

CANADIAN MENNONITE

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The 100 percent clean comedian

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EDITORIAL

CoSA: cautious optimism

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

Programmers and volunteers of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) across the country happily got word of a reversal of a federal government decision to cut funding that helps keep sexual offenders from reoffending.

CoSA is a highly successful program that matches a circle of volunteers with offenders convicted of serious sex crimes, such as rape and pedophilia, just as offenders are completing their prison sentences. The nationwide program operates in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and New Brunswick.

"MCC's long history with CoSAs have shown they are the best way to protect public safety, working with dangerous offenders in the most cost-effective way while also providing a chance for someone who has sexually offended to turn their life around and live offence-free," said Stephen Siemens, restorative justice coordinator for MCC Canada.

The trained volunteers offer help with basic things such as finding offenders a place to live or a doctor, but they also provide a support network the offenders can turn to if they feel themselves being drawn back into their former criminal habits. They reduce the isolation of the offenders, many of whom have few supports and little or no family connections.

But CoSA programmers were subjected to a big scare late last month when they received calls and e-mails that the

program, set up with a pilot project \$1.5 million grant from Correctional Service Canada (CSC), would expire on March 31. Since it was a pilot program, the government is not legally bound to continue it, according to a spokesperson.



It was a short-sighted fiscal decision. It is much cheaper to rehabilitate offenders, Tajinder Kainth, a CoSA volunteer from Kitchener, Ont., told the local newspaper. "The Circles program costs \$325,000 a year to support about 155 offenders in several Ontario cities, while it costs about \$110,000 a year to house a single male inmate in Canada."

Go figure. This is not good economics, let alone moral or ethical.

We hope the most recent decision not to cut the funding sticks. It is a jittery time in Ottawa right now, with the present government determined to cut everything it can to balance the budget in time for elections next year. Much higher on its "crime and punishment" agenda is a focus on crime victims, rather than the rehabilitation of offenders. That is too bad.

Canadian Mennonites have deep ownership in CoSA, which has its roots in the ministry of Harry Nigh, then-pastor of the Welcome Inn Church of Hamilton, Ont. Nigh formed a group of volunteers who pioneered the concept of surrounding offenders with a caring circle, a model that has proliferated across Canada and into the United Kingdom, Europe and the U.S.

"There are presently over 30 individual

CoSA projects worldwide, all based in part on the innovative model developed over the past 20 years in Canada," said Robin J. Wilson, a former CSC psychologist. "But the funding for it in Canada has always been tenuous."

Wilson recounted a trip to Ottawa in 1996 by CSC and delegates from MCC Ontario with then-Solicitor General Herb Gray; CoSA was initially turned down. Gray did concede, eventually, that while the government had no legal obligation there was a moral responsibility for providing these services to offenders. On that basis, a funding structure was established that has seen CoSA supported over 18 years.

We hope the original vision can be restored and kept intact. A lot of credit goes to local politicians like Harold Albrecht, the Kitchener-Conestoga MP and a member of the Brethren in Christ communion, who, when hearing of the cutback, got on the phone to Steven Blaney, the minister of public safety and emergency preparedness; as well as to Health Minister Rona Ambrose, who also spoke with Blaney to push for restoration.

The restoration of \$650,000 to a \$2.2-million-per-year program is appreciated, but is only a drop in the bucket when you hear the news of much larger sums of tax dollars going toward more prisons and harsher prison sentences.

CoSA currently has 600 to 700 volunteers working with high-risk offenders around the country, CoSA spokesperson Andrew McWhinnie told the *Edmonton Journal*. Federal government studies have shown a 70 percent to 83 percent reduction in sexual re-offences by those who take part in the program.

Those are the hard facts from the government. What motivates us as Anabaptist Christians is Jesus' mandate: "When in prison, you visited me" (Matthew 25:36).

ABOUT THE COVER:

Born and raised in Niverville, Man., Matt Falk began performing stand-up at the age of 17 after seeing comedians like Ellen DeGeneres and Robin Williams on TV. 'I just wanted to be like them so badly,' he recalls. 'I think that's what motivated me.' Our Focus on Funny feature begins on page 4.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MATT FALK

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Hebrews 10:23-25 • Accuracy, fairness, balance • Editorial freedom •

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- Funding cut for MCC's Circles of Support and Accountability
- Three new bloggers begin posting from the Middle East, Colombia and Canada. Visit <http://www.canadianmennonite.org/blogs>
- An update from the Mennonite Disaster Service volunteers in High River, Alta.

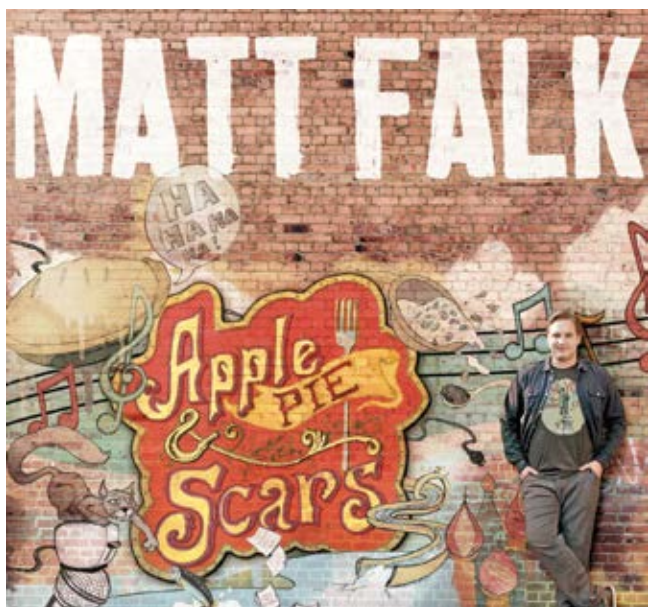
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The 100 percent clean comedian

Matt Falk says, 'Vulgarity is no substitute for wit'

BY AARON EPP

YOUNG VOICES CO-EDITOR



Written over the course of five years, the material on Apple Pie & Scars includes bits about food, weight loss, pop music and Falk's religious upbringing.

Matt Falk recalls one of his worst gigs from the beginning of his career as a comedian. He was hired to perform at a corporate event, and during his 30-minute set the audience barely chuckled.

The people in the club mostly just stared at Falk and talked among themselves. At the end, he wished the crowd a good night and began making his way to the exit. The emcee grabbed the microphone and made Falk the butt of his next few jokes, saying, "Well, you can't win 'em all." The audience erupted with laughter.

"Technically, I was the one who made them laugh," Falk recalls with a chuckle. "If you really think about it, I was the one who brought them all together in the end. And hey, I got paid."

Falk no longer bombs the way he did that night, and in the years since he has established a promising career that, along with stand-up appearances at comedy clubs, theatres and churches, has included acting on television and writing popular dinner theatre shows.

In 2010, he placed second out of 285 contestants in the World Series of Comedy in Las Vegas, netting him 16 weeks of work across the U.S. His debut album, *Apple Pie & Scars*, debuted at No. 1 on the iTunes comedy chart upon its release at the end of 2012, and TheSeriousComedySite.com listed it as one of the Top 10 Comedy Albums of 2013, alongside the latest release by the legendary Bill Cosby. The CBC has described Falk as "effortlessly funny," and renowned Canadian comedian Ron James once called him "a genius child."

"There are days when I have to pinch myself," Falk says. "Like, 'This is what I do for a living? This is how I make money?' This is exactly what I want to do. This is my dream job."

Not bad for a 24-year-old of Russian Mennonite descent whose upbringing and faith in Jesus Christ inform the way he conducts himself on and off the stage.

Dream come true

Born in April 1989 and raised in Niverville, Man., 30 kilometres south of Winnipeg, Falk started entertaining audiences when he was 15 by performing magic at children's birthday parties.

Falk online

- Learn more about Matt Falk at www.mattfalkcomedy.com
- Falk on Mennonites: <http://bit.ly/MZf2DU>
- Falk on his Russian grandpa: <http://bit.ly/1mFx8ei>

FOCUS ON FUNNY

Two years later, he started doing stand-up at school talent shows and local fairs, cracking jokes about puberty, his hometown and his family.

Falk fell in love with comedy at an early age, watching comedians like Ellen DeGeneres and Robin Williams on TV. Their hilarity captivated him. “I just wanted to be like them so badly, so I think that’s what motivated me to get into [comedy],” he says by phone from the Niverville home he shares with his wife Sabrina.

Falk likens his early forays into comedy to playing, the way a child might see a doctor and pretend to be a doctor during

Television System called *Summer Camp*; written or co-written three popular shows at Winnipeg’s Celebrations Dinner Theatre; filmed a web series called *Out in the Cold*; and toured throughout the country.

“Every year we get more and more bookings, every year it grows, and that’s incredibly exciting,” Falk says, adding that he headlined in Ottawa for the first time last year. “The number of gigs is increasing, but so is the quality of gigs.”

Informed by faith

Part of what makes Falk accessible to—and popular with—a wide range of audi-

says. “If you can come up with a way to present the joke without swearing, then you spent the time and put the effort in to craft a better joke.”

Falk is currently working on a new hour of material that he hopes to record this year and release in both CD and DVD formats. In late March, he will perform throughout southern Ontario as part of The Circuit, a clean comedy tour sponsored by World Vision Canada. On April 11, another one of Falk’s dreams will come true when he appears at the popular Winnipeg Comedy Festival, and he will spend the last two weeks of April in Ottawa performing a number of shows

PHOTOS BY CODY GOETZ



playtime. “I dreamed of being [a comedian] and that dream never left me. I just kept playing, as it were.”

His salesman father and his mother, who runs a daycare, were both supportive, driving him to performances. Faith was always important to the family, and Falk was baptized as a teenager at Niverville Mennonite Church, now known as Niverville Community Fellowship.

By his late teens, Falk was appearing at Rumor’s Comedy Club in Winnipeg, and in 2008 he became the youngest comic in history to headline at the club.

After placing second in the World Series of Comedy, Falk and his wife relocated to Abbotsford, B.C., for six months, and then to Toronto for two years, to pursue career opportunities and make industry connections in larger centres. In the past four years, he has written for and acted on RocKids TV, a Bible-based television series for children aged 4 to 10; filmed a pilot for Crossroads

ences is that his act is 100 percent clean, meaning it is free of vulgar material.

This approach to comedy is informed by his faith. He references James 3:12: “Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.” For Falk, who sees his comedy career as a ministry, saying filthy jokes on stage and then trying to tell people about Jesus in the same breath just wouldn’t work.

“It doesn’t make sense for my stage character to be swearing or cursing,” he says. “I don’t do it in my everyday life, so it doesn’t make sense to write like that. I feel I’m a better representation of Christ when I choose my words wisely and I’m not making people feel uncomfortable.”

While writing clean is a challenge, it’s also fun, he says. Sometimes when writing, he knows adding a swear to a bit would get a laugh in a comedy club, so the challenge becomes figuring out how he can get a laugh without using the swear.

“Vulgarity is no substitute for wit,” he

at the Absolute Comedy Club.

“Other than my wife, my backing is Christ,” Falk says. “He’s been the one who’s given us all the favours and opened all the doors, and brought us to the place we are now. We ask questions and we listen, and we move forward to what we believe he is leading us toward.” ❧

Matt Falk will perform on April 12 at Douglas Mennonite Church in Winnipeg as part of Canadian Mennonite’s annual meeting and banquet. The banquet starts at 6 p.m. and will celebrate the magazine with food, fun and fellowship. In addition to Falk, the evening will include a musical performance by the Winnipeg Children’s Choir and a presentation by Dick Benner, editor/publisher of Canadian Mennonite. Tickets are free. A call for donations will be made at the end of the night. This is a fundraising event that is open to all Mennonite churches. Space is limited. To reserve tickets, e-mail Carl DeGurse at cdegurse@cmu.ca or call 204-632-7609.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

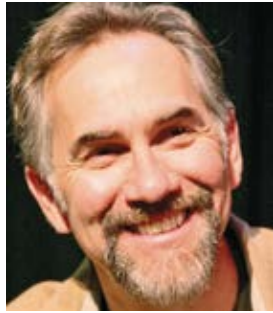
Laughter is sacred space

TED SWARTZ

TED & COMPANY THEATERWORKS

Laughter has always been a huge part of my working career, working as a writer and actor in comedic theater.

Most etymologists, those who study where words come from, believe that the word “humour” is derived from the same root as the words “human,” “humility” and—my favourite—“humus,” meaning “of the earth, connected to the dirt, soil”—that which makes things grow, where things are real, gritty and full of



nutrients. To laugh is to be grounded in the best possible way. A sense of humour is a proclamation that I am fully human.

It is a sacred space.

On a path to be a Mennonite pastor, I had gone back to school at age 30 in order to prepare for seminary, along with three small children, a supportive wife and a congregation sponsoring us. While an undergrad I took an acting class, and fell in love with this art form.

When actors are free to experiment, it can be the most exhilarating place on earth. Acting onstage can be like falling in love, when the creative spirit jumps out of you and begins dancing with the spirits of the others in the scene, when the sparks are almost visible, when you can feel the cords of energy connecting you to your acting partner, when you feel the audience leaning forward, wanting to share in the same energy. Where you come offstage and ask, with wonder and awe, “What just happened there? And when can we do it again, feel that again?”

In those acting classes and

TED & COMPANY THEATERWORKS PHOTO



Ted Swartz in a scene from Laughter is Sacred Space.

FOCUS ON FUNNY

productions, I discovered the mystical and spiritual life for the first time. Theatre helped me to see the world of the invisible, showing that forces greater than ourselves are at work and play in the world. I had discovered who I was: I was an actor.

At around that same time, I met Lee Eshleman, who became my comedic soul mate, and for the next 20 years we created six full-length theatrical and comedy shows, carved out a business and a full-time living in the performing arts—a task

We were exploring life and sacred texts with an eye toward what was askew, peculiar and, above all, where was the funny? Always, what was funny?

of love, sweat and determination.

We were exploring life and sacred texts with an eye toward what was askew, peculiar and, above all, where was the funny? Always, what was funny? It was a celebration of laughter as a healing art, a teaching method, an absolute affirmation that humour is a profound and indispensable societal lubricant.

Much of our material was mining the humour in the biblical story. We felt if you could find the humour inherent there, you would discover a deeper human story, and then perhaps come to a greater understanding of the ongoing dynamic, frustrating, mystifying relationship between God and humankind.

Lee made me laugh more than anyone ever had before. It was the genesis of our relationship and the glue that enabled us to endure conflicts in creative decision-making, not to mention some years spending more time together than we did with our spouses.

Transferring to the stage what made the two of us laugh was the simple formula of writing and performing live. We were each other's incubator partner; if it made us laugh, there was an excellent chance it would do so for an audience.

Laughter was our method of illuminating both our relationship with the people we met and performed for, but also a way to understand the world, as well as

God—until Lee's suicide in 2007.

And the laughter pretty much stopped for me.

Lee had been dealing with depression pretty much the entire time of our friendship and creative partnership, and that spring he lost the battle. Lee's struggle was a paradox: Someone who made so many people laugh, and consequently embrace their full humanness, had profound doubts about his worthiness and connection to the God we wrote so much about.

His death destroyed the business and cast into doubt whether I could continue writing and performing for a living. It was difficult to envision being able to induce laughter from the stage, but it was equally difficult to envision a life without theatre.

I would say, five years later,* I'm certainly not an expert on healing or being a survivor of suicide. I will say, though, that theatre and art still hold keys to my identity and recovery. In those five years, I

wrote plays, creating and producing in an almost manic manner, paradoxically both running from and embracing grief, anger and guilt. Not coincidentally, perhaps, it produced some of my best work.

The laughter, like a dormant perennial, began to return.

Laughter never stopped being sacred space; it just took me a while to find that space again.

Art, theatre and laughter were the barometers and light posts back from my own depression and grief. While humour remains the launch point for all my work, it's different now. There is a depth, a shadow, a perception only earned through grief and determination.

Loss changes you—grief changes. In the words of a character of mine written in 2008: "In this life there is grace, but never enough . . . there is peace but never enough . . . there is love . . . but never enough . . . but we take what we have . . . which is never enough . . . we break it and we pass it out."

Lee used to say laughter is a sign that we are never too far from the love of God. I believe he was right.

** This blog entry originally appeared Sept. 20, 2012, on the Huffington Post website. Reprinted by permission of the author.*

/// For discussion

1. What kind of jokes make you laugh? Why do we value a sense of humour? When can laughter be disrespectful or inappropriate? What is the tipping point where there is too much laughter? How do you interpret Ecclesiastes 7:3: "*Sorrow is better than laughter because a sad face is good for the heart*"?
2. Matt Falk says, "Vulgarity is no substitute for wit." Why do so many comics use vulgar language? Do you agree that a clean joke is a better joke? Is it inappropriate to laugh at a dirty joke?
3. Ted Swartz says that "laughter is sacred space." What do you think he means? How is laughter different if there is grief behind it? How do you interpret the old saying, "Laughter is the best medicine"?
4. Do you ever think of God as laughing? What might make God laugh? Does it make you uncomfortable if someone interprets the Bible to make it funny? Should we have more Mennonite comedians?

—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.

✉ MCC should consider new partner in Gaza

RE: "FLOODING WORSENS Gazans' plight," Jan. 20, page 19.

I am pleased to hear that Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is actively involved in relieving the Gazan people from the devastation caused by flooding in December. This action is an answer to the call of God to help those in need.

But I am appalled by the bitter, false and accusatory words of MCC's partner in Gaza, Al Najd Development Forum, against the nation of Israel. Al Najd claims the flooding caused by rainfall was worsened by Israel opening dams east of Gaza.

This is an utterly false accusation, and one viciously perpetrated by Gaza's Hamas government. The *Christian Post* provided a quote by Uri Schor, a spokesman for Israel's Water Authority, who stated: "The allegation of [Israel] opening dams and flooding

FROM OUR LEADERS

Encouraging parents

KATHY GIESBRECHT

I've been a youth pastor for more than two decades and if I have any regret, besides the amount of pizza I've consumed, it is that I did not pay more attention to the parents/caregivers of the youth in my groups.

Research, particularly the recent Canadian report, "Hemorrhaging faith: Why and when Canadian young adults are leaving, staying and returning to the church," consistently points to parents as the key players in the formation of a young person's faith. This finding is not a shocker, but it was sobering to me when I reflected upon the amount of energy I had given to supporting, visiting with and praying for the parents/caregivers of the youth I had served.

One of the most beautiful circles of support I have ever witnessed was a circle of parents who would meet together each Sunday morning. Their

time together was simple. They read some words from a parenting book, shared their stories, offered support and encouragement, and held each other in prayer. My sense was that this Sunday morning circle provided the understanding, solidarity and hope that were not being offered them anywhere else, and that it was sorely needed.

I sometimes wonder what would have happened in the congregations I've served if I had offered retreats, regular group meetings, one-on-one coffee times or at least a Friday night bowling outing to the parents/caregivers! This wondering leads me to challenge us to consider making support for parents/caregivers a priority as we continue to renew our practice of youth ministry.

There are wonderful shifts happening in the ways our congregations are accompanying youth, and after reading a variety of recent research reports I'm thinking one good shift would be to pay

more attention to the people our youth call Mom and Dad. If these parents/caregivers are not part of our congregation, our supportive efforts could potentially be a welcome gift.

On page 113 of the 138-page "Hemorrhaging faith" report, in the section where the implications of the research were being explored, I read this: "Parents need to be encouraged to model their own faith for their children and to articulate how God works in their lives and their children's lives, and thus engage in their children's spiritual journeys."

Modelling and articulating faith is no small calling; it is a responsibility that lays heavy upon the hearts of parents. As we walk into new forms and expressions of youth ministry, may we find ourselves shaping our ministries in such a way that they are offering the deep encouragement and support parents/caregivers need as they walk the day-in, day-out journey of life with their children.

Kathy Giesbrecht is associate director of leadership ministries for Mennonite Church Manitoba.



the Gaza Strip is baseless and false.” Israel’s authorities have stated that the dams it is accused of opening don’t even exist.

Further, MCC’s partner blamed the Israeli “occupation,” which *Canadian Mennonite* clarifies as meaning Israel’s control of supplies and people in and out of Gaza.

While I agree with Al Najd that Israel’s management

of its border is a frustration to the Gazan people, it is absolutely necessary, considering Gaza’s government is classified as a terrorist organization not only by Israel but also by Canada.

Israel’s purpose in managing its border is not to harm its neighbour, but to ensure its own continued existence as a nation and a people. This is a reasonable and necessary policy in light of an existential threat.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Give a crown today

PHIL WAGLER

The Olympic Games came and went, and Canada won hockey gold again. I intended to get up early to watch the men’s final game. On the Pacific coast that meant 4 a.m., and thanks to our new baby girl, who cried me awake, I was up. I sat in my comfy chair and promptly fell asleep before the puck dropped. I woke up to see medals being placed around the necks of the Canadian guys. They were gold. Apparently we had won.

The Canadians dominated that tournament. In six games, they allowed three goals. They didn’t score much, but they didn’t have to. It was clinical and surgical. However, for most of the Games there was endless criticism and negativity about how the team was performing. It was typically Canadian. We flip-flop easily between sarcastic self-congratulation and self-conscious negativity. Both are the way we deal with our national angst and search for significance, I think.

I am struck with how this also shows up in our churches.

At one end of the continuum there are camps of Christians who heap negativity on those human systems that are trapped by sin. These Christians are deeply critical, protesting in nature, always pointing the finger—prophetically they claim—at the perceived wrongs of those systems human beings find themselves

sometimes serving and sometimes struggling within. Ironically, pacifists can seem like the angriest people on the planet.

At the other end are those Christians who heap negativity on those individuals trapped by their choices or simply hit by the fallout of life in an imperfect world. These people only see individuals as sinners. They love to harp on those who do “wrong” or “live in sin.” The fervent evangelist can be utterly joyless.

Notice the common thread of negativity. The result of this is a mission of negativity in our culture that is already trapped in negativity, our rabid criticism over our winning teams standing out as a cultural example. It makes me wonder if our way of life as a church is shaped more

Ironically, pacifists can seem like the angriest people on the planet.

by our culture’s dysfunction than our king’s declaration?

I am not saying that sin-stained systems or sin-marred people should not be prophetically named or invited into the salvation of Jesus. At issue is not this message, it’s that we’re so blasted negative about it, and I think we’re actually out of step with our Lord on this.

When Jesus described his mission, he quoted Isaiah 61 (see Luke 4:14-20). This was his mission statement and he eventually says we are sent as he was (John

20:21). Isaiah 61 is a thoroughly positive word. The Spirit of the Lord is upon the Messiah to proclaim good news, bind up the broken-hearted and proclaim the season of God’s favour. His mission is to bestow crowns of beauty on people instead of ashes, oil of joy instead of mourning, praiseworthy clothes in exchange for cloaks of despair. God is seeking to turn people into the proof of his strength and splendour. How can this be negative?

Here’s my growing conviction: We should stop trying to put people in their place, and instead join Jesus in placing crowns of beauty on those who have believed they are worthless and are mourning because of the mess of a sin-tainted world. We should cease heaping burdens on people neither we nor they can carry, and instead show and tell the implications of the good news of the kingdom alive in the community of the king who wore a crown of thorns that we may wear a crown of beauty.

Yes, this will confront sinful systems and it will call individuals to repentance, but it will finally make room for the convicting and freeing work of the Holy Spirit, rather than highlight our self-righteous negativity. You who follow Jesus have received mercy and have been brought into the kingdom of his light, so stop being so grumpy and find someone today to give a crown to.

Phil Wagler (phil_wagler@yahoo.ca) lives in Surrey, B.C.



Israel is a beacon of light in the region, upholding similar values as Canada, including the rule of law, democracy and tolerance. These values are reflected in its parliament, which allows both Arabs and Jews to participate equally in the political process.

It is unfortunate that MCC's partner focused its comments on Israel making "this natural disaster a catastrophe," rather than on Israel's actions to save its

enemy from catastrophe. Schor further stated in the *Post* article: "Due to the damage caused by the storm—which affected all neighbouring countries and not only the Palestinian Authority—Israel responded to a special appeal conveyed through the UN, transferring four high-power pumps to the Gaza Strip intended to help residents remove water from flooded areas."

I am deeply disturbed that MCC's partner is using

NEW ORDER VOICE

An ear tuned to lament

KATIE DOKE SAWATZKY

I've never been to a Mennonite church conference before. I'm a little late. I find my name tag on the table, hook it onto the lanyard provided. I'm welcomed by Janette, the administrator I talked to about childcare before registering. She tells me to sit anywhere. I choose a table near the back.

I've come to hear the speaker, Rick Faw, the education director for A Rocha, a Christian conservation organization. He is set to speak about the "theological and missional implications of creation care." My family and I spent a day at A Rocha's Brooksdale Environmental Centre in Surrey, B.C., in the fall. It's a beautiful place and the staff are committed to community building around ecological sustainability.

But really, I'm curious what he will tell the church about, well, environmentalism.

As he begins his session, it quickly becomes evident that his talk will be an introduction for people new to the idea of earth-care as a spiritual practice or call from God. He recites Bible verses supporting "the earth-keeping dimension of discipleship" and invites us to "join God in his work of redeeming all things" by beginning to think of ways to care for nature. Two of his suggestions are to "cultivate wonder and gratitude" and to "get to know your place."



Sigh. I realize I'm not going to hear what I want to hear. He doesn't mention any alarming statistics and only vaguely alludes to the effects of climate change. This isn't to say he doesn't know about them or believe them. I'm sure he does. But it seems he's decided that to motivate people to act, you've got to encourage them, present the glass as half full, ready to be topped up. Give a comforting picture: wonder, gratitude, caring for the earth, beauty.

Sure. But I don't think you can start there, and I particularly don't think the church can start there. Before redemptive change happens, isn't there first woe, lament and repentance?

What I long to hear someone say to the church is that the earth is dying. This land we live on and take from, over and over and over, is dying a lamentable death. Living beings—animals, birds, trees and flowers, sea-swimmers and

This land we live on and take from, over and over and over, is dying a lamentable death.

plants—those we claim to be stewards of, are dying because of our over-consumption and dominion. Woe to us.

I guess I want to hear a prophet. I want to see her wring her hands and shout at the top of her lungs from the back of the sanctuary . . . or church basement.

Thankfully, the Mennonite church is open to hosting such a voice, albeit on

paper. Last year, Herald Press released *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice and Life Together*. The book is a collection of settler and indigenous voices that lament the effects of colonialism and "sound . . . a common warning: the controlling [settler-colonial] culture is violently sick, devastating peoples and lands. The need is urgent: repent, resist, do something."

In these pages I've encountered prophetic voices that inspire me. In the introduction, the book's editor, Steve Heinrichs, envisions a Cree woman, a buffalo and young Salmon boy disrupting his church service, breaking into the back of the sanctuary and running to the front. The woman says, "Listen . . . my cousins! We can't bear it any longer! . . . Don't you feel the catastrophe that's coming, that's here, that's been for far too long? Shattered peoples all around; shattered lands right below. Manitou Ahbee, this place where Spirit sits, is weeping a death cry because of this civilization's culture-fracking ways."

I appreciate Rick Faw's talk. He works for conservation in hope that the earth

will be renewed, inviting others to join him. But for inspiration and motivation, my ear is tuned to voices of lamenting prophets inside and outside the Mennonite church, even if, for now, they linger on the page.

Katie Doke Sawatzky (katiesawatzky@gmail.com) lives in Vancouver.

the media's coverage of an MCC humanitarian effort as an opportunity to defame its neighbour. I suggest that MCC consider supporting a different partner in its beautiful and important goal of relieving the suffering of those in need: one who loves the Gazan, Palestinian, Israeli Arab and Israeli Jew alike.

ANDREW PINNELL, NEW HAMBURG, ONT.

✉ Proposed charter is nothing but Québec government 'fearmongering'

RE: "PROPOSED QUÉBEC charter not a threat to religious freedom" letter, Feb. 3, page 11.

The Québec Charter of Values has nothing to do with the separation of church and state. The phrase, "separation of church and state," coined by American president Thomas Jefferson, refers to the lack of intense collaboration between the institutions of organized religion and the institutions of the state. Such was the case with the Church of England in the 18th century and, to a lesser extent, remains the case today, as bishops still sit in the House of Lords. It does not, however, refer to separating one's religious beliefs from one's political actions. A politician who can compartmentalize his convictions is a populist of the worst kind.

Many are the folks in the pages of *Canadian Mennonite* who advocate for nonviolence, which is a core Mennonite value. Since violence is often an intensely political issue, is that not an example of one's religion interfering with politics? The fact is, people only object to religious beliefs if they are being used to support an issue they already disagree with. If I said that God told me we need to lower unemployment, I doubt there would be a lot of people crying foul about religious interference.

Like religion, most political ideologies are not based on the scientific method. How is a politician influenced by his religious beliefs any different than a politician influenced by Karl Marx? What is Marxism but an atheistic religion practised by millions, that has frankly been a lot less successful than Christianity?

If you are worried that someone sporting a certain symbol won't treat you fairly, that says more about your own insecurities. As a middle-class person, should I be worried that someone in a Che Guevara T-shirt might execute me and redistribute my wealth? There are various laws, rules and regulations already in place to prohibit discrimination and to guide people on how to properly do their jobs. This so-called Charter of Values is nothing but fearmongering by a government upset by lack of support for separatism.

BENJAMIN WEBER, KITCHENER, ONT.

✉ Conversation starters about the Bible and homosexuality

AFTER READING MENNONITE Church Canada's "Being a Faithful Church 5: Between the horizons: Biblical perspectives on human sexuality," I felt that starting a conversation about the Bible and homosexuality on the basis of this document might be difficult.

Therefore, I am providing three statements that might help get a conversation going:

- "HOMOSEXUALITY AS an 'orientation' is not and cannot be wrong—it just is; at issue is whether gays and lesbians should be celibate or may express their sexuality within a loving, committed relationship." (Loren I. Johns, "Homosexuality and the Bible," ©1998, 2012)
- "FIFTEEN REASONS why I have changed my mind." (Roberta Showalter Kreider, © 1995, 2006)
- "THE CRUX of the matter, it seems to me, is simply that the Bible has no sex ethic. There is no biblical sex ethic. The Bible knows only a love ethic. . . . Approached from the point of view of love, rather than law, the issue is at once transformed. Now the question is not, 'What is permitted?' but rather, 'What does it mean to love my homosexual neighbour?'" (*Christian Century*, Nov. 1979, page 112)

I hope that some may find the above helpful in conversing about the Bible and homosexuality.

JIM SUDERMAN, WINNIPEG

✉ Don't be distracted by the opposites of light and darkness

RE: "HOMOSEXUALITY NOT necessarily a God-given condition" letter, Feb. 3, page 10.

Yes, we are created in the image of God and our bodies were created from the dust of this earth. As we desire to embrace a divine reality, we must also respect our humanity.

I don't believe we can fully embrace God without first recognizing the significance of our roots. A tree cannot grow without appreciating its ties to the dark mystery found in the earth. We are all inherently drawn to God in the same way a tree is drawn to the sun.

God loves and desires everyone, and yet we are not always receptive. We cannot continue to be distracted by the opposites. Extreme light or extreme darkness leave us in poverty. One makes us blind; the other drains our soul.

Scripture all on its own is just words, and yet those words were derived from experience in the natural

world. Are we listening to the simple truths found in our experience as we attempt to discern what Scripture is trying to say? I am not always certain. Let love be our guide.

JOHN GASCHO, WARMAN, SASK.

✉ **Biblical prohibitions against homosexuality don't make sense today**

RE: "HOMOSEXUALITY NOT necessarily 'a God-given condition' letter, Feb. 3, page 10.

Brent Kipfer states, "Even if it no longer makes sense to many in our postmodern age, I trust that Scripture's prohibition of homosexual sexual relationships reflects the . . . holy love of God." This raises two questions for me. Do these passages truly reflect the holy love of God? Does it matter that they no longer make sense to many people?

The passages that specifically prohibit homosexual acts are found in Leviticus 18-20 and Romans 1. The Leviticus passage calls homosexual acts "an abomination." Paul calls them "unnatural." Both passages call for people who commit these acts to be put to death. It is difficult to imagine how someone with a homosexual orientation could receive this as loving correction.

But what about holiness? It is important here to think about what we mean when we talk about God's holiness. Does a holy God rigidly enforce a set of eternally unchanging laws? Or does God meet us where we are and show us the way to holiness within our specific culture and circumstances?

Both biblical passages that mention homosexuality tell us not to imitate the godless culture or society that surrounds us. And this is good advice. But today we know that homosexuality is not linked to culture or to godlessness. It is innate.

We know this not because those secular post-modernists have convinced us of it. We know this because people who have grown up in our Mennonite congregations, people who live holy, godly lives, are telling us that it is so. These people are attempting to live out their sexuality in a godly way, just as heterosexual Christians do.

This is why these biblical prohibitions of homosexual behaviour do not make sense not only to people outside the church, but also to many within our churches. In my opinion, the Bible has many correctives to offer North American society. But if God meets us where we are, then it follows that what God says makes sense. We may not always like it, but it has to make sense.

LORA BRAUN, MORDEN, MAN.

✉ **'Dismissive treatment' of letter writer concerns reader**

RE: "FAITHFUL SPEECH" editorial, Feb. 3, page 2, which references Brent Kipfer's "Homosexuality not necessarily a God-given condition" letter, Feb. 3, page 10, written in response to Gerhard Neufeld's Viewpoint column, "Unlearning the Bible to welcome homosexuals," Jan. 6, page 15.

I applaud the editorial decision in printing Kipfer's letter. However, the "Faithful speech" editorial, as I read it, is dismissive of his view and thereby those who share it.

I quote: "In response to Gerhard Neufeld's 'Unlearning the Bible to welcome homosexuals' column . . . Kipfer in this issue uses the Scripture—as Neufeld warns—to insist that the Bible's 'prohibition of homosexual relationships reflects the same holy love of God. We do no one any favours by unlearning that.'"

Whether I agree or disagree with Kipfer, it seems to me this dismissive treatment reveals a bias within which it is difficult to carry on an open and respectful discussion within *Canadian Mennonite* on the issue of sexuality currently in process.

HERMAN J. WIEBE, SWIFT CURRENT, SASK.

✉ **The church must not compromise with the world**

IT IS WITH mixed feelings and concern that I write. Our church has changed considerably over the years; it almost no longer resembles the church I grew up in during the 1970s and '80s. There has been compromising and undermining the Word.

It's interesting that some who left the mainline churches because of liberalism, secularism, acceptance and inclusiveness have told me with surprise that they now see the same trends emerging in the Mennonite church.

Sadly, it seems our churches are now deteriorating because of the deceptive liberalism of some in leadership. They have accepted and embrace much of the beliefs of secular society, which we know is exactly what Christ and the apostles preached and taught against in the New Testament. There is no way we can walk in the ways of the world and expect to walk with Christ also.

I work with mostly unchurched people and those of other beliefs, many of whom practise homosexuality. Most of them understand my stance and eventually come to admit theirs is a deceptive lifestyle that they aren't ready to give up. These people respect my beliefs and wonder why the churches are now so accommodating of sin, yet the very people who are critical and judgmental of my views and the Word are Christians.

Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6), and that we are to pick up our cross, follow him and sin no more. We must preach the Christ who came and died in humility. We must not take offence to the blood and the cross, for by his blood and death he paid for our salvation. Yet so many want to make them palatable by denying or sanitizing some or all of this reality. We must repent of sin and not accommodate it. Rather, we must accommodate him.

Many Christians live in ignorance of the Word of God. We live in a time in which there are more Bibles and access to Scripture than ever before. Yet most Christians are functionally biblically illiterate. They would rather be spoon fed, relying on what they get second hand. If they don't hear what their itching ears want, they move on until they find what they want to hear.

We must be a Bible-believing and Bible-teaching church, not reinventing the Word of God.
ARNOLD THIESSEN, BATH, ONT.

✉ **Don't waste time on 'narrow definitions of a faithful lifestyle'**

RE: "BE CAREFUL what the church is 'shifting' from" letter, Feb. 3, page 7.

When I read letters like the one from Angela Harder, I feel perplexed and saddened.

Her argument that yoga and other non-biblical forms of meditation and prayer are somehow a contaminating threat to pure Christianity is a clear example of the fearful myopia that grips so many believers in North America today. Too many Christians are wasting time and energy defending their own narrow definitions of a faithful lifestyle.

I offer this beautiful passage as an alternative viewpoint: *"I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me"* (Philippians 4:13).

Our lives are not meant to be spent inside pious boxes that we create and try to keep others in as well. When we scratch the surface of these arguments, we see that living in fear of our evolving world is not only impractical and more than a little hypocritical, but also contrary to the way that Jesus himself lived his life. He let his God-given conscience guide him through a life lived fully within his society and culture, attending wedding parties, mourning the death of friends and celebrating Passover. He also refused to let his active faith be hemmed in by prescriptive rules and mores, challenging even the sabbath itself to heal a person in need.

A life lived in the spirit of Christ need not be rigidly restricted to a finite set of practices or styles of worship. A church focused on Christ will only fulfill its

mission if it is courageously engaged, ready and willing to grow and learn even from Dutch Catholic priests (like Menno Simons, for example), Indian yogis, Ethiopian evangelists and more.

SCOTT MORTON NINOMIYA,
ST. JOHN'S, N.L.

✉ **Reductionist view of Jesus 'simplistic and unconvincing'**

RE: "WAS JESUS just a rebel with a cause?" review, Feb. 17, page 29.

I appreciated reading Amanda Witmer's generally favourable review of Reza Aslan's book *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*. However, I found myself wondering why the reviewer chose not to deal with what I consider to be one of the more significant theses of the author, namely that the followers of Jesus after his death deliberately engaged in a dramatic transformation of Jesus' message, one which bears no resemblance to the historical Jesus.

According to the author, Jesus' followers "transformed Jesus from a revolutionary zealot to a Romanized demigod; from a man who tried and failed to free the Jews from Roman oppression, to a celestial being wholly uninterested in any earthly matters." By transforming their messiah from a fierce Jewish nationalist into a "pacifistic preacher of good works whose kingdom was not of this world," the gospel writers and Paul ensured that their new religion would not be a threat to the Romans and, in the process, developed an altogether new doctrine which, according to the author, would have been "utterly unrecognizable" by Jesus.

To make his case, Aslan is very selective as to which parts of the New Testament narrative to give credence. He discredits a wide swath of New Testament testimony in defining who Jesus was and what he taught. The death and resurrection stories are viewed by Aslan as "flat fabrications full of contradictions and inconsistencies."

Paul's conversion is seen by Aslan as a "bit of propagandistic legend created by Luke," and that Paul had no interest in the historical Jesus and his goal was to transform the historical Jesus into Jesus the "Christ," an other-worldly messianic figure who would pose no threat to the Hellenistic Roman Empire.

I found this reductionist view of Jesus as an essentially misguided, zealous revolutionary with political ambitions who dared to take on the Roman oppressors and the temple establishment—but beyond that contributed little to the radical teachings of the emerging new religion, Christianity—an interesting but simplistic and unconvincing point of view.

VICTOR FAST, LONDON., ONT.

VIEWPOINT

Speaking man to man

DON NEUFELD

MENNONITE MEN

We have an important opportunity before us as men. For decades now, women both in secular and Christian circles have been in dialogue and have raised their voices strongly to challenge traditional definitions of femininity, prescribed female roles and violence against women.

In response to recognized and experienced discrimination based on gender, women have found their voice and broadened their horizons significantly. Presumptions about biblical interpretation that have dominated for millennia have been reconsidered, leading to new understandings that have highlighted gender equality and opportunities to affirm people based on gifting apart from gender.

Although far from complete, this transformation continues to gain momentum and we all have benefitted greatly from these important social changes. We, in Mennonite Church Canada, are accustomed to women in our pulpits and in other leadership positions, who, in turn, create positive role models for girls and women of all ages. Historically, men's voices have simply been presumed to hold sway, and have spoken for both men and women without recognizing the tragic implications of patriarchal-based injustice for both women and for men.

As women have benefitted from conscious conversation as women, for women, so our opportunity as men is to look more consciously at who we are as men in our personal lives, in our marital and parenting relationships, in our vocational or recreational pursuits, and in our spiritual lives before God and with others in Christian community.

This is an opportunity long overdue. In my work as a social worker for more than 20 years, I have witnessed the damage created by gender-based injustice, violence perpetrated primarily

towards women and children by men. But increasingly, I have also come to see the damage done in men's lives as we have been expected to function within a caricature of our humanity, confined to definitions of masculinity that have valued primarily our assertive, public selves, while undervaluing and failing to nurture our healthy, broad and freely expressed emotional selves.

The resulting picture of masculinity perpetrated by centuries of social conditioning and supported by a specific theological tradition has left boys and men struggling, even while experiencing the "privilege" that males have because of our gender.

The traditional image of men and masculinity that has dominated Christendom has been eroded by rapid societal change. Some Christians, lamenting this direction in our world and tagging all sorts of social ills as the result of this trend, have attempted to re-exert a traditional vision of men and women. Through multiple avenues of teaching and media, including mass gatherings of Christian men, the message has been that to "act like a man" is "not to be a woman," to be strong and not the "weaker vessel," to be a leader and not a follower, to be stable and not emotional.

Jesus gets portrayed as a "prize fighter with a tattoo down his leg," and real men are characterized as requiring a battle, an adventure and a damsel to rescue. There is little room in this picture for pain, sadness or brokenness that many men experience in our lives. The resulting portrait of masculinity is narrow and competitive in nature, causing confusion and fear for those who may not fit well into the correct categories, a fear that one might not measure up to the markers of acceptability. Insecurity and shame are often lurking, with no safe outlet for

honest conversation.

Is this an adequate vision of masculinity? Do we, as Christian men from an Anabaptist perspective, have an alternative voice to offer in this crucial dialogue? Is this an important matter of Christian faith?

Gareth Brandt, a Columbia Bible College teacher and author, considers these questions in his book, *Under Construction: Reframing Men's Spirituality*, in which he states: "Men's self-understanding is significant in the outworking of God's salvation in the world. Men, and in particular Christian men, have been a big part of the problem over the centuries, so we must be part of the solution for the future."

Mennonite Men is a binational ministry of Mennonite Church Canada and MC U.S.A. Traditionally focused on raising funds for church capital projects, the organization has become increasingly involved in promoting opportunities for men to gather to consider God's call in our lives and to provide an Anabaptist perspective on manhood that speaks to current issues. One of its projects was to underwrite the publishing of Brandt's book in 2009.

With the initiative of Mennonite Men, three opportunities to join the conversation are being held in the coming months. On May 17, Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond, B.C., is hosting an event, "Becoming the man you want to become . . . being the man others want to become." On June 20 and 21, Brandt will join us at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg, Ont., leading men in a conversation on themes based on his book. Then in July, at the MC Canada assembly in Winnipeg, Mennonite Men will host an evening gathering, at which we will consider how we might become more actively involved in questions of gender justice, manhood and men's spirituality. For details of the events, including registration instructions, visit www.mennonitemen.org. ☸

Don Neufeld is a clinical social worker in private practice, a member of Bethany Mennonite Church, Virgil, Ont., and a Mennonite Men board member.

WOMEN WALKING TOGETHER IN FAITH

Cleaning house and Lenten resolutions

By EV BUHR

I've always liked the saying, "My house may not be clean, but my kids are happy."

I took that to heart when my kids were young and I spent a lot of time with them. I'm not sure what my excuse is now. "My house may not be clean, but I've read a lot of books," or, "My house may not be clean, but I've watched all the shows I recorded on the PVR."

Just go on Facebook and you'll find many articles on cleaning and reorganizing your house: things like finding unique storage spaces in the little cubbies under stair-treads, satirical articles on how to hide your mess away from guests' eyes, or the Ikea commercial that asks why our bedroom doors are closed when we have visitors.

I confess that the latter struck home since there are a few piles of stuff that get moved from place to place when we have guests, most often from the dining room table to the bedroom and back again when it's time for bed. Horror of horrors, does that mean I'm a hoarder who has trouble getting rid of things from my past, like the ribbons and tulle we used to decorate our wedding in 1994? Although they did come in handy at my daughter's princess birthday party six years ago.

Or maybe my Mennonite frugality of saving re-usable bags and plastic containers for leftovers gets in the way of ridding my home of stuff! But I've always thought that if I can use something in the future, I should save it.

In such a setting, it's daunting to figure out where to start the clean-up. If I start getting rid of what I don't need upstairs, then take what I "need" to the storage room, only to find that it's already full to brimming with stuff I haven't used in years, should I start with the

storage room instead? And if so, what if I get frustrated? When will I ever get upstairs?

Or what if I throw out the one thing I really should have kept and actually need? And once I've sorted and stored the stuff from the familiar piles on my dresser, will I be able to find these things in their new location?

What about my spiritual house? Do I have a storage room door that I close when guests are around? Do I clean up this house on a regular basis? There's a song on the radio by Imagine Dragons, called "Demons," that I find interesting because of the line, "Look into my eyes / it's where my demons hide." We all have things we hide and don't want others to see. Even sins forgiven are not always forgotten, and make up part of the "stuff" we carry around in our inner storage room.

Lent is a time when we can work on cleaning our inner house. There are many articles and books on the spiritual disciplines of abstinence and of engagement that may be useful:

- **DISCIPLINES OF abstinence** are ways of denying ourselves something we want or need in order to find space to better connect with God. These can include solitude, silence, fasting, honouring the sabbath, secrecy in our deeds and submission to our Lord.
- **DISCIPLINES OF engagement** are ways of connecting with God and other people in a loving and honest way. They include Bible reading, worship, prayer, soul friendship, personal reflection and service to others.

By engaging in these disciplines during Lent, we can clean out our spiritual house in preparation for Easter and new life in Christ.

Procrastinator that I am, this year during Lent I'm committing myself to spending 30 minutes each day cleaning up my spiritual house and 30 minutes cleaning up my actual house. With God's help and guidance, I'm pretty sure I can do both and even get a head start on spring cleaning.

And most likely my kids will still be happy! ☺

Ev Buhr is president of Alberta Women in Mission and office administrator at First Mennonite Church, Edmonton.



This year during Lent Ev Buhr is committing herself to spending 30 minutes each day cleaning up her spiritual house and 30 minutes cleaning up her actual house. Will you join her?

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Burgess—Tessa Marie (b. Feb. 10, 2014), to Lisa and Nathan Burgess, First Mennonite, Calgary.

Cornies—Isla Rayne (b. Jan. 31, 2014), to Brian and Sonya Cornies, North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Doell—Logan John (b. Dec. 23, 2013), to Malina and Ron Doell, Carman Mennonite, Man.

van Sintern-Dick—Leah Marie (b. Jan. 4, 2014), to Matthew and Cathrin van Sintern-Dick, North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

/// Corrections

- The featured speaker on creation care in the editorial “Eden and the Rock,” March 3, page 4, was Rick Faw, not Rick Paw. Also, A Rocha is 30 years old, not 20, as was erroneously stated.
- Walter Thiessen, who was honoured with a tribute concert earlier this year, died on Sept. 30, 2013. His date of death was incorrectly referenced in “Artbeat Snapshots,” Feb. 3, page 26.
- Riverton, Man., was last host to the North American Native Assembly in 2004. Incorrect information appeared in the “CMU site of this summer’s North American Native Assembly” UpComing brief on page 37 of the Feb. 17 issue.

Canadian Mennonite regrets the errors.

/// Clarification

Andrey Utkin is a lay minister of the Kutuzovka/Petershagen Mennonite Church in Ukraine. His position was misidentified as pastor in the “Please pray for a peaceful solution” article on page 24 of the Feb. 17 issue. *Canadian Mennonite* regrets any confusion caused.

Deaths

Bergen—Menno I, 95 (b. Dec. 10, 1918; d. Jan. 17, 2014), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Cressman—Eloise (nee Cressman), 95 (b. April 11, 1918; d. Feb. 7, 2014), Nith Valley Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Driechel—Otto, 87 (b. Aug. 22, 1926; d. Jan. 1, 2014), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Dyck—Isaac C., 101 (b. Nov. 27, 1912; d. Feb. 8, 2014), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Hildebrand—Matthew Kurt, 27 (b. Jan. 29, 1987; d. Feb. 6, 2014), Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite, Rabbit Lake, Sask.

Krahn—Walter, 79 (b. July 15, 1934; d. Jan. 27, 2014), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

McGlynn—Marianne (nee Klassen), 61 (b. Jan. 21, 1953; d. Jan. 24, 2014), North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Pauls—Peter, 78 (b. Jan. 15, 1936; d. Feb. 3, 2014), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Pottcker—Agnes, 87 (b. Feb. 19, 1926; d. Feb. 7, 2014), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Reimer—Mary T., 88 (b. June 21, 1925; d. Dec. 27, 2013), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Sawatzky—Carole Louise, 49 (b. Jan. 5, 1965; d. Jan. 21, 2014), Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Schmidt—Susie (nee Dick), 88 (b. Feb. 4, 1925; d. Jan. 5, 2014), North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Wiebe—Elizabeth, 90 (b. Dec. 24, 1923; d. Dec. 28, 2013), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

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.

Poncius' Puddle



GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

Let your hopes run wild!

Registration for Assembly 2014 commences

BY DEBORAH FROESE

Mennonite Church Canada
WINNIPEG

Leaders and planners want participants to bring their wildest hopes and dreams for the future of the church to Mennonite Church Canada's Assembly 2014, from July 3 to 6 in Winnipeg.

The theme, "Wild hope: Faith for an unknown season," will explore how Mennonites can live out their Christian faith in a world in which attitudes and ideals are continually shifting. Mark 4: 35-41, the story of Jesus calming stormy seas, will help provide scriptural focus.

Executive minister Dave Bergen says he's excited about the theme. "It stirs my imagination. Being engaged with God means we'd better hold on for a wild ride. Not everything is predictable and tame, and that's the 'wildness' of Wild Hope," he says. "The other end of this is an assurance. Our God is a God who offers hope for a world so much in need of it."

"The challenges facing the church are enormous," says Vic Thiessen, chief administrative officer, "but they are brimming with opportunity."

For Ken Warkentin, MC Manitoba executive director, the theme captures the energy of the times. "The God in whom we hope will not be controlled, but God has been, and will continue to be, good," he says.

Wild Hope takes place on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University. Lodging and meals are offered on campus. A children's and junior youth assembly will also be held on site for children up to age 14, and special events are being planned for young adults in attendance.

Executive assistant Coreena von Kampen is managing logistics. She says planners are encouraging participation from all demographics. "We have special rates for students and young adults,

and we're offering subsidies for under-resourced participants," she says, adding, "We welcome donations to help offset those costs."

Plenary sessions feature updates from, and discussions with, the Being a Faithful Church and Future Directions task forces. Seminars offer a wide array of topics, from introducing MennoMedia's new Sunday School curriculum, "Shine," and exploring the covenants between Canadians and their host peoples, to reimagining congregations and the wider church.

Keynote speakers for Assembly 2014 are:

- **BRIAN QUAN**, minister of English ministries at Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church.
- **BETTY PRIES**, a conflict management specialist with Associates Resourcing the Church.
- **DAVID DRIEDGER**, associate minister at First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

Delegates will have the opportunity to meet international workers Christina and Darnell Barkman (Philippines); George and Tobia Veith (Macau); and Nhien Pham (Vietnam). The Veiths and Pham have seminars scheduled during the assembly.

On July 5, MC Manitoba is hosting an evening of dinner and fun at Camp Assiniboia, just outside of Winnipeg. Bus

service will be provided.

A ministers conference is scheduled prior to the assembly opening on July 3. Led by Karl and Charlotte Lehman, a psychiatrist and pastor, respectively, "Prayer that heals the heart" will equip leaders to stay healthy in times of great change.

Denominational minister Karen Martens Zimmerly says she's looking forward to delegate discernment and reflection about the future of the church—especially face-to-face conversations with many people across MC Canada's culturally diverse family. "We extend a special invitation to our new Canadian churches and leaders," she says. "Please join us. As we speak and learn about 'wild hope,' we need your voice!" ❧

Early registration closes on May 15. The final cut-off date for registering is June 15. To register online, visit home. mennonitechurch.ca/Wpg14.

MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA PHOTO



Mennonite Church Canada Assembly 2014 planners encourage people to check out the website and register online. Pictured from left to right: MC Canada staffers Vic Thiessen, chief administrative officer, left, and Karen Martens Zimmerly, denominational minister; and Ken Warkentin, executive minister of MC Manitoba, the hosting area church. Not pictured: MC Canada's executive minister of formation, Dave Bergen, and executive assistant Coreena von Kampen.

Go home and proclaim Jesus there?

School for Ministers speaker challenges pastors to live out the gospel, not just preach it

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove's accent places his roots in the southern United States, North Carolina specifically. He grew up in the community fictionalized as Mayberry on the popular 1960s *Andy Griffith Show*, not the place one would think to find one of the proponents of New Monasticism and a self-identified radical.

Conrad Grebel University College and Mennonite Church Eastern Canada brought Wilson-Hartgrove to the 37th annual School for Ministers last month. Using storytelling to get deep into the meaning of discipleship in the 21st century, he focused

on Jesus as the answer for North America's spiritual hunger.

Beginning with Romans 10, he looked at the need for Christians to be spreading the message of God's peace through Jesus. Having grown up in conservative evangelical circles in the south, Wilson-Hartgrove is well aware of how this text has been used as part of the "Romans' Road" to salvation. His focus on "the feet of those who bring good news" challenged the pastors present to live out the gospel, not just preach it.

In his second presentation, Wilson-Hartgrove looked at how Jesus taught

doctrine in a "meandering . . . resurrection dependant," way, dependant less on words and more on practice. Focusing on 21st-century fragmentation of North American culture, including religion, he suggested that building community and working at the issues of life through growing mature disciples following Jesus is the church's call. He recommended less seminary teacher/pupil learning and more mentor/apprentice learning through practice, like Jesus did in Matthew 14.

Saving his most radical focus for the last session, Wilson-Hartgrove looked at the story of Jesus meeting the Gerasene demoniac in Luke 8. Unlike most of Jesus' healings and teachings, this one took place "on the other side," away from the Jewish part of Galilee. When the man had been healed from his many distracting and fragmenting demons, he wanted to follow Jesus by joining the other disciples in the boat, but Jesus told him to "return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." Luke concludes the story: "So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him" (Luke 8:39).

