

CANADIAN MINIONITE

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EDITORIAL

A difficult debate

BARB DRAPER
INTERIