to Michael and Alicia Turman, Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Baptisms

Michael Gillis, Beaumont Sinclair—Fiske Mennonite, Sask., Dec. 8, 2013.

Deaths

Baechler—Verda Magelena, 91 (b. June 8, 1922; d. Dec. 17, 2013), Zurich Mennonite, Ont.

Bergmiller—Edward, 91 (b. Oct. 14, 1922; d. Dec. 12, 2013), Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Block—Alvina (nee Jantzen), 77 (b. June 9, 1936; d. Dec. 27, 2013), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Friesen—Margaret, 82 (b. April 23, 1931; d. Dec. 21, 2013), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Gordon—Esther Rebecca (nee Kraft), 86 (b. March 23, 1927; d. Dec. 25, 2013), First Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.

Hildebrand—David, 96 (b. June 17, 1917; d. Dec. 21, 2013), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Janzen—Margaret Rose (nee Bergen), 69 (b. Feb. 28, 1944; d. Nov. 22, 2013), Arnaud Mennonite, Man.

Klassen—Frank, 85 (b. Jan. 17, 1928; d. Nov. 8, 2013), Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Klassen—Frieda, 82 (b. Aug. 24, 1931; d. Dec. 8, 2013), Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Martens—Albert, 88 (b. Jan. 20, 1925; d. Nov. 26, 2013), Fiske Mennonite, Sask.

Martin—Arnold (Arnie), 69 (b. March 17, 1944; d. Nov. 16, 2013), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

Neufeld—Kaethe (nee Peters), 92 (b. June 21, 1921; d. Nov. 2, 2013), Vineland United Mennonite, Ont.

Peters—John, 84 (b. May 16, 1929; d. Dec. 14, 2013), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Rempel—Vera (nee Prosjanik), 90 (b. Aug. 25, 1923; d. Oct. 30, 2013), Vineland United Mennonite, Ont.

Snider—Dorothy, 82 (b. Feb. 15, 1931; d. Dec. 27, 2013), Preston Mennonite, Cambridge, Ont.

Weber—Israel (Isey), 77 (b. June 20, 1936; d. Dec. 5, 2013), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

Wiebe—John. A., 88 (b. Aug. 11, 1925; d. Dec. 28, 2013), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Wiens—Maria (nee Peters), 100 (b. Dec. 29, 1912; d. Dec. 21, 2013), Vineland United Mennonite, Ont.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones

announcements within four months of the event.

Please send Milestones announcements by e-mail to

milestones@canadianmennonite.org including the

congregation name and location. When sending death

notices, please also include birth date and last name at

birth if available.

Pontius' Puddle



GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

MCC in Canada yesterday, today and tomorrow

STORY AND PHOTOS BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

On a cold, windy December day in Winnipeg in 1963, 40 men made the decision to form Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada. Exactly 50 years later, a group of people braved

another bitterly cold day in Winnipeg to reflect on those 50 years and contemplate MCC's future.

On Dec. 13 and 14, 2013, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and the Chair



Phyllis Toews deftly knits winter toques for children as she listens to Lucille Marr, an instructor in the McGill University religious studies program, highlight the significant contribution of women to MCC. Marr pointed out that, from 1940-79, more than 900 volunteers served with MCC, 'with almost twice as many women as men. Although women were involved . . . decades would go by before women would find a place at the MCC Canada board table.' Women continue to write themselves into the MCC story in many significant ways; Toews continues to volunteer in a thrift shop and with Ten Thousand Villages.

in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg collaborated to present the 50th Anniversary History Conference of MCC in Canada. The launch of Esther Epp-Tiessen's book *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History* kicked off the conference.

The decision to form a national inter-Mennonite partnership for relief, immigration service and peace was a controversial one, said Epp-Tiessen, who spoke of "the agony and the ecstasy" in researching and writing this book.

From the stories that Epp-Tiessen uncovered, she presented a mosaic of what MCC in Canada represents, calling it a bridgebuilder within the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ family. "Today we take inter-Mennonite cooperation very much for granted," she said. "That wasn't always the case. Much of that cooperation happens at grassroots levels like thrift shops

'At times [MCC in Canada] has been a vanguard of justice within the church, sometimes pulling the church in directions it didn't want to go.'
(Esther Epp-Tiessen)

and relief sales."

During a discussion that followed, it was pointed out that, although MCC works intentionally to create a sense of unity, the Sommerfelder Mennonites decided last year to withdraw from MCC over concerns about MCC's direction and widening theological spectrum. "What does it mean for the future of MCC Canada to continue to be collaborative?" attendees pondered.

MCC builds bridges across wider divides, Epp-Tiessen pointed out. "MCC is a place of profound learning and Christian formation," she said. "MCC workers have been profoundly shaped and formed by their service experiences. Many have found their faith deepened in the context of poverty and need."

MCC in Canada has been a force for social change, an incubator for creative ways of responding to human need, and a

MCC IN CANADA YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW

'An organization can weather [denominational membership] changes, but only if they recognize how massive the changes are. MCC has demonstrated great creativity in facing social changes.'
(Paul Bramadat)

counterculture lifestyle drawing people to live justly, sustainably and simply. "It has been a keeper and a shaper of the peace, preserving, nurturing and giving concrete expression to an Anabaptist commitment to peace, nonresistance and non-violence. At times it has been a vanguard of justice within the church, sometimes pulling the church in directions it didn't want to go," Epp-Tiessen said.

The 1970s was a period when new programs were being created almost every year, she said. The organization was fairly bold, with apologies offered to Canada's Japanese and indigenous communities.

"Would MCC make those apologies today? I kind of doubt it," said Epp-Tiessen. "MCC, as an organization, has become much more professional and bureaucratic,

and those kinds of things are much more difficult for it to do now. It is much better known in society and concerned about that image. The supporting network is much more diverse and there is concern about the constituency critique," said Epp-Tiessen, who, since completing the book, has become the Ottawa Office public engagement coordinator for MCC Canada.

Paul Bramadat of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society at the University of Victoria provided a context for the challenges facing MCC Canada today. He spoke of the erosion of religion. "Mennonites lost 9.5 percent [of their membership] from 1991 to 2001 and 6.5 percent from 2001 to 2011," he said, adding, "Groups that rely on identification with denominations will need to be mindful of these changes."



The launch of Esther Epp-Tiessen's book Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History opened the 50th anniversary of the MCC in Canada History Conference in Winnipeg on Dec. 13. It is a story of both MCC Canada and MCC in Canada. Pictured, Epp-Tiessen autographs her book on the opening evening.

"There is an opportunity here, but also a challenge," he cautioned. "An organization can weather these changes, but only if they recognize how massive the changes are. MCC has demonstrated great creativity in facing social changes."