Wilson-Hartgrove wondered if this was the call to followers of Jesus in the present time: Go home and proclaim Jesus there. In an age of fragmentation, where few know their grandparents, might it not be better for God's followers to model community and trust because of Jesus?

As pastors considered his stories and the example of the community he lives in, they wondered how to apply what he had to say.

MC Eastern Canada executive minister David Martin caught Wilson-Hartgrove's deep spirituality. In response, Wilson-Hartgrove wondered if Mennonites are living off the inherited spirituality of their deep rural roots and now need new devotional practices for the city.

George O'Reilly, interim pastor at Ottawa Mennonite Church, wondered if stability and a deep welcome to strangers resulted in the desire to absorb newcomers, rather than allowing them to change the congregation. Wilson-Hartgrove's response was that communities of Christ need to welcome newcomers as if they were Jesus. ❧

PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY



David Siebert; Josie Winterfeld, pastor at Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont.; Dylan Siebert and Annemarie Rogalsky enjoy table fellowship during 'Awakening hope,' an intergenerational evening of 'inspiring each other on the path of Christian discipleship and community living' on Feb. 20, that grew out of the annual Mennonite Church Eastern Canada School for Ministers. A number of local potlucks afforded intimate opportunities to talk, then an evening of stories and music was held at the Mennonite complex at 50 Kent Avenue. Older participants spoke of the hospitality and welcome they received as they 'invaded' the homes of young adults who took time from their busy lives to relate.



Long-time Camp Squeah workers Dan and Lorraine Friesen, centre, who have served more than 25 years at the MC B.C. facility, are honoured with a prayer of blessing and support by a circle of friends at the area church's annual meeting in February.

Becoming missional communities in B.C.

Delegates hear area church is vibrant, connected

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

B.C. Correspondent
CHILLIWACK, B.C.

Excitement and challenges in Mennonite Church British Columbia were a recurring theme when delegates met for their annual general meeting at Eden Mennonite Church in Chilliwack on Feb. 22.

Throughout the morning, Garry Janzen, MC B.C.'s executive minister, interviewed several people in leadership positions of area church leadership, asking them, "What excites you?" and, "What are your challenges?"

First was Lee Dyck, completing her first year as area church moderator. "I love the word 'missional,'" she said. "I am excited that we have churches that connect with the Anabaptist vision of the church. We have lots to celebrate." As for challenges, Dyck said, "We need to strengthen our connective tissue with each other and foster an Anabaptist vision of what it means to walk in this world."

Linda Matties of the Church Health Committee said she felt energized by the unexpected tasks that came to her

committee, including working out an upcoming sabbatical for Janzen, and working on credentialing for a Cambodian pastor. "I get to hear what's happening in all

A praise item noted that currently no MC B.C. congregations are searching for leadership, as all currently have lead pastors.

of your churches and that excites me," she said. In the way of challenges, Matties said, "We need to put more effort into training pastors that our unique churches need." A praise item noted that currently no MC B.C. congregations are searching for leadership, as all currently have lead pastors.

Evangelism and Church Development chair Barry Lesser said, "We're changing our paradigm a little bit. We hope to shift to where every member of every church sees themselves as a church planter. The new term is 'multiplier'—every member a multiplier of the church. Pray for us for wisdom to discern what is most needed

in each congregation." He also cited the recent development of Living Stones Mennonite Christian Church, a recently planted Mandarin congregation with cells in two locations.

Henry Krause of the Service Peace and Justice Committee mentioned both indigenous relations and creation care as priorities. Creation care had been the theme the previous day at the LEAD conference. (See online article at <http://bit.ly/POFAWE>.) Krause talked about "engaging in what it looks like to be people who care for God's good creation," and added, "It's part of our ethos of living simpler. We know that God loves the whole world."

Indigenous relations coordinator Brander McDonald expressed gratitude for the MC B.C. family for support during last year's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) activities, estimating 30 MC B.C. churches attended the TRC events.

Karen Heidebrecht Thiessen, pastor of Level Ground Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, gave an enthusiastic report about her congregation's involvement with Forge Canada, a resource provided through MC B.C.

Faith and Life Committee chair Tim Kuepfer asked for prayer "for us to have wisdom and insight, and reflect on what matters. Pray for us, that we'll have an ear to the churches."

During Camp Squeah's report, special

recognition was given to Dan and Lorraine Friesen, who have served the camp for 25 years, longer than any other workers in the camp's history, Dan as site manager and Lorraine in many capacities, including the annual Paddle-a-thon fundraiser. A special laying-on-hands prayer was given for the Friesens for their continued ministry.

Delegates passed the budget for 2014. Alan Peters of the Finance Committee said, "We ended up definitely in a much better place than we had budgeted for," but said a challenge remains to communicate the value of MC B.C. to people within the churches. ☸

Telling God's story

Historical society uses various avenues to tell the stories of Mennonites in Saskatchewan

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent

SASKATOON

“Please do not take photographs.” With these words, Jake Buhler, chair of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, introduced the evening’s guests, an a cappella choir from the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, sometimes known as the Holdeman Mennonite Church.

The gathering was the sixth in the “Getting to know our families” series sponsored by the historical society and featuring different Mennonite groups. The event was held at Saskatoon’s Bethany Manor on Feb. 28.

Along with the choir, speaker Bob Goodnough shared the denomination’s history and beliefs. John Holdeman founded the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, in the mid-1800s as a response to perceived apostasy in the Mennonite church. He attracted a following among Swiss and Russian Mennonites, German Lutherans and some English-speaking people. Today, the denomination has about 25,000 members worldwide; 5,188 of those members form 56 congregations in Canada. Most churches have their own schools, he said.

Prior to celebrating communion, about once a year, Goodnough said that each church holds revival meetings, giving opportunity for repentance and restitution. Church discipline—including excommunication—is practised, but is meant to be restorative.

Simplicity is stressed. Women wear black prayer coverings and men grow beards. According to Goodnough, the church has no fixed leadership structure; Christ is head of the church and each congregation is self-governing.

The next day, upwards of 30 historical society members attended the society’s annual meeting. Following a brief business session, Buhler introduced keynote

speaker Richard Thiessen, library director at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford B.C.

Thiessen led a virtual tour of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). What began as the Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia 17 years ago has grown to include information on Mennonites worldwide. GAMEO’s goal, said Thiessen, is “to tell God’s story through the lives of Mennonites around the world.” The website currently has 15,460 articles in English, with the hope of eventually adding other languages.

Thiessen’s second presentation addressed the importance of archives in bringing history to life. Neither library nor museum, an archive houses primary source documents, such as diaries and church registers, and significant secondary source documents, including books,

journals and magazines. In building an archive, Thiessen said historical societies need clearly stated development policies that meet the needs of their patrons.

In discussing Thiessen’s presentation, Buhler offered a compelling reason for maintaining church archives. GAMEO may take a phrase such as “sending missionaries to the pagans” and edit it to be less offensive to 21st-century sensibilities. In doing so, said Buhler, “we lose the record of how we once thought about the world around us.” Because they house primary source documents, archives preserve the attitudes and worldview of their writers, for better or for worse, he said.

Preserving history, Thiessen reiterated, is about telling God’s story. “If we believe God is in us, that we’re doing the will of God, then we’re living out God’s story.”

Visit canadianmennonite.org/telling-gods-story to view a video interview with Richard Thiessen and listen to an audio clip of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, choir.

To learn more about the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and its upcoming events, visit <http://mhss.sk.ca/>.



*In the newly-expanded archives, Jean Fehr peruses Maureen Klassen’s book **It Happened in Moscow**, which the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan launched last November.*

Coloured or colored: Jazz speaks for the oppressed

2014 Sawatzky Visiting Lecturer Carol Muller remembers Sathima Bea Benjamin's 'musical echoes'

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

Sounds of a jazz chanteuse filled the Great Hall at Conrad Grebel University College for the 2014 Rod and Lorna Sawatzky Visiting Scholar Lecture on Feb. 7.

Carol Muller, professor of music at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, spoke on Sathima Bea Benjamin, a woman of mixed racial heritage whose father Edward Benjamin hailed from St. Helena, a British colonial island in the South Atlantic and her mother Evelyn Henry was of Mauritian and Filipino descent.

But in apartheid South Africa, she was not black, white or Indian, so she had to be registered as coloured. Like many of her generation, she fell in love with American jazz, mostly performed by musicians of colour.

Muller focussed on Benjamin's 2002 recording, *Musical Echoes*, looking at what an echo comprises. Some would see an echo as a copy and less than the original, but an echo continues to broadcast the original long after the original has finished sounding.

Benjamin heard an "echo" of coloured music as she listened to, and then later performed, jazz in apartheid South Africa, Europe and North America. She and her husband left their homeland after the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, refusing to live under a regime that would shoot women and children in cold blood, landing in New York at the height of the equal rights movement there.

Receiving recognition in post-apartheid South Africa, Benjamin travelled back to

record with South African musicians, the echo of North American jazz musicians' fight for equality now ringing in her native land.

According to Muller, Benjamin's *Echoes* generated new possibilities, even while staying true to the original. Every time recorded music is played, the original is echoed and is heard in a new place and culture, creating the possibility for something new to be created, she said. ☘

☘ Briefly noted

Marv Baergen to retire from Mennonite Men

Marv Baergen already had a 30-year career with community corrections in the federal and Alberta governments and a lifetime of congregational involvement when he began a national ministry career with a term on Mennonite Church Canada's Witness Council. From there, his service blossomed into an assignment as congregational partnerships facilitator with MC Canada in 2003. Soon he became involved in Join Hands, a binational church-building ministry of Mennonite Men. Baergen will retire from his service with Mennonite Men later this year. "The last several years of my time with Mennonite Men have been particularly rewarding to me, as we have begun to do workshops across the country on issues relating to men's spirituality," he says. "Marv has been a steady presence for Mennonite Men, particularly in the leadership transition the last three years," says Don Yoder, Mennonite Men coordinator. But retirement from some official roles does not mean an end to Baergen's life of caring. He will continue to play a supportive and organizing role for several planned men's gatherings, as well as a men's dinner at the MC Canada assembly in Winnipeg in July. —Mennonite Church Canada



Marv Baergen



Ken Hull, left, director of the Institute for Worship and Arts at Conrad Grebel University College, discusses the legacy of 'coloured' jazz musician Sathima Bea Benjamin with Carol Muller, professor of music at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, after her 2014 Rod and Lorna Sawatzky Visiting Scholar lecture on Feb. 7.

‘Do the gospel’

AMBS Pastors Week brings five perspectives on seeing Jesus

BY MARY E. KLASSEN

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary
ELKHART, IND.

The Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) “Fab Five” aren’t a band of superheroes who can remove snow

/// Briefly noted

Manitoba considers giving up camp ownership

STEINBACH, MAN.—After 30 years of discussing the pros and cons of church vs. private ownership of their Camps with Meaning (CwM) facilities, the 140 delegates of Mennonite Church Manitoba voted overwhelmingly to proceed with a plan to change the ownership structure of two of their three camps. Meeting at Steinbach Mennonite Church on March 1, the delegates from 35 congregations authorized the board to bring proposals for owning and operating Camp Moose Lake and Camp Koinonia, with the “flexibility to develop a business plan which sharpens a camping ministry with a smaller footprint, yet, with the opportunity for growth in some directions.” The ideal scenario, the delegates were told, would be for related partners, such as a church, a group of churches or a group of passionate individuals to own and operate the camps. Sale of any of the camps on the open market would be a last resort. Ken Warkentin, MC Manitoba’s executive director, feels good about the new direction, saying, “Having grappled for years with over-capacity in camping infrastructure, we learned that there could be another way to structure ownership of some of our camps that still allows for [MC Manitoba’s] ministry programming expertise to positively impact campers at those sites.”

—Mennonite Church Manitoba

and raise frigid temperatures, but they did help participants to see Jesus at Pastors Week at the end of January.

Presenters Andy Brubacher Kaethler, Rachel Miller Jacobs, Safwat Marzouk, Jamie Pitts and Allan Rudy-Froese are each in their second or third year of teaching at AMBS. They took on the challenge of helping participants see Jesus anew and allowing Jesus to help them see in new ways.

Kaethler, assistant professor of Christian formation and culture, pointed out that when Christians do not examine their own culture and the way it shapes their reading of the Bible, they risk being blind to God’s liberating, reconciling work in the world.

Kaethler, who served as Mennonite Church Eastern Canada’s youth minister from 2000-03, argued that humans are not primarily rational beings, but “we are liturgical. . . . We are first and foremost loving creatures.” That human capacity for love is expressed in practices and habits that are often counter to their culture. “We need to

be people who can imagine the kingdom of God as if it is real, and live into that reality,” he said.

Helping others see Jesus through preaching was the challenge Rudy-Froese, assistant professor of Christian proclamation, worked with. To prepare for preaching, he called Pastors Week participants to:

- **PREPARE THEIR** bodies, recognizing that the whole body is involved in speaking. Rehearsal is important for the preacher just as it is for the choir and soloists.
- **ALLOW THEMSELVES** to receive a gift from Christ in their study and preparation.

“If we don’t get the gift ourselves, we won’t preach it either,” he said. “If we have not seen Christ, how can we help others see Christ? If we cannot see how Christ is carrying us, how can we say to others that Christ is carrying them?” Finally, he called on preachers to “do the gospel in your sermon.”