Stefan Epp-Koop, chair of the MCC Manitoba board, offered a view into the next 25 years of MCC Canada. "MCC will grow and mature, built on the energy of its new structure, on a strong, existing donor pool and on the need for the work done by MCC," he predicted, wondering, though, "What will happen as Mennonite churches shrink and as resources continue to be stretched?"

With many churches no longer seeing themselves as peace churches, Epp-Koop forecast an important role for MCC to "work for peace and be engaged on peace issues in the churches."

"And whatever happened to service?" he asked. "Since 1987, the number of service workers in MCC has dropped from 800 to 400, and in MCC Canada it has dropped from 160 in the early 1990s to 10 in 2011. How can we reverse this trend?" ❧

Leadership opportunities overseas

Is God calling you to use your leadership, management skills and experiences to serve others through Mennonite Central Committee?

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717-859-1151 or 204-261-6381

MCC IN CANADA YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Five lessons from Africa

DAN UNRAU

Last year, a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Learning Tour group—including the author—visited Ethiopia and Uganda to get a grasp of MCC’s work and its effectiveness in the holy work of being the church as Jesus’ hands and feet in places of need.

• “OH MY God! Oh my God!” gushed Sister Sophia meeting us as we disembarked from our bus.

The nun in her sky-blue habit wasn’t taking God’s name in vain, but was effusively thanking the Lord that the “good people” (her words) from MCC had come to bless her, pray with her and encourage her anew.

“Thank you! Thank you, for enabling 30 girls to be students here, and for the science labs that you built and equipped for us some years ago. And thank you, too, in advance, for what MCC can yet do to help us deliver the next two levels

the air of the tense confines of the stuffy meeting room. Someone had just said a kind word about the reconciliation work being done in the overcrowded family barracks of the Kampala police headquarters, and the response was spontaneous.

The visiting MCC delegation, with members of Alarm, a ministry of reconciliation committed to bringing some peace in and around the too-often feared and sometimes disreputable police force, not only heard the good news of progress being made in the barracks, but received an invitation to “bring more of your

*‘My purpose on earth is to worship you / If I don’t worship you, O Jesus, I have no place on this earth.’
(African worship song)*

of high school education for our girls, so that they will be able to go to university,” she shouted after us as we boarded the bus renewed in our compassion and faith by this remarkable woman.

• “HAVE THERE been any unexpected results from the food security program that MCC has partnered with the relief and development wing of the Meserete Kristos Church here in Boricha, Ethiopia?” someone asked Frew, the impressive, young administrator of the program.

“Besides feeding people, empowering people, educating people, and giving farmers and families new hope,” he said with a smile, “we have planted 11 churches.”

• THE SHOUT of “Asante asana” (“Thank you very much”) and accompanying rhythmic hand clapping exploded into

peace” to other police precincts in the country as well.

• FOUR WOMEN, enveloped in their layers of traditional Ethiopian dress, sat against the end wall of a room as our group filed around tables with cups of steaming tea in our hands. The rain beating down on the tin roof tried to drown out the stories of the women, who seemed shy, humble, self-conscious and uncomfortable until it came time for each of them to tell their personal stories.

Then as each of them stood in turn to talk of their experiences of living with HIV/AIDS, they “lit up” as if plugged into a higher power, and told of the blessings of the ministry that had provided them with anti-retroviral drugs that enabled them to rise from their beds and work. They spoke of receiving nutrition counselling and small loans to start their own businesses, all of which allowed them to

PHOTO BY DAN UNRAU



Sister Sophia was full of thanks for the work that Mennonite Central Committee had done in her community and for the work it would do in the future.

send their children to school—even college, in two cases—and, what was more, save the equivalent of a loonie per month for future needs. Their eyes reflected joy, and their words of “Praise the Lord” expressed gratitude to God.

• MISRAK ADDIS Meserete Kristos Church began to fill a half-hour before the first note of music sounded. The large crowd made up of people mostly under 30 sat to privately pray while waiting for the service to begin.

And when it did, we sang only one congregational song for 45 minutes! Verse after verse was interspersed with a repeated chorus: “My purpose on earth is to worship you / If I don’t worship you, O Jesus, I have no place on this earth.” We found we didn’t need a variety in songs, for the energy, intensity and emotion rose and fell during periods of lament and joy, tongues and tears, ululating and groans.

This was worship. This was devotion. While we couldn’t understand the words, what these worshippers were saying, feeling, celebrating and crying out for was unmistakable: The chief end of all humans is “to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism). ❧

Dan Unrau of Richmond B.C. is a semi-retired pastor.

MCC IN CANADA YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW

'A passion that's exciting'

New generation of leaders steps up at MCC Saskatchewan thrift shop

BY JULIE BELL

Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan
SASKATOON

Twenty-four-year-old Andy Arthur remembers the April day in 2013 that a factory full of garment workers collapsed in Bangladesh. As he did his job as assistant at the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Village Green Thrift Shop in Saskatoon while the death toll escalated, he wondered what he could do to help people so far away.

Then he realized he was already doing that. "I'm reselling clothing so people don't have to go out and buy new clothes from companies using cheap labour," he says. "We're raising money [for MCC] to help women in Bangladesh do textile work in their homes, where they can be safe and with their children. Every action is a part of something bigger."

Arthur has since been promoted, and is part of a young and dynamic team of

co-managers at Village Green.

Karen Ens, 33, and Sophia Kutsiuruba, 25, make up the other two members of the team.

Kutsiuruba says the highlight of her day is meeting people who come to browse, buy or just talk. "There are people from diverse backgrounds and across the spectrum of income brackets and culture," she says enthusiastically. "I see the humanity in all of these interactions. It's my way of experiencing God."

Ens agrees. "I am passionate about making Christ known and serving him," she says. "I get to make connections with people and help those who are in great need."

Erica Baerwald, the coordinator of MCC's thrift shops in Saskatchewan, is thankful for the dedication of older

managers and volunteers who have built a solid foundation at the province's thrift shops, but is equally delighted that a new generation of younger people is joining the network. "They have a passion that's exciting," she says. "Their energy inspires me."

Kutsiuruba describes her generation as sometimes cynical and non-committal, but says many young people are searching for a way to connect with the mission of agencies such as MCC. "For example, caring for the environment and reusing things: these are inherent to thrift stores, and you don't have to sell that to young people," she says. "There are a lot of them with energy to direct at things. They just may not know where to start."

Arthur says that perhaps the most important thing that MCC can offer to his generation is hope. "You watch the news and say this world is so messed up, why do we even try?" he says. "But then you see that when we work together as a community, as a world, good things happen. Just those little moments of sharing hope can encourage young people to keep working at something." ❧

MCC PHOTO BY MATTHEW SAWATZKY



Karen Ens, Sophia Kutsiuruba and Andy Arthur are co-managers of MCC's Village Green Thrift Shop in Saskatoon.

COVER STORY

Flooding worsens Gazans' plight

MCC partners maintain Israel worsened the flooding by opening dams east of Gaza

BY SHELDON C. GOOD
Mennonite Central Committee

A week after torrential rain battered the Gaza Strip, people in the al Nafaq Street area of eastern Gaza City were still struggling to clean mud and debris out of their homes and businesses just before Christmas.

Flood waters initially swelled to 3.6 metres within 12 hours on Dec. 11 and 12, 2013, before receding to about 2 metres of sewage-contaminated water on sections of the street. The flooding caused 400 households to lose everything and about 100 people were hospitalized because of frostbite or upper respiratory infections.

Using small fishing vessels and various makeshift boats, dozens of community members helped each other to clean out street-level homes and salvage items from homes and shops. Walking was restricted to narrow stretches of mud and sand along the flooded roads.

As day faded to night, daily clean-up efforts were replaced by the noise of multiple generators on nearly every block, due to scarce electricity and temperatures that hovered around 5 degrees Celsius.

Al Najd Development Forum, a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) partner, responded quickly to the need by providing clothes and food rations. MCC now is funding continued distribution of these items as well as household and kitchen supplies to 100 families in various locations in Gaza, including eastern Gaza City. An MCC team was in Gaza on Dec. 18 to assess the situation.

In the broader Gaza Strip, the flooding forced 40,000 residents to flee their homes, and 100,000 people have lost production of their agricultural land. Most people sought shelter with family or in public buildings such as schools.

The United Nations declared Gaza “a disaster area” on Dec. 14.

Khalid Abu Sharekh, chair of Al Najd, said the flooding was disastrous in and of itself, but its effect was much worse because Gazans were already in survival mode because of the Israeli occupation.

“The occupation has meant a lack of income for people, and that makes this natural disaster a catastrophe,” he said, referring to Israel’s control of supplies and people in and out of Gaza.

Even before the flooding, unemployment, poor healthcare, lack of education and stressed agriculture were major issues

in Gaza, said Dan Bergen, MCC representative in Palestine and Israel.

Gaza’s 1.8 million people have endured daily 12-hour blackouts since the lone power plant was switched off last November due to a fuel shortage. Israel limits fuels and other supplies that get into Gaza, and within the past year Egypt has closed tunnels that for many years were used to bring fuel and supplies into Gaza and to send exports out.

On Dec. 13, Israel opened a crossing with Gaza, allowing fuel supplies and four water pumps to enter to help relieve the effects of the flooding. However, many Gazans, including MCC partners, maintain that Israel worsened the flooding by opening dams east of Gaza.

Since then, power has been going on and off in eight-hour increments, instead of every 12 hours, due to fuel donations from the Qatar government. Nevertheless, Gaza is mostly dark after sunset at around 5 p.m. ☼

Sheldon C. Good is a freelance writer from Washington, D.C.

MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE PHOTO BY RYAN RODRICK BEILER



‘The occupation has meant a lack of income for people, and that makes this natural disaster a catastrophe,’ says Khalid Abu Sharekh, chair of Al Najd, a Mennonite Central Committee partner, of the flooding in Gaza shortly before Christmas.

VIEWPOINT

A year of struggling biblically

BY WILL BRAUN

SENIOR WRITER

My fellow *Canadian Mennonite* writer, Aaron Epp, has launched his Year of Reading Biblically, offering public reflections on his private cover-to-cover reading of the Good Book. I say, “Good on ya. I’m eager to read your comments.”

His project triggered a few of my own thoughts about the Bible:

1. FOR MANY people, the Bible is the straightforward word, or Word, from above. For others, like me, it is complicated. It’s not that we have it in for the Bible, we just can’t deny the questions and struggles that arise along our honest quest for meaning.

It can be tough wringing ever more meaning out of stories so oft repeated and from such foreign contexts. The blood can be a bit much. The inherent male bias does not warm my soul. And the way that warmongers, xenophobes and prosperity peddlars latch on to the same Bible can cloud one’s view.

I think this is important to acknowledge.

2. I STUDIED theology long enough to realize that smart people can make the Bible say whatever they want.

In a 2009 article entitled “The case of the customized Christ,” I critiqued respected theologian and social justice advocate Ched Myers for a big book in which he makes Jesus out to be a social-justice advocate. I like Myers and I have devoted much of my life to social justice,



but I don’t accept his argument. It’s an unjustifiably selective reading of the Bible.

The temptation is always to use the Bible to support our pre-existing beliefs and inclinations: to create God in our own image.

The Bible is more helpful when it takes us out of our comfortable ruts, rather than deepens them.

For instance, I’d rather do faith-based social-justice work than share the message of God’s love in an overt way. Yet if I take the Bible seriously, I see that open discussion about the essence of the spiritual life—not quite the same as pre-packaged witnessing—is vital.

There are also biblical passages in which Jesus uncritically embraces the same sort of wealthy folks I am apt to judge.

3. WHICH LEFT-BRAIN, Cartesian wet blanket put all those numbers in the Bible? Why does it have to be surgically dissected into chapters and verses?

Our interaction with the Bible would change significantly without the numbers. I think that would be a good experiment. Theology and Bible “study” would look different, which I would welcome.

4. MY APPROACH to the Bible has been shaped by Northrop Frye, the immensely gifted Canadian literary critic who died in 1991. Frye wrote, “The Bible should be read as literally as any fundamentalist could desire, but the real literal meaning is an imaginative and poetic one.”

To expand on a point made previously in these pages, the Bible obviously contains a great deal of poetry, story and metaphor, and we should embrace the power of that. The modern mindset tends to equate truth with hard fact, and has therefore come to see poetic and imaginative forms of communication as inferior. Frye says this unfortunate twist of modernity has confused and distorted our reading of the Bible.

Frye makes the case that “imaginative” forms of communication—as opposed to the simple relaying of facts—can carry the message of love, redemption, hope and peace much more deeply and powerfully into a community of readers. The words can become one with the listeners, not just information to glean.

He compares it to colour versus black and white, something more fluid and penetrating than the simple assertion of a set of beliefs.

A parable is a simple example of an imaginative form of communication that is not “true” in the sense of conveying what actually happened, but still conveys much truth. Frye says people who get wrapped up in questions like whether the virgin birth actually happened are not heretical, but “illiterate,” unable to tune in to the intended mode of communication.

He says the structure of the Bible and its historical inconsistencies indicate that it was clearly intended as something other than a coherent account of historical facts.