Listeners come to learn about God, but mostly they want a relationship, said Rudy-Froese, who wrote the *Canadian Mennonite* column “This preacher has 22 minutes” in 2010. Preachers can bring Jesus Christ to the congregation, he said, if their bodies are ready and they pause to receive the gift that Christ has for them in their preparation. //

PHOTO BY JASON BRYANT



Dubbed the ‘Fab Five,’ the five newest professors at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary shared from their different disciplines, helping participants during Pastors Week see Jesus anew and encouraging them to allow Jesus to help them see in new ways. Pictured from left to right: Allan Rudy-Froese, Rachel Miller Jacobs, Jamie Pitts, Safwat Marzouk and Andy Brubacher Kaethler.

AMBS launches Center for Faith Formation and Culture

BY MARY E. KLASSEN

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary
ELKHART, IND.

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) is launching the Center for Faith Formation and Culture to help congregations, families and individuals not only nurture faith, but also to become aware of how their contexts shape their faith.

"This centre will keep our focus right where it belongs—on how we form communities of faith where life abundant can flourish from the early years on through the final years of life," says Sara Wenger Shenk, AMBS president.

The work of the centre will include offering resources and conducting research to help congregations read their cultural contexts and foster faith-building practices. It also will foster connections among others working at faith formation in Mennonite Church Canada and MC U.S.A.

Andy Brubacher

Kaethler, assistant professor of faith formation and culture at AMBS, will direct the work of the centre. Since 2004, Brubacher Kaethler has directed !Explore: A Theological Program for High School Youth, in which youth in grades 11 and 12 ask theological questions, test gifts for leadership and explore ministry. Now his attention will expand to three categories: children and families, youth and young adults, and adults and seniors.

However, Brubacher Kaethler emphasizes, "We really want this to be intergenerational. Faith formation doesn't happen in isolation at these life stages."

Each year, the centre will focus on one of the three life stages. Initially the offerings will be workshops linked to courses in the seminary's curriculum that deal with faith development at different times of life.

For 2014-15, the emphasis will be on children and families. Rachel Miller Jacobs,

AMBS assistant professor of congregational formation, will teach a one-semester course on faith formation in families, and Brubacher Kaethler is planning a workshop that will explore reading the Bible with children. The workshop, while being part of the course, is intended for broader participation, including church leaders and families. He hopes to involve people working with Christian education curricula and resources in children's literature at nearby Goshen College.

For the focus on youth and young adults, Brubacher Kaethler is aware of several ways in which the centre may be a resource to the church. In the ministry of catechesis and preparation for baptism, Brubacher Kaethler wonders, "Is it time to consider something more robust, like mentorship or apprenticeship?" He also is looking at

the experiences of youth and families who are new to North American cultures, along with the challenges their congregations face in fostering faith development.

For the year in which the focus is on adults and seniors, Brubacher Kaethler imagines some events or sessions being held at Greencroft, a retirement community in Goshen.

He has occasionally been asked if AMBS will offer a program like !Explore for seniors, so as he anticipates concentrating on later stages of life, he will use that model to look for ways of encouraging and supporting people who have either long-standing or new questions about their faith.

As the centre becomes more established, it may host pastors in residence for several weeks, providing opportunities to research related topics, share in AMBS classes and contribute to developing resources. Broader sharing in print and digital formats will be done as the work of the centre gains momentum.

"Events will be open to people from all across North America," Brubacher Kaethler said. "We hope they will be for families and children, as well as church leaders." ❧



**Andy
Brubacher
Kaethler**

/// Briefly noted

Historical society hands out Award of Excellence

WINNIPEG—Harry Loewen of Kelowna, B.C., received the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada's Award of Excellence when the organization met in Winnipeg in mid-January for its annual meeting. Loewen was the founder of the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. Serving as teacher, researcher and writer, he knew how to reach both popular and academic audiences, and has been an inspiration to many young intellectuals over several decades. His publications include a comparison of 16th-century Anabaptism and Lutheranism, early 20th-century work on Mennonites in the Soviet Union, and his own story of coming to Canada with his widowed mother. He also approached contemporary topics such as Mennonite literature and Mennonite identity with his collection *Why I am a Mennonite*. As the original editor of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, from 1983-95, he conceptualized and created a space where Canadian Mennonite scholars could engage in valuable academic discourse. The award is given annually to those who have made significant contributions to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by their research or writing.
—Mennonite Historical Society of Canada



**Harry and Gertrude
Loewen hold the Mennonite
Historical Society's 2014
Award of Excellence.**

PHOTO BY TAYLOR DERKSEN



Jana Klassen, left, Hanna Martens and Danika Peters have fun in the snow at this year's senior high snow camp at Camp Valaqua. Klassen and Martens are on the Alberta Youth Leadership Team.

Not-just-snow camp

BY DANIKA PETERS

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
WATER VALLEY, ALTA.

Snow camp. The title brings to mind a group of kids running in the snow, creating snow angels and starting snow-ball fights.

While the annual event, hosted by the Mennonite Church Alberta Youth Leadership Team, does include those activities, it also encompasses so much more. The camp gives youth a break from the stressful school semester and allows them to gather in a fun and festive environment surrounded by God's nature. With exciting activities, amazing speakers and cooks, and expressive worship, snow camp is a

great place for young adults to grow not only in their friendships, but in their faith as well.

Being surrounded by the wonderful nature of God, Camp Valaqua is the best place imaginable where youth can learn about faith, explore new ways of worship, and how to live in Jesus' name to promote a sustainable foundation for everyday lives.

Carl Adrian, the speaker at this year's senior high snow camp, spoke on inner peace and mindfulness of self and surroundings. Sessions challenged the campers to think about their relationships with

themselves and others in all aspects of life. He encouraged the youth to bring the peace created and fulfilled at camp into everyday society in order to construct a thriving world culture enriched with love and compassion.

He also introduced the idea of a personal mission statement: a moral or belief acting as a foundation for a life of meaningful work.

Before and after these sessions, the camp would gather together and worship collectively through song.

There were also many great activities: cross-country skiing, indoor games, a coffee-house/talent show, and a silent monk-themed supper. Combined with everything else going on that weekend, it was the perfect blend of fun and fellowship for a weekend away from busy lives. ❧

Trying to represent a diverse whole

MC U.S.A. Executive Board releases statement on one conference's decision to license pastor in a committed same-sex relationship

Mennonite Church U.S.A.
HARRISONBURG, VA.

Discerning a response to calls from across the church to respond to conversations around inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) members of Mennonite Church U.S.A. in leadership roles across the church took up most of three days the denomination's Executive Board spent in meetings last month.

The board's conversation focused primarily on two recent events:

- **THE DECISION** by Mountain States Mennonite Conference to license Theda Good, a pastor who is in a committed same-sex relationship, for ministry at First Mennonite Church in Denver
- **THE ANNOUNCEMENT** of Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) in Harrisonburg to begin a listening process to review its policy of hiring faculty and staff in committed same-sex relationships.

The 13 Executive Board members began by sharing their diverse personal perspectives on the actions taken by Mountain States Mennonite Conference and EMU. They also read and listened to the words of individuals across the church who sent letters and e-mails urging the board to take action in response to the recent decisions by Mountain States and EMU. The letters also represented a wide range of opinions on the issue.

"What does it mean to come as a board member representing the whole—a whole that includes a broad diversity of opinions?" asked Dick Thomas, past moderator and current board member from Lancaster, Pa. "We need to trust the Lord to help us make changes we need to make in time to be relevant and in a way that

allows us to get there together."

The Executive Committee of the board then presented a statement, encouraging Executive Board members to take it with them overnight and to spend time in prayer discerning God's leading. Over the course of the next two days, board members offered feedback and counsel to the Executive Committee. The statement underwent three revisions before the Executive Board approved a final version. While the statement had broad support across the board, it did not pass unanimously.

The final statement calls for the creation of a listening task force to review the process by which Mountain States Mennonite Conference decided to license Good, and to examine the ways these actions interface

with the existing membership guidelines and polity documents of MC U.S.A.. After receiving counsel from the Constituency Leaders Council at its next meeting in March, the task force will conduct a review and bring a recommendation for next steps to the Executive Board at its June meeting. The full text of the statement, which includes instructions for contacting the task force, is available at <http://bit.ly/1InvkFh>.

The board also met with EMU president Loren Swartzendruber and Carlos Romero, executive director of Mennonite Education Agency (MEA), to learn more about EMU's listening process regarding the hiring of faculty and staff members who are in committed same-sex relationships. Swartzendruber said that, after listening to voices from across the church, he and the EMU cabinet will bring a recommendation to EMU's board. The Executive Board urged Swartzendruber to stay in close consultation with Romero and MEA as the process moves forward. ❧

While the statement had broad support across the board, it did not pass unanimously.

❧ Briefly noted

Goshen College to offer three new majors

GOSHEN, IND.—Changes are coming to Goshen College's course catalogue, with new majors and minors being added for the fall of 2014:

- **A NEW** marketing major and minor will be offered through the business department. The marketing major will consist of a mix of existing courses from the business, art, communication and English departments, which address topics such as advertising, sales, design, storytelling, technology, writing and other marketing strategies.
- **THE BUSINESS** department will collaborate with the mathematics department to offer two new majors and minors. Computer science and information technology will follow paths similar to the current informatics major, while students who study information technology will focus more on communication and preparing for careers in a computer-related field.
- **ANOTHER NEW** major will result from collaboration between the education department and the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program. A new elementary education/English learners major and dual licensure program will be offered to students who want to work in an elementary school setting with diverse populations.

—Goshen College

GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

A matriarch, a passion and the gospel

New MC Canada Witness workers take on church-planting assignment in Thailand

BY DAN DYCK

Mennonite Church Canada

Tom Poovong's passion for sharing the gospel was first fuelled by his mother, a woman he describes as deeply spiritual and abundantly generous.

Tom was just 15 years old when his parents and seven siblings emigrated to Calgary from Laos in 1980. In those early years, his mother, Bouying Poovong, would trundle her children onto a bus each weekend and commute to downtown Calgary in search of a Buddhist temple. Not finding one, they attended a Catholic church for a time.

She eventually met some Mennonites via connections with other Laotian immigrants. The family initially began attending First Mennonite Church in Calgary. As a teen, Poovong recalls how a faithful church member with a station wagon would pick up the large family on Sunday mornings.

The more the Poovong family learned about Jesus, the more deeply they became involved in the church, says Tom, who has since studied at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Tex.; been in ministry with the Lao Mennonite Church; led Bible study groups; served on the refugee committee at Trinity Mennonite Church, DeWinton, Alta.; started a house church, worked at a Mennonite Central Committee thrift store; owned and managed convenience store franchises; and installed granite countertops.

But much changed over the last year. In the summer of 2013, Tom and his wife Christine accepted a Mennonite Church Canada church-planting assignment in Thailand, where Christine grew up. They are currently settling there with their one-year-old son, Joseph, and recently adopted

three-year-old daughter, Phimchanok.

Both Tom and Christine cite their families as inspirations for their faith.

Tom calls his mother an evangelist. At 74, she has travelled back to Laos several times to share God's message of love with anyone who will listen. On her first trip back, she personally financed the drilling of a well in her home village.

Christine, who also has six biological siblings, grew up as an adopted child of Canadian missionary parents in Thailand, Al and Terry Purvis. The Purvises opened

the El Shaddai children's home in Thailand in 1982, in response to an influx of orphans resulting from the Vietnam War.

"The most important [thing in life] is to obey God's call," says Tom of his desire to plant a church in Thailand. "When a person receives something so big and sometimes even confusing, we cannot escape God's call. My experience of moving from a war-torn country and getting to know many God-loving people in the Mennonite community was really something for me. Growing up in two cultures, it seems like God was constantly calling on me to bring good news to the people."

The Poovongs, now married for 15 years, are excited to work with MC Canada to help form new Anabaptist Christian communities in northeast Thailand. They are now based in Khon Kaen, about 90 kilometres from where former MC Canada workers Pat and Rad Houmphan established the first Anabaptist congregations in Borabu and Ban Daeng. Key to the process will be small business and economic development, and building relationships with other Mennonite/Anabaptist groups in the country. ❧

PHOTO COURTESY OF MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA



Tom and Christine Poovong hold their children Phimchanok and Joseph.

/// Briefly noted

MEDA receives grant for ground-breaking research

Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) is one of 12 winners of Grand Challenges Explorations, an initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. With the \$100,000 US grant, and \$35,000 of its own money, MEDA will pursue an innovative global health and development research project in Ghana. Effective, affordable water catchment, storage and irrigation systems will help Ghanaian women to extend their growing season and produce more food to feed their families. MEDA will test models that can be assembled with local available

components and be easily used by women from varying locations and agricultural yields. If women farmers in Northern Ghana can raise vegetables and legumes during the dry season, they can improve their families' nutrition and earn income to buy supplemental food, and cover health, education and household costs. "This grant will allow us to bring our knowledge of providing irrigation solutions in Zambia, Afghanistan and elsewhere to Ghana, where we already have experience working with women in agriculture," says Rachel Hess, senior consultant/project manager



Thanks to the Gates Foundation grant, Ghanaian women will be able to produce more food to feed their families.

for MEDA's Women's Economic Opportunities Department. "It's great to be recognized as a leader in providing global health and development initiatives, and to use this research opportunity to truly make an impact."
—MEDA

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GOD AT WORK IN US

Quietly inspiring

Over the years John Wiebe has been a musician, teacher and producer

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
NEW HAMBURG, ONT.

The music studio and classroom in the backyard is decorated with Apple computer prints of creative individuals. John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Einstein, Picasso, Amelia Earhart, some with the Apple logo covered with a piano sticker, share the walls with a painting by Leighton Jones of the Children's Band.

John Wiebe, who describes himself as "kind of burnt out from teaching" right now, still teaches a few dedicated students, but has cut down considerably from the days when he taught at home and at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener.

Instead, as he nears 65, he's spending time working through his many binders

of arrangements, études and original compositions. Some need finishing, others organizing, and others yet are being assembled for future publication.