I don’t think Frye’s approach is the only useful one, nor that everyone should adopt it. I’m just saying I find it freeing. It gets around some of the biblical complications without reducing the Bible to just another fanciful work of literature. Frye’s reason for writing about the Bible is precisely that it is far more than just another “good book.”

So to Aaron (or anyone else), if incongruities, questions of factuality or the sheer outlandishness of Revelation trip you up, you’re welcome to my copies of Frye’s *The Great Code* or his *Words With Power*. ❧

It's not about the numbers

Discipleship focus for Vietnamese church

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

The regular congregants at Vietnamese Christian Church can be counted on one hand, but Pastor Ken Ha isn't worried. It's not about the numbers, he says.

The group has been meeting in Abbotsford for five years as an outreach of Vancouver Vietnamese Mennonite Church, whose pastor, Nhien Pham, had been leading the Abbotsford group from its start.

Ken took over from Pham in the role of pastor last September, moving with his wife Ruth from a pastorate in Worcester, Mass. Abbotsford is like home for the

"If you focus [solely] on the message, something [can be] wrong or missing. If you look at Scripture, you never fail." (Ken Ha, pastor, Vietnamese Mennonite Church)

Has, as Ken had attended Columbia Bible College there, and 14 years ago pastored a Vietnamese fellowship at Bakerview Mennonite Brethren Church in the city.

The church, with members ranging in age from about 30 to 60, meets weekly in space provided by Emmanuel Mennonite Church and functions as part of Emmanuel's ministry, including financial support. Worship is on Sunday night, with prayer meeting on Thursday night.

Currently, the church is the only Vietnamese congregation in the Abbotsford area of the Fraser Valley. With an estimated 200 Vietnamese families in the community, the possibility for growth is great, the Has believe. Outreach includes visiting local mushroom farms, where many Vietnamese immigrants work, and asking permission to visit with the workers, as well as putting up posters advertising the services.

The Has hope they will be seen as a resource when life presents difficulties, such as workplace problems or a death in the family. Additionally, Ruth has many

extended family members in the area, which provide additional contacts.

Ken's focus is primarily on discipleship, empowering people to live Christian lives and reach out to their neighbours, but letting the Holy Spirit lead in the specifics. "We talk about the why, not the how," he says.

Adds Ruth, "We do the work, but we need God to touch their hearts."

Ken notes that people often place too much emphasis on the sermon when they come to church, measuring how fulfilling their experience is by how good a speak-

er the pastor is. "If you focus on people, sooner or later you fail," he says. "If you focus [solely] on the message, something

[can be] wrong or missing. If you look at Scripture, you never fail."

That's why Ken prefers a grassroots model of ministry. "The way we used to do church for many years [from the top down] won't work," he says. "I give people freedom to do their job. If we don't allow people to do it the first time, they don't."

Vietnamese Christian Church had a Christmas celebration the last Sunday in December, with some 75 people attending, including members of Vancouver Vietnamese Mennonite. Some also came from the neighbouring cities of Langley and Chilliwack, and even Washington state. The celebration included a meal followed by a worship service, the opposite order of a traditional Vietnamese way of doing things, but, say the Has, one that seemed to make more sense in order to enjoy fresh, hot food, and then allow people with full stomachs to concentrate better on the worship service.

"The main thing to understand is that the work takes time," says Ken. "A strong core group is the key. Thirty years ago, when I came to Canada with nothing, if [someone] saw me at the time, they'd probably say nothing would happen. They wouldn't see the picture of me in 2014, pastor of this congregation. With God, all things are possible." ❧



Ken and Ruth Ha, the new pastoral couple at Vietnamese Christian Church in Abbotsford, B.C., hope for growth not only in numbers but in discipleship.

GOD AT WORK IN US



PHOTOS FROM CHURCHILLRIVERCANOE.COM



Northern Saskatchewan scenes from Churchill River Canoe Outfitters' excursions.

40 years of canoe tripping

Saskatchewan guide helps others meet God in the wilderness

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent
ROSTHERN, SASK.

The trickling of an indoor waterfall in the room where Ric Driediger sits evokes images of a northern stream while he reflects on 40 years on the waterways of northern Saskatchewan as a canoeing guide.

His career began in 1972 when, at 19, he was invited to help guide a group of Mennonite students on a canoe trip. When asked how much he would like to be paid, he began to see guiding as a career possibility.

Driediger took courses in guiding, leadership, navigation and wilderness camping, and also learned through relationships. LaVerne Jantz, who hailed from his hometown of Drake, Sask., invited Driediger to join a group of young people in exploring how God uses the wilderness for spiritual growth. For the next four years, Jantz became his mentor, as the two travelled everywhere together.

In 1975, Driediger, Jantz and two other friends started a Christian camping organization called Wilderness Trails. They worked with youth and young adults, charging up to 40 percent of their costs and expecting to make up the remainder through donations. This worked well when they only led six canoe trips a year, but when that number grew to 40 trips they found their business model wasn't sustainable.

Meanwhile, Driediger had started Horizons Unlimited, a business he hoped would operate at a profit and finance Wilderness Trails. Offering services to the general public, the business didn't keep Wilderness Trails afloat, but it did help him and his staff develop a name for themselves.

In the mid-1980s, Horizons Unlimited purchased Churchill River Canoe Outfitters of Missinipe, Sask. In existence since 1964, Churchill River is the second-oldest canoe tripping company in Canada. Since then, "more by time than by design," Churchill River and Ric Driediger have become synonymous with canoeing in Saskatchewan.

Another important figure in Driediger's life was well-known Ontario canoeist Bill Mason. Mason became friends with Driediger and his wife Theresa when she worked on her master's degree in Ottawa.

"He taught me how to be a Christian in a non-Christian world," says Driediger. "He taught me how to be relaxed about my spirituality," helpful lessons in his work with Churchill River.

In 2013, about 7,000 people came through Driediger's office, mainly from Saskatchewan and Alberta, but also from other parts of Canada, the U.S. and Europe.

In June, people come to fish, while July and August are geared more towards canoe trips. He especially enjoys hosting pastors who will discuss theology with him, and he looks forward to hosting a retreat for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan pastors this September.

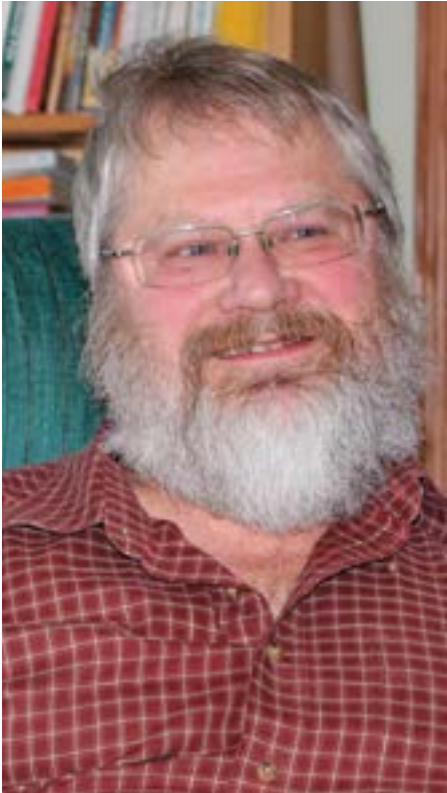
Whether with pastors or the general public, Driediger finds that "spiritual subjects come up all the time. I believe God reveals himself through nature," he says. "Millennia before the Bible came to be, that's how people found out about God. They looked at what God had created."

When people return from a canoe trip, he encourages them to talk about their experiences and their spiritual and emotional responses. "People will talk about sitting on the shore of a lake in the early morning . . . and just looking out across the water," he says.

Being caught in a storm will also get people thinking. "Nature is so powerful and we don't have control," he says. When people experience these things, "they're feeling a reflection of God in some way or another," he says. As he asks them questions, his guests discover the spiritual truths they experienced in the wilderness.

The Driediger children, Dan and Sarah, both students at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, work as guides in the summer months, as do a number of their friends. He also recruits guides from colleges that offer related programs. Staff are expected to make a long-term commitment, as it takes three to four years to become a good guide.

Churchill River also employs people from the nearby first nation community of Grandmother Bay. Although not without




Ric Driediger loves telling stories about his life as a canoeing guide.

challenges, the relationship is deeply rewarding. Driediger has many stories to tell about his indigenous staff and the impact they have had on his life.

The canoeing season lasts five months and that means seven months are spent away from camp. Driediger has yet to find the ideal winter pastime. His home-based tent- and tarpaulin-manufacturing business, while profitable, isn't enjoyable. He has also taught business administration and marketing some winters. Such opportunities, while more enjoyable, aren't always available.

Meanwhile, he pursues his interest in theology, preaching when invited, and leading a student-initiated Bible study at Rosthern Junior College. And, undoubtedly, as the water continues to trickle in the room where he sits, he looks forward to another summer of encountering God in the wilderness. ☿

 *View a video interview with Ric Driediger at canadianmennonite.org/ric-driediger.*

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ARTBEAT

Writer makes case for respect, fairness, stability

Malcolm Gladwell speaks at fundraiser at Floradale Mennonite Church

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
FLORADALE, ONT.

Before Malcolm Gladwell signed copies of his newest book, *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits and the Art of Battling Giants*, for a gathered crowd at Floradale Mennonite Church, he spoke at a fundraiser there for the Woolwich Counselling Centre in nearby Elmira, where the author's mother Joyce was the first executive director.

In his Nov. 27, 2013, talk Gladwell focussed on Alva Belmont, an early 19th-century suffragette, and the story of the British occupation of Northern Ireland.

As a suffragette working for women to

be allowed to vote in the United States, Belmont focused on the American ideals of respect, fairness and stability. If these things are absent, Gladwell stated, the oppressed will rise up in defiance of a culture or government they see as illegitimate.

He said this is what happened in Northern Ireland when Oliver Cromwell tried to force the Catholics to submit to his rule through the fear of retribution. Finding him illegitimate—disrespectful, unfair, and not creating stability for the Irish—Gladwell said some would call

him the cause of the creation of the Irish Republican Army.

The evening raised around \$10,000 for the counselling centre as Floradale Mennonite donated all the receipts from the more than 550 attendees, the local Royal Bank donated \$3,000, and Wordsworth Books, an independent book store in Uptown Waterloo, donated \$5 from each book sold that evening.

Gladwell has also published *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (2000), *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (2005), *Outliers: The Story of Success* (2008), and *What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures* (2009).

To view Gladwell's reading at Floradale, visit www.floramc.org and follow the links to "Videos." ❧

/// Briefly noted

Dora Dueck wins High Plains Book Award

WINNIPEG—Dora Dueck's short story collection, *What You Get at Home*, won the 2013 High Plains Book Award in the Short Story category. The High Plains region includes

Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Dueck, whose book was published by Turnstone Press, was one of 10 finalists from Canada this year, a record number for the awards. Dueck was honoured in person at the awards banquet on Oct. 26 at the Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings, Mont. All winners received a \$500 cash prize. An editor, writer and historian, Dueck, who is a member of Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, has published two previous novels, *Under the Still Standing Sun* (1989) and *This Hidden Thing* (2010), the latter of which won the McNally Robinson Book of the Year Award. *What You Get at Home* is her first collection of stories. —Turnstone Press



Malcolm Gladwell signs a copy of David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits and the Art of Battling Giants (Little, Brown and Company, 2013) for Fred and Shirley Redekop. Redekop, pastor of Floradale Mennonite Church, north of Waterloo, Ont., was instrumental in having Gladwell, who grew up nearby, come and read as a fundraiser for the Woolwich Counselling Centre.

FOCUS ON FINANCES

GOD, MONEY AND ME

Things I wish my father had done

MIKE STRATHDEE

We almost missed it on the first pass, buried under the newspapers and magazines that were filling a large recycling bin. If we hadn't been checking each piece, it would have been discarded unnoticed.

"It" was a letter I had long forgotten having written. My aunt, helping to clear out my father's house this fall after his sudden passing, couldn't believe Dad had kept the letter in his reading pile for so many years.

Dad told me in 2007 that he was naming me co-trustee of his estate and I wrote the letter to suggest steps he could take to simplify things. Making his wishes clear could minimize misunderstandings.

I mentioned that most people don't state their wishes around distribution of personal effects. This is unfortunate, as disagreements about who should get an item that has fond memories attached to it are the greatest source of family conflicts after a loved one passes.

Dad had many musical instruments and all five of his grandchildren play one or more. Knowing his thoughts would have made some of the divvying up easier. Thankfully, no one has come to blows over any of Dad's things!

As I haul stuff hither and yon, I wish I had convinced him of a few things:

- **FEDERAL DEPOSIT** insurance protects up to \$100,000 at chartered Canadian banks. Similar provincial insurance protects deposits at credit unions. Like many folks his age, Dad didn't trust banks and spread his money around. But the only difference between 10 separate \$20,000 deposits at 10 institutions and two \$100,000 deposits is the work required to wind them up.

- **TELL YOUR** trustees where important stuff is kept. My aunt and I had to visit numerous financial institutions before we discovered where Dad had rented a safety deposit box.

- **LABEL YOUR** keys and tell someone where you keep them. Ask a Mennonite Foundation of Canada (MFC) consultant for a copy of our Personal Information Directory. We couldn't find keys to Dad's freezer, where a lot of important stuff was carefully wrapped in zip-lock bags. A crowbar took care of the lock, but not the answer to where his safety deposit box

keys were located. I found those keys hidden in the back of a dresser drawer, weeks after paying to have the box drilled open.