Like most musicians, Wiebe has cobbled together a life through the years beginning in St. Catharines, moving to the Bracebridge area of central Ontario, and finally to part of Ontario with lots of Mennonites, just not "Russian Mennonites" like he and his wife Helmi.

While living in Waterloo a number of years ago he penned "A Song for June" for his friend Doris Gubler's wedding to David Martin, who is now executive minister of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

With his studio in the backyard he also produces CDs for local musicians, including the Rockway foursome Moglee a few years ago. Local performances in retirement homes and at Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden, and with James Krabill's Reunion Vocal Band round out his work. He joined that group after answering a *Mennonite Reporter* ad in the late '80s seeking "all pop Mennonite musicians."

Soft spoken, gentle, not driving up to a point like a stereotypical Russian Mennonite, Wiebe draws inspiration from the photos in his studio. Lennon's "Give peace a chance" rings true for Wiebe. Faith has a place in his music, Wiebe says, although "not in a 'gospelly' way."

And "the past is the past," Phil Everly of the Everly Brothers once said. Although Wiebe says he "lacked the business side" of music, he has been able to follow his passion, waiting for the waves of inspiration to roll up on the beach and dive in. "Eventually it's hard work," he says.

Wiebe is currently involved with Bryan Moyer Suderman, working on a project that combines the themes of home and environment. As he walks to the Home Hardware Store in New Hamburg, Wiebe meets friends and fellow church members; it's those relationships that make a place home for him.

"We've gone the wrong way about what's worth something," he says, lamenting the fact that the market dictates what is of worth, not measuring the people or what they need to live, but rather what the profit can be. Inspired and quietly inspiring, Wiebe still makes his musical mark. //



John Wiebe plays in his studio/classroom in New Hamburg, Ont. He is currently involved with Bryan Moyer Suderman, working on a musical project that combines the themes of home and environment.

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Lederach to receive Grebel's first honorary doctorate

WATERLOO, ONT.—Conrad Grebel University College will confer its first honorary doctorate on John Paul Lederach at its convocation ceremony on April 13. Lederach is professor of international peacebuilding at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, and distinguished scholar at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) in Harrisonburg, Va. He previously served as professor of sociology and conflict studies at EMU, where he was the founding director of its Conflict Transformation Program and its associated Center for Justice and Peacebuilding. “Lederach is an exemplary scholar and innovative peace practitioner on the world stage,” says Susan Schultz Huxman, Grebel’s president. “He is a natural fit for Grebel’s first honorary doctoral degree because he embodies the best of our signature academic areas in peace and conflict studies, religion and theological studies, and music and the creative arts; emphasizes the importance of Anabaptist/Mennonite education; and is an inspiring teacher and storyteller.” Lederach will offer the address at this year’s convocation ceremony as Grebel celebrates the first graduates from its new Master in Peace and Conflict Studies program at Grebel and the University of Waterloo. A public forum with Lederach will also be hosted by Grebel on April 12. —Conrad Grebel University College



John Paul Lederach

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GOSPEL FOR ASIA

ARTBEAT

Scenes along the 'road to nowhere'

BY DAVE ROGALSKY
Eastern Canada Correspondent
TORONTO

In Willms's provocative photo of a young girl walking away through the windblown grasses towards a small Russian village on a lakeshore was part of his winning entry in the 2013 Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival.

Entitled "Road to Nowhere," Willms's photo exhibit was judged by a portfolio review panel consisting of some of the world's most prominent curators and art

directors from all of the submitted works as worthy of a solo exhibition at Toronto's Contact Gallery earlier this year.

This project is described as "a photographic ode to [Willms's] pacifist Mennonite ancestors, who endured five centuries of brutally violent oppression throughout Europe, Russia and Siberia."

The girl in the photo turned out to be a distant relative of Willms, who didn't know

he still had relations in Ukraine. His own family fled to North America in the 1920s after his great-grandfather had been used as a human shield by soldiers in the midst of the Russian Revolution.

Willms sees this as part of "their history, [where] the Mennonites have been repeatedly put in a position where they have had to decide between taking up arms and abandoning your faith; leaving their homes, possessions and land behind; or dying where they stand."

In his artist statement he writes, "If I could impart one message upon the viewer of these photographs, it would be that hostilities brought against pacifist peoples are more than an injustice; they are an attack upon the very notion of peace itself."

Willms currently has no connections to the Mennonite community except his family, although his grandparents were the

PHOTOS BY IAN WILLMS



Regina, a Russian Mennonite girl playing near Davlekanovo, Russia, 2013.

last generation to worship as Mennonites.

Through a local historian in the Republic of Bashkortostan, he found photos of his family home and found relatives in the area, although, because of a language barrier, he couldn't tell how close they were.

He expresses "admiration and respect for the Mennonite religion and what it stands for, and [Mennonites'] willingness to suffer for that through history." In his personal philosophy he draws a certain amount of cues from his roots, saying in a phone

interview that he "tries to keep things simple and minimal, even as a late 20s living in Toronto. Keep humble and appreciate things. It can be taken away in a split second." He describes himself as a "pacifist and has never been in a fight because of no justification for violence in this world."

Plans are underway to have the exhibit shown in Waterloo Region at a later date. ☘

See more photos online at canadianmennonite.org/road-to-nowhere.



A Mennonite cemetery in the village of Neudachino, near Novosibirsk, Russia, 2013.



The Singel Mennonite Church, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 2012.



A bust of Karl Marx in an abandoned Mennonite factory building, near Zaporozhye, Ukraine, 2012.

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In common cause with the homeless

Young Mennonites stand up for Abbotsford's homeless

BY RACHEL BERGEN

Young Voices Co-editor
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

On a wet, snowy Abbotsford afternoon, 300 people rallied at city hall to protest the municipal government's treatment of homeless people.

They held signs saying, "Everyone deserves a home," "We can do better," "Love dignifies," and, "Stop the insanity," which garnered a lot of media attention.

Two of these protesters were Chris Lenshyn, 34, associate pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Church, and Dave Dueckman, 20, a youth leader there.

Mayor Bruce Banman and three other city councillors voted against Abbotsford

in Jubilee Park. Although they fought the injunction, the campers eventually moved to a different part of town around Christmas-time.

The protesters said the city's latest move was the last straw. People started to band together over social media, and even those who couldn't make the event shared event information with their friends and joined the discussion.

For Lenshyn, working to put on the event and attending it were calls from God. He said he wants to stand in solidarity with those who are seen as "mere problems" and

[Dave] Dueckman, who is a Columbia Bible College student, said he seeks to model his life after Jesus Christ. This was his first political rally.

Community Services' application to re-zone a lot for a 20-bed, low-barrier housing project on Feb. 19. Shortly after, Lenshyn and other Emmanuel Mennonite members started planning a demonstration, which took place on Feb. 24, to show their solidarity with Abbotsford's less fortunate.

This is the most recent development in the Abbotsford government's war on its homeless citizens. In June, Abbotsford police were accused of damaging their camping gear with pepper spray, making the camps uninhabitable. The next month, city workers dumped chicken manure on a settlement of homeless people, prompting the mayor to make a formal apology. In September, the city issued a notice to evict about 20 people from an encampment

are victims of inaccurate stereotypes. "The life of Jesus gives us an example of breaking down barriers in the name of a holistic, divine reconciling relationship," he said. "Following the footsteps of Jesus brings us into the pursuit of justice and human dignity for all."

Likewise, Dueckman, who is a Columbia Bible College student, said he seeks to model his life after Jesus Christ. This was his first political rally. "In my year at [Columbia] I've been learning more about Jesus, his character and the people and causes he associated with. I asked myself if this would be something that Jesus would be a part of. My answer was, 'Absolutely, yes!'"

(Continued on page 34)

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRIS LENSHTYN



More than 600 people have signed the Voices for Dignity canvas, an unconventional petition, against Abbotsford's treatment of its homeless population.



Chris Lenshyn, with microphone, addresses a crowd of supporters and media at the 'Stand up for Abbotsford's Homeless' rally on Feb. 24.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVE DUECKMAN



Dave Dueckman

(Continued from page 33)

His answer was confirmed when he was at church on the Sunday before the rally and sang Hymn No. 353: "I bind my heart this day to the neighbour far away, to the stranger near at hand in this town, and in this land."

"I was, like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm singing these words. Obviously I have to back this up with something,'" he said.

Other churches, including Level Ground Mennonite and 5 and 2 Ministries, were involved in the rallies.

"It was neat to be united with a bunch of strangers who were there for a common cause," Dueckman said, adding that it was easy to tell that the majority came from a faith background.

Since helping to organize the rally, Lenshyn and the Emmanuel youth have gathered supplies and donations for the

homeless camps in the area. They originally planned to give the donations to those living in the camps personally, but decided it would seem like voyeurism, as the camps have almost become like tourist destinations. They opted to donate to organizations working directly with the city's homeless population.

Lenshyn said the fight is far from over. He and the other event organizers have established a permanent Facebook group called Voices for Dignity. The open group had 168 members at press time.

"We are looking to mobilize the momentum we created," he said. "People were inspired and many are wanting to get involved in a more intentional way."

Dueckman said he will try to be involved in whatever initiatives are planned in the future. ☺

Creating meaningful community

Vision for Emmaus House student residence inspired by Anabaptist-Mennonite faith

BY AARON EPP

Young Voices Co-editor
WINNIPEG

PHOTO BY MATT VEITH



The creation of Emmaus House is a way of 'paying forward the way people have provided meaningful community for us,' Rod Reynar says.

When Rod and Susan Reynar tell people they are inviting 10 university students to live with them and form an intentional community, they are typically met with one of two responses: "Oh, that's neat," is the first. The second is, "Oh, that's interesting," which the couple says usually translates to, "You're crazy."

"Both of us felt excited by the idea and thought it was interesting," Susan says. "We have lived in community in the past, so we know the lows and highs."

The Reynars are currently renovating their 102-year-old home, located in Winnipeg's West End, not far from downtown.

Inspired by their Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, the Reynars have developed Emmaus House as a place where university students

will find support academically and spiritually in lives of service, healthy living and relationship.

For a fee comparable to what they would pay if they lived in dormitory on campus, students attending the University of Winnipeg, the University of Manitoba or one of the colleges in Winnipeg will be able to live at Emmaus House. The Reynars are encouraging students enrolled at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) to consider living in residence there, so that they can become a part of the on-campus community that institution offers.

But more than simply pay rent for a place to lay their head, residents commit to sharing common spaces, preparing and eating meals together and participating in bi-weekly small group Bible studies, as

well as service projects and social activities as determined by the community, and agree to live by behavioural guidelines the Reynars have developed in order to uphold the Christian community they envision for Emmaus House.

The Reynars will live on site as house coordinators, facilitating and participating in the life of the community. They were inspired to start Emmaus House in part by the Menno Simons Centre residence in Vancouver as well as from discussions in Mennonite Church Alberta about intentional communities for students.

For the Reynars, Emmaus House is a way to work together as a couple to use their gifts to guide young students at a time when those students are, for the first time, experiencing life away from the home they grew up in.

Rod has arachnoiditis, a neuropathic disease caused by inflammation of membranes around the spinal cord. He lives with excruciating pain daily. Since 2000,

offers from his own giftedness," she says.

Susan has a background as a home economist and has worked for Mennonite Central Committee in Alberta and Manitoba. She loves to create special moments and a high quality of life for people, Rod says, adding, "Susan creates a great quality of life without a lot of money."

"Quality of life in your living space is important to me," Susan says. "The question we have with Emmaus House is: How can we create a good quality of life together and extend that to others?"

The Reynars add that Emmaus House is a way for them to reflect the kindness they have been shown by family, friends and their church community as they have journeyed through life with Rod's chronic pain.

"We've been incredibly blessed, and this is a way of paying forward the way people have provided meaningful community for us," Rod says.

As they have developed Emmaus

'We've been incredibly blessed, and this is a way of paying forward the way people have provided meaningful community for us.'
(Rod Reynar)

Rod has spent 10.5 years of his life in bed—a story detailed in the May 27, 2013, issue of *Canadian Mennonite*. Two years ago, he underwent an experimental treatment in the Netherlands and received an implant to manage the pain. While his pain used to be at 9.3 on a scale of 10, it is now typically at 5. It has left Rod, who earned a doctorate in agricultural education at Penn State University, on long-term-disability leave from work.

He is currently teaching at CMU on a volunteer basis. Emmaus House will allow him to further mentor students.

"Rod loves mentoring academically," Susan says. "He loves university students and digging deeper into their areas of interest because he's so widely read. The idea of being in a community of students and supporting them connects to Rod's gifts."

Rod lives well with pain, she adds. He does not take it out on others. "It's easy to walk with Rod in his pain, because he still

House, the Reynars have shared their vision with friends, family, leadership from MC Manitoba, the Mennonite chaplain at the University of Manitoba and others. All have been supportive.

"That means a lot," Rod says. "When you're venturing out onto the thin limb of the tree . . . you wonder what you're doing sometimes."

Susan acknowledges that "it's kind of a crazy endeavour," but it's one the couple is excited about. "Living at Emmaus House is an invitation to students to see their lives as more than just their studies, and to explore what the implications their studies have for who they are becoming in the moment." ❧

The Reynars are currently accepting applications for this September's semester. Visit www.emmaushousewinnipeg.ca for details.

PHOTO BY AARON EPP



Rod and Susan Reynar are the coordinators of Emmaus House, an intentional community forming in Winnipeg's West End. The couple moved to Winnipeg from Olds, Alta., last summer.