- **IF YOU** collect things of value, leaving records of the purchase date, maintenance schedule and so forth is helpful to trustees in establishing what stuff is worth.

- **PUT SOMETHING** in writing to inform your loved ones of your wishes for healthcare if you are incapacitated. Many Canadians have never prepared incapacity documents like powers of attorney or advance directives, and don't understand the consequences of failing to prepare. Do your loved ones a favour and spell out your wishes. MFC can help. Ask for a copy of "Your will and estate planning guide" or meet with a consultant.

Mike Strathdee is a stewardship consultant in the Kitchener, Ont., office of Mennonite Foundation of Canada. For more information on impulsive generosity, stewardship education, and estate and charitable gift planning, contact your nearest MFC office or visit MennoFoundation.ca.

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Silence and spinning wheels

Parents of LGBTQ children speak out on the Being a Faithful Church process

BY RACHEL BERGEN

Young Voices Co-editor

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL AND MARTHA SNYDER



Martha and Paul Snyder attend Bloomingdale Mennonite Church, Ont., and have a gay son. They open their home to LGBTQ people whose families have disowned them.

For many parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) children, the ongoing Mennonite church's inclusion discussion brings them back to different points in the last 30 years, when similar debates took place. Since then, they say not much has changed for the church as a whole.

Mennonite Church Canada is currently undergoing a discernment period and compiling reflections through the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process. The current document, BFC 5, provides biblical perspectives on sex, sexuality and faithfulness. MC Canada is asking for congregations to complete responses to submit to the BFC task force by February, to aid it in forthcoming recommendations.

Individual and congregational responses are guiding the process, yet some congregations where LGBTQ people and their families attend aren't participating, choosing to stay silent on the subject.

John and Mary Klassen (pseudonymous names) have three young adult children who are members of the "queer" community, an increasingly acceptable way to refer to the LGBTQ community as a whole, which is reclaiming the term that was once considered a slur.

Their church in Saskatchewan hasn't engaged in the BFC process and the Klassens do not find it to be a place where they can talk openly about their family or the alienation they face.

"I don't feel supported on a whole by the church," says Mary. "On an individual level, yes, but not as a body."

Instead, the Klassens attend a support group for parents of LGBTQ children. Mennonite families who feel marginalized

from their churches are increasingly finding support in such self-started groups.

"It's a safe place," says John. "We don't have to worry. What we talk about there doesn't go further than that. It has become church for us."

After their daughter came out to them when she was 19, Erwin and Val Warkentin of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg approached their church about finding a way to lovingly discuss the issue of homosexuality in the church. For three years, they led the congregation in dialogue and education, and then founded the Pilgrim Group after the dialogue period ended.

Throughout the three years, the Warkentins didn't feel there was a place for them to go for support within the church. It wasn't until they began meeting with LGBTQ people and their families in the Pilgrim Group that they received what they were missing in church.

Although Bethel Mennonite Church is participating in the BFC process, Val is not. "When I hear things like, 'Wait 10 years and we'll be fine,' that makes me crazy," she says. "What happens to our kids, to families who are leaving the church? We're losing a lot of wonderful young people in the church."

Erwin says they take turns being "totally fed up," but he continues to participate in the process while working to build community and relationships through the Pilgrim Group. "I'm not critical of what they're doing [with the BFC process], but we're into the third year now and if this process is supposed to take us 100 miles, we're now at about 7.5 miles and we have a year to go," he says.

What bothers him is that the BFC

process looks a great deal like the Human Sexuality in the Christian Life document that was commissioned by the General Conference Mennonite Church in 1980 and the Mennonite Church general assembly in 1981. The 160-page document just contained nine pages on homosexuality, he says, maintaining, “We’re not going anywhere, we’re just spinning tires at this point.”

Paul and Martha Snyder of Kitchener, Ont., attend Bloomingdale Mennonite Church, which is also not participating in the BFC process. They have a gay son and often open their home to LGBTQ people whose families have disowned them. They started the group many years ago and

found the support they weren’t receiving in their church. Now they meet about every two months and 25 people participate.

The Klassens, Warkentins and Snyders agree that, although difficult, having LGBTQ children has brought them on a wonderful journey where they have supported and been supported by a wide array of people outside of their home churches.

According to MC Canada, about 110 congregations—about half—have participated in the BFC process. The BFC 5 recommendations will be heard at the assembly in Winnipeg this summer, but the discernment period will not conclude until 2016. ❧



Rachel Bergen

VIEWPOINT

On living organ donation

DANIEL BIGHAM

SPECIAL TO YOUNG VOICES

Many of us are familiar with the concept of organ donation that occurs after someone passes away, but more recently I have learned about the need for living organ donations.

Over the past year, I have followed the story of Craig Dunbar, a 41-year-old from Ottawa who was afflicted with kidney failure in 2007.

For six years, Dunbar searched for a new kidney. This past November, he found a match through Canada’s Living Donor Paired Exchange. Two people were in the process of being tested to join the program

strikes me as a rich one for Christians to consider. As I have personally reflected on the greatest commandment Jesus gave us—to love God with our whole being, and to love others as we love ourselves—I ask myself, “If the roles were reversed, would I want Dunbar to donate a kidney to me?”

The answer is yes, as I suspect it is for most of us. But in talking with other Christians, it quickly becomes apparent that most of us are hesitant to donate a kidney to someone we don’t have a strong personal connection with.

This reminds me of the story of the

When we die and God asks us how we responded to the hungry . . . we should also be prepared to account for how we responded to those who needed a kidney.

on Dunbar’s behalf before a family friend stepped forward and donated one of her kidneys to him. The other two are continuing on with the process, in order to be anonymous “angel” donors through the exchange.

The concept of living organ donation

Good Samaritan, who was willing to act even though the person in trouble wasn’t a beloved family member or acquaintance. Why? I think it goes back to Jesus’ commandment to love others as we love ourselves. Each human life is uniquely valuable to God, regardless of whether

the person is a family member or a stranger to us. Dunbar's life is as valuable to God as my life, and as valuable as your life.

There are many other ways in which living organ donation is relevant to our Christian dialogue:

- **STEWARDSHIP.** WE often acknowledge that stewardship is more than money, that we are also privileged to manage the time and talents that God has entrusted to us. Can we consider it good stewardship that hundreds of millions of Christians keep an extra kidney while people are dying or have very compromised health for lack of one? And since 20 years of dialysis for a person costs roughly \$1.2 million of taxpayer money, a kidney donation is also good stewardship of a country's medical resources.

- **WITNESS.** AS we endeavour to demonstrate to the world the beauty of loving others as self, situations like Dunbar's are a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate who God has called us to be. If we turn away, we send a confounding message to the world. We don't want the church to be known for what it's against, but rather what it is for.

- **CHRISTIAN FORMATION.** As we sit around tables and talk about how to form faith in our youth with this curriculum or that, we must remember that it is actually how we choose to live—and the hard decisions we make—that are most

formative for our children.

- **PEACE.** AS followers of Jesus we know that the seeds of peace are best sown long before conflict erupts. Sacrificial love for one another is one of the most beautiful seeds of peace that I know of.

When we die and God asks us how we responded to the hungry, the thirsty and the naked, we should also be prepared to account for how we responded to those who needed a kidney.

Were we like the priests who saw the robbed and beaten man, but walked to the other side of the road? Or were we like the Good Samaritan who stopped and helped?

Donating a kidney won't be a good choice for everyone. But if it is fear and uncertainty that is holding us back, we need not be afraid because what we, as Christians, are about is love, and love drives out all fear.

We often raise our eyes to heaven and ask for a miracle. As we do so, we must remember that God has also placed miracles within us that are ready to blossom if we are willing. ☸

Daniel Bigham lives in Waterloo, Ont. For more information about Craig Dunbar, visit www.kidney4craig.com. A great resource for more information is the blog of Carol Penner, a pastor who donated a kidney: anundesigneddonor.blogspot.ca.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Four songs for 2014

BY AARON EPP

YOUNG VOICES CO-EDITOR



Aaron Epp

At the end of December, I sat down with my journal and day planner to jot down my highlights of 2013. I quickly had a list of 32 events or milestones that I felt were significant. I grew a lot physically, mentally and spiritually last year, and I'm hoping that growth will continue in 2014

through things like A Year of Reading Biblically.

Part of my year-in-review reflecting included making a playlist of songs for 2014 that have been important to me in recent months. These songs remind me to keep pressing forward even when life seems difficult. Here is a look at four of them:

“Remember to Remember”

By Shad featuring Lights
From *Flying Colours*
Black Box Recordings, 2013.

Vancouver-based Shad has proven himself as one of Canada’s most deft hip-hop lyricists. The real treat for me is that not only are his songs clever and

Shad encourages listeners to remember that forgiveness, serving others and love are more important than worrying about status or wealth.

catchy, but he also weaves a social consciousness that is informed by his faith into his lyrics. Remembering where you came from is a recurring theme in Shad’s music, whether he’s referencing the story of Abraham and Isaac (“Rose Garden”) or talking about how being faithful to one’s beliefs—not building a legacy on earth—is what’s really important in life (“Live Forever”). With a chorus sung by pop singer Lights, “Remember to Remember” continues this tradition as Shad encourages listeners to remember that forgiveness, serving others and love are more important than worrying about status or wealth. Hear the song at www.tinyurl.com/ShadRemember.

“Free Life”

By Dan Wilson
From *Free Life*
American Recordings, 2007.

Many people are familiar with the 1998 song, “Closing Time,” by one-hit-wonders Semisonic. The band’s front man, Dan Wilson, released a solo album in 2007 that includes this gorgeous title track. Over gentle acoustic guitars and a pedal steel, Wilson sings in his tenor voice about the meaning of life. “In the air the questions hang / Will we get to do something? / Who are we gonna end up being? / How are we gonna end up feeling? / What are you gonna spend your free life on?” I’m almost 30 years old and I’ve continually thought about those questions over the last 12 or so years. This song reminds me to keep asking those questions. Hear it at www.tinyurl.com/WilsonFreeLife.

“Thankful Heart”

By Michael Caine and The Muppets
From *The Muppet Christmas Carol*
Walt Disney Records, 1992.

Every Christmas, I watch the Muppets’ adaptation of Charles Dickens’ classic novella, *A Christmas Carol*. “Thankful Heart” is the song Scrooge, played by

legendary British actor Michael Caine, sings after he wakes up on Christmas morning with love and joy in his heart. “With a thankful heart / With an endless joy / With a growing family / Every girl and boy / Will be nephew and niece to me / Will bring love, hope and peace to me / Yes, and every night will end / And every day will start / With a grateful prayer / And a thankful heart.” This song is a good reminder that loving one’s neighbours and giving thanks to God for the many blessings in life are what truly matter. Hear the song at www.tinyurl.com/MuppetsThankfulHeart.

“God Is Good”

By Dustin Kensrue
From *The Water & The Blood*
Mars Hill Music, 2013.

I’m not a big fan of contemporary worship music. So much of it is full of unhelpful theology. *The Water & The Blood*, Dustin Kensrue’s collection of worship music, is an exception. The album consists of 11 simple songs for worship that focus on drawing closer to God in times of both triumph and struggle. The standout track, “God is Good,” is an anthemic reminder that even when life doesn’t seem to be working out the way I would like it to, and I’m not sure how things are going to work out for me in a particular situation, I can trust—and lean on—God, who is good. Hear an acoustic version of the song at www.tinyurl.com/KensrueGodIsGood. ☘

PHOTO BY JUSTIN BROADBENT



Vancouver-based hip-hop artist Shad weaves a social consciousness that is informed by his faith into his clever, deft rhymes.

Calendar

British Columbia

Feb. 15: Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, hosts its Bearcat Brunch, with speaker Martine Rennie, former head coach of the Vancouver Whitecaps. For more information, visit columbiabc.edu or call 604-853-3358.

Feb. 21: MC B.C. Leaders, Elders and Deacons (LEAD) conference at Eden Mennonite Church, Chilliwack. Speaker: Rick Faw of A Rocha. Topic: "Creation care."

Feb. 22: MC B.C. annual general meeting, at Eden Mennonite Church, Chilliwack.

March 8: LifeBridge Ministries fundraising concert. Location TBA.

Alberta

March 27-30: Truth and Reconciliation national event in Edmonton. For more information, visit trc.ca.

March 30-April 9: MCC Alberta Middle East Learning Tour.

Saskatchewan

March 2: RJC Guys and Pies concert fundraiser.

March 7: Spring pastors gathering at Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim, at 1 p.m. Theme: "Church leaders in a post-Christendom world."

March 7-9: Prairie Winds worship retreat, at Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim. Keynote speaker: John Bell. Theme: "Why do God's people... pray, sing, read Scripture and worship together?" For more information, visit mcsask@mcsask.ca or call 306-249-4844.

March 14-15: MC Saskatchewan annual delegate sessions at Parliament Community Church, Regina.

March 16: RJC/CMU concert, at RJC.

Manitoba

Feb. 5: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate open house, at 7 p.m.

Feb. 7: "I call you friend" CMU dessert fundraiser, at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Winkler, at 7 p.m. To attend, e-mail development@cmu.ca.