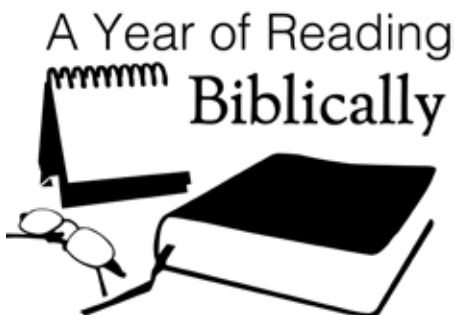
PERSONAL REFLECTION

It's God's story

BY AARON EPP

YOUNG VOICES CO-EDITOR

PHOTOS BY MATTHEW SAWATZKY

*Reading the Bible is fun!*

Self-centredness is our default setting, writer David Foster Wallace argued in a commencement speech he gave. The challenge for educated people is to choose to think beyond themselves.

Reading the Bible is fun. I'm midway through Deuteronomy as I write this, and I've really come to look forward to my daily Bible reading.

In the Jan. 29 issue of *Canadian Mennonite*, I lamented that it's difficult to read with fresh eyes stories I've seemingly heard millions of times before, and while that has been the case sometimes, re-reading stories I'm already familiar with has also been part of the fun.

From Adam and Eve to Joseph and his brothers, tracing the connections from story to story and reading about the formation of the Israelite people in Genesis has been interesting because you read about God working through a particular people.

Of course, I'm reading through the Bible knowing that, as weird as the stories sometimes get, and as angry as God gets, I know that God is up to something good.

But many people have been turned off from Christianity because they read the Old Testament and were horrified by the stories they read. A friend of mine told me that one of his non-Christian friends once picked up the Bible to read through it. She didn't get much further than Genesis 19, in which Abraham's nephew Lot is seduced by his daughters so that he can bear them children.

Stories like this are evidence that if you know a non-Christian who is interested in hearing about the Lord, you shouldn't just hand them a Bible and say, "Read this."

Indeed, during a recent discussion about biblical literacy of which I was a part, someone pointed out, "If you don't come to the Bible with a spiritual outlook, it's going to be crap. You have to have a divine encounter first. Then you will see God at work in the stories."

I like telling stories. It's what I do for a living. Whenever something happens to me, I craft that incident in my head into a story I can tell my friends so that we

can all laugh about it later. Or I'm going through the incident in my head and drawing whatever meaning I can out of it.

It's important to carefully choose who or what we are putting at the centre of our stories, though. Two weeks ago, I re-read "This is Water," a commencement speech the late, acclaimed writer David Foster Wallace gave in 2005. "Everything in my own immediate experience supports my deep belief that I am the absolute centre of the universe, the real-est, most vivid and important person in existence," Wallace said.

We rarely talk about this basic self-centredness because it's so socially repulsive, Wallace continued, but it's pretty much the same for all of us: "It is our default-setting, hard-wired into our boards at birth. Think about it: There is no experience you've had that you were not at the absolute centre of. The world as you experience it is right there in front of you. . . . Other people's thoughts and feelings have to be communicated to you somehow, but your own are so immediate, urgent, real. You get the idea."

Life, Wallace suggests, is about challenging this way of thinking in order to live a compassionate life.

"It's a matter of my choosing to do the work of somehow altering or getting free of my natural, hard-wired default setting, which is to be deeply and literally self-centred, and to see and interpret everything through this lens of self."

As *A Year of Reading Biblically* continues, I'm choosing to be aware that it's not just my story I'm living day in and day out; it's God's story.

As with the stories of Adam and Eve and the Israelites before me, God is up to something today. The challenge is to stop thinking only about myself long enough to perhaps discern what that something is. ▮

Calendar

British Columbia

April 11-13: MC B.C. Junior Impact youth retreat at Camp Squeah, Hope.

April 12,13: Lenten Vespers with the Abendmusik Choir; (12) at Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, Abbotsford, (13) at Knox United Church, Vancouver; both services at 8 p.m.

May 3: Mennonite Women B.C.'s 75th Inspirational Day at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford. Speaker: Karen Martens Zimmerly.

May 8,9,10,11: Recycled Orchestra, a youth orchestra from Paraguay is on tour across Canada; (8) Broadway Community Church, Chilliwack,

at 7 p.m. (9) Vancouver, venue and time TBA; (10) Peace Portal Alliance Church, Surrey, at 7 p.m. (11) Central Heights Church, Abbotsford, time TBA; all concerts with Calvin Dyck and Abbotsford Youth Orchestra.

Alberta

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

May 4: 2014 Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools Music Festival, at Ambrose University College, Calgary, at 3 p.m.

May 10: Camp Valaqua spring work day. Volunteers needed to help get the camp ready for summer by splitting wood, installing docks and setting

up tipis. For more information, call 403-637-2510.

May 23-25: "Pause, a weekend away" women's retreat at Sunnyside Christian Retreat Centre, Sylvan Lake. Speaker: April Yamasaki, Emmanuel Mennonite church, Abbotsford, B.C. For more information, visit Pause2014.blogspot.ca or e-mail Kate Janzen at kajanszen.13@gmail.com.

Saskatchewan

April 22-23: "Honouring the Earth," an SMYO service and learning opportunity for students in grades 8 to 12, at Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim. This event replaces the SMYO "Worship extravaganza" scheduled for March 29.

April 26: Saskatchewan Women in Mission Enrichment Day, at Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

May 6: Recycled Orchestra, a youth orchestra from Paraguay is on tour across Canada; at Rosthern Junior College; at 7 p.m.

May 10: RJC spring choir concert, at RJC.

May 24: RJC fundraising golf tournament at Valley Regional Park.

Manitoba

April 5: Jazz@CMU. For more information, visit cmu.ca/programs/music/html.

April 18: Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Christ* will be sung in English with an orchestra under the direction of Yuri Klaz, at First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m. An offering will be taken.

April 26: CMU spring concert, at 7 p.m. For more information, visit cmu.ca/events.html.

April 27: The 45-voice adult choir of Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, performs Haydn's *The Creation* with orchestra and soloists, at 7 p.m.

April 30, May 2,4: Recycled Orchestra, a youth orchestra from Paraguay is on tour across Canada; (30) Steinbach Mennonite Church; (2) Winkler MB Church; (4) North Kildonan MB Church, Winnipeg. All performances at 7 p.m.

(Continued on page 38)

UpComing

Silver Lake Mennonite Camp launches new Navigate program

SAUBLE BEACH, ONT.—Silver Lake Mennonite Camp has created a new nine-month program for young adults, to begin this fall. Navigate is for young adults aged 18 to 20 and will focus on skills development, life skills and personal discovery. Participants will live, work and serve together during the camping seasons, and will be involved in building projects; garden, orchard and chicken care; canning and preserving; and general maintenance. Accreditation and certificate workshops will equip participants with the skills required to step into leadership roles with various outdoor education groups and retreats that Silver Lake hosts. Jon Moyer, Navigate program director, calls the program "an opportunity for young adults to gain practical life skills, whether it be financial planning, mindfulness or how to swing a hammer, while discerning where they want to go and how to get there." At the completion of the program, Navigate participants will receive a \$1,000 scholarship from Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., or Canada Mennonite University, Winnipeg. The deadline for the program, which will run from this September through May, 2014, is May 1. For more information, call the camp at 519-422-1401 or e-mail navigate@slmc.ca.

—Silver Lake Mennonite Camp

Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
April 14	April 1



global family
foundation

SAVE
THE DATE!

Recycled Orchestra Canadian Tour

Out of the slum of Cateura, Paraguay comes an unlikely orchestra, playing instruments made from trash found on the landfill.

Join us for an inspirational evening of story and music to see how hope is rising in one of South America's poorest communities.

April 25 - 28	Ontario
April 30 - May 4	Manitoba
May 5-7	Saskatchewan
May 8 - 11	B.C.

Visit www.globalfamilyfoundation.ca
for more information



(Continued from page 37)

Ontario

April 4-6: "Does God See Me?" young women's retreat (aged 16 to 18) at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp. For more information, visit slmc.ca/retreats.

April 6: Hillcrest Mennonite Church, New Hamburg, presents It's Cool in the Furnace, an intergenerational musical about Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar, at 2:30 and 7 p.m., as part of the church's 50th-anniversary celebration. For more information, call 519-662-1577.

April 6: Menno Singers hymn sing at Wanner Mennonite Church, Cambridge, at 7 p.m. Song leader: Mark Diller Harder.

April 8: Mennonite Savings and Credit Union's 50th annual general meeting, at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener; registration at 6:30 p.m., followed by the meeting at 7 p.m.

April 12: MC Eastern Canada Youth Bible Quizzing.

April 15: MennoHomes hosts a retirement celebration for Martin Buhr at Gale Presbyterian Church, Elmira, from 6:30 to 9 p.m. For more information, visit www.mennohomes.com.

April 18: Deadline to apply for participation in Silver Lake Mennonite Camp's new Navigate program for young adults aged 18 to 20. For more information, visit slmc.ca/navigate.

April 25-26: MC Eastern Canada annual church gathering in the Niagara Region.

April 25-28: Recycled Orchestra, a youth orchestra from Paraguay is on tour across Canada; (25) First Baptist Church, Waterloo; (26) UMEI Christian High School, Leamington; (27) Bethany Community Church, St. Catharines; (28) Wainfleet Brethren in Christ Church. All performances at 7 p.m.

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.

Community Mennonite Fellowship in Drayton, Ont., seeking a full-time Lead Pastor. Position available Summer 2014. For more details, contact Henry Paetkau, MCEC Area Church

Minister at: hpaetkau@mcec.ca or visit communitymennonite.com. Please submit applications to Henry Paetkau by April 15.



Waterloo North Mennonite Church invites applications for the full-time position of lead minister. We are a theologically diverse, urban congregation.

We are seeking a person with a well-integrated Mennonite/Anabaptist theological orientation who is committed to team ministry, with gifts in preaching and planning worship, pastoral care, ministry team leadership and administration. Candidates should have a Master of Divinity degree or equivalent, and previous pastoral experience. Supervised training in a pastoral setting is desirable, as is additional education in areas relevant to pastoral leadership.

Review of applications will begin on Apr. 25, 2014.

Preferred start date: Fall 2014

Please submit inquiries, resumes and references to:
Henry Paetkau, Area Church Minister
Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
#201 - 50 Kent Ave.
Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1
Tel: 226-476-2500 or 855-476-2500

Classifieds

Student Housing

University Student Housing in Winnipeg
Inspired by an Anabaptist Christian faith perspective, Emmaus House is a residential community where university students in Winnipeg, Man., will find support academically, spiritually, in lives of service, healthy living and relationship. Go to emmaushousewinnipeg.ca for more information and the Fall 2014 application form.

Learning Opportunity

Learn to grow food organically (vegetables, livestock, field crops). Internships available. Murray Bunnett Family Farm, New Brunswick. House & Board included. Members of Petitcodiac Mennonite Church.
1-506-756-8261
cmbunnett@hotmail.com

Employment Opportunities

Connexus Language Institute in South Korea seeks university graduates to teach elementary school students English, while

Announcement

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

living in Christian community. One to two year commitment. Round-trip airfare provided. Email master@connexus.co.kr.



Employment Opportunity

UMEI Christian High School invites applications for the position of RECRUITMENT & ADMISSIONS DIRECTOR.

- Post-secondary college diploma or university degree.
- Experience and/or education in the area of marketing, business and community relations will be given preference.
- The successful applicant will have a passion for Mennonite School Education and be aware of the distinctiveness expressed from a Mennonite & Anabaptist perspective at UMEI.
- The applicant must be a self-starter and be willing to take initiatives on his or her own, and be able to engage in effective teamwork with staff, board and parents.
- Responsibilities include implementation and supervision of all Recruitment & Admission initiatives.
- Full-time equivalency of the position will be determined in consultation with the successful candidate.
- Remuneration will be commensurate with experience and education.
- UMEI Christian School is a privately funded Mennonite Church secondary school offering a full complement of Grade 9-12 courses, fully recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

For a more complete job description and to submit applications, contact Sonya Bedal, Principal, UMEI Christian School, 614 Mersea Road 6, Leamington, ON N8H 3V8. 519-326-7448. office@umei.ca, www.umei.ca. Applications accepted until March 28.



Navigate



"I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be."

- Douglas Adams

Adventure



Skill Development



Personal Discovery



Navigate is a new and unique program for 18- to 20-year-olds. Spend nine months (September to May) living and learning at Silver Lake and find where you need to be, in a place like no other.

Apply by May 1, 2014

slmc.ca/navigate

navigate@slmc.ca 519-422-1401

FREEDOM FROM ADDICTION



Much More than a Rehab Center!

Residential Addiction Treatment for Young Men and Women Ages 19-34

Proven Effective

At Welcome Home, we not only eliminate the addictive behavior, we also resolve the underlying issues that led to the addiction. In addition, program participants receive extensive career training and gain the healthy life-skills and other abilities needed to stay sober. Program participants develop mentally, socially, physically, emotionally, and spiritually **until they are ready** to live as responsible, contributing members of society - **for life!**



Life-long sobriety -
our only purpose.

Our Program Includes:

- Personalized Treatment
- Group Therapy
- One-on-One Counseling
- Safe, Comfortable Residences
- Physical & Mental Wellness Training
- Extensive Personal Development
- Parenting Skills
- Vocational Skills Development
- Life-Skills Training
- Well-Balanced Meals
- All Clothing Needs
- Public Speaking Training
- Social Skills Development
- Debt Counseling
- Leadership Training
- Recreational & Social Activities
- Computer Training
- Medical, Dental, & Legal Assistance

Most Affordable

Similar programs cost \$10,000 to \$30,000 per month. However, Welcome Home is funded by the John Volken Foundation, a private charitable organization dedicated to fighting addiction. Thanks to this funding, **the Program is FREE**, except for the one-time intake fee. No strings attached. We only require your solid commitment to change.



Stop the Pain
Take the First Step Today

For More Information Phone 1-855-592-3001

 **Welcome Home**
ADDICTION RECOVERY ACADEMY
Changing Lives

www.WHrecovery.org