Feb. 13: "Another look at love" CMU celebration fundraising dinner, at Victoria Inn, Winnipeg, at 6 p.m. To attend, e-mail development@cmu.ca.

Feb. 27: Face 2 Face | On Campus: Topic: "The European debt crisis and other wonders hiding in the global economy." For more information, visit cmu.ca/face2face.

Feb. 27: IDS Esau Public Lecture Series, with Hannah Wittman, at Menno Simons College. For more information, visit mscollege.ca/esau.

March 7: CMU dessert fundraising evening, in Winkler, at 7 p.m. For more information, visit cmu.ca/events.html.

March 20: CMU Verna Mae Janzen Music Competition finals, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit cmu.ca/programs/music.html.

March 20: IDS Esau Public Lecture Series, with Jules Pretty, at Menno Simons College. For more information, visit mscollege.ca/esau.

March 23: Mennonite Community Orchestra and CMU Singers, Women's Chorus and Men's Chorus perform Missa Pax by Timothy Corlis. With guest artist: Catherine Richard, piano.

Ontario

Feb. 7: Carol Ann Muller, the Rod and Lorna Sawatsky Visiting Scholar, speaks at Conrad Grebel University College, in the Chapel, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit grebel.ca/sawatsky.

Feb. 7-9: MC Eastern Canada youth winter retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp, Sauble Beach.

Feb. 13: Conrad Grebel University College presents "An evening with Bruce Cockburn," in the University of Waterloo Humanities Theatre; at 8 p.m. For more information, visit uwaterloo.ca/grebel/cockburn.

Feb. 17: Family Day open house at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg; from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. RSVP required. Call 519-625-8602 or e-mail info@hiddenacres.ca.

Feb. 19-21: MC Eastern Canada School for Ministers, "Will you come and follow me?" with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo.

Feb. 26: Irish singer-songwriter Steafan Hanvy performs in the Chapel at Conrad Grebel University College,



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 CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY

Waterloo; at 7 p.m.

Feb. 28-March 2: Women's retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite, Camp, Sauble Beach. Resource person: Tanya Dyck Steinmann. For more information, or to register, visit slmc.ca/retreats.

March 6-7: Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist/Mennonite Studies at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo; at 7:30 p.m. each evening.

Speakers: Steve Nolt and Royden Loewen.

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

For Rent

Two bedroom semi detached condo for rent. Pondview Retirement Community, Wellesley, Ont. Includes appliances, garage, backyard. Call 519 656 3460 or email jkgerber@kw.igs.net.

Travel

Visit Europe the Mennonite Way with Mennonite Heritage Tours! Small group Hotel Tours focusing on Mennonite/ Anabaptist heritage in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Poland and Ukraine. www.mennonite-heritagetours.eu

PHOENIX (Arizona)
MENNO Guest House Bed and Breakfast welcomes families and business guests coming to the Phoenix area. Call 623-847-0314 or email phxmenno-guest@gmail.com. Visit our web site www.hospitalityservicescenter.org.

Employment Opportunities

Lead Pastor

Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church seeks a full time lead pastor, seeking to fulfill the Great Commission found in Matthew 28. Contact by email - search.bergie@gmail.com

Brussels Mennonite Fellowship is seeking a 1/2 to 3/4 time pastor. Start date: Fall 2014. For more details please go to www.bmfchurch.com

COLUMBIA BIBLE COLLEGE (Abbotsford, BC)

Worship Arts Faculty/Program Director

Full time faculty position (75% teaching, 25% admin), providing leadership to the Worship Arts Program. Start: 08/16/14. Full details: columbiabc.edu/careers

COLUMBIA BIBLE COLLEGE (Abbotsford, BC)

Biblical Studies Faculty

Full time teaching faculty position in New Testament. Doctorate and/or 5 years min experience preferred. Start: 08/16/14. Full details: columbiabc.edu/careers

Employment Opportunity MCCO

Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, a growing Anabaptist relief, development and peace agency, seeks three creative, strategic leadership persons:

Associate Director
Revenue Development Director
Financial Controller

For more information see:
<http://serve.mcc.org/positions/employment>
Postings close February 28, 2014



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Responsible to oversee and implement a comprehensive fundraising strategy and program to financially support the mission of CMU.

More information:

cmu.ca/employment.php

Call 204.487.3300 or Email hrdirector@cmu.ca



Employment Opportunity

VINELAND UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH invites applications for the FULL TIME position of LEAD MINISTER. We are located in a semi rural community in the heart of Ontario's Niagara Peninsula.

We are seeking a person who is committed to an Anabaptist understanding of faith and theology, deeply rooted in biblical teaching, a confident preacher, excels in developing relationships with the congregation and willing to work as part of the leadership team. Candidates should have previous pastoral experience, a Masters of Divinity or equivalent is preferred. Start time is negotiable.

Please submit inquiries, resumes and references by February 15, 2014 to:

Henry Paetkau, Area Church Minister,
Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
#201 - 50 Kent Ave.,
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3R1
Tel: 226-476-2500 *704 or 855-476-2500
Email: hpaetkau@mcec.ca

PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Many people hang Advent calendars in their homes in the weeks leading up to Christmas, but Wes and Gwen Ens of Rosthern, Sask., added a creative twist to their holiday decorating in 2013 by making their garage door into an Advent calendar. The calendar is made up of 24 reversible fabric panels depicting the story of God's involvement in human lives from creation to the birth of Christ. The Enses, who are members of Eigenheim Mennonite Church near Rosthern, wanted their Christmas decorations to be Christ-centred, and thought it might be interesting for passers-by to see the progress as each successive day revealed a new picture. They tried to keep their designs simple so they would be easier to craft, and so they would be more easily recognizable from a distance. Of the responses to their project, Gwen says people would often drive by very slowly, while Wes says neighbour children came daily to see what picture had been revealed.



God at work over Christmas Snapshots

PHOTO BY FLORENCE DRIEDGER



Members and guests of Peace Mennonite Church in Regina enjoy cross-cultural feasting and visiting at the annual Christmas banquet, held Dec. 14, 2013. International Volunteer Exchange Program participant Nelson Martenez of Colombia, left, visits with Margaret Jacob and Zahara Alli, who came to Saskatchewan's capital as refugees from Sudan some years ago; and Farida Uwimbabazi and Sylvie Nyakabwa, both of whom came as refugees from Congo. Farida serves as a deacon at Peace Mennonite. While they may not have come in from the highways and the byways, banquet guests each year include people who are lonely or who are new to Canada and individuals moving into the community through Circles of Support and Accountability. Over the years, attendance has ranged from 25 to 60 people, and each Christmas sees newcomers joining the group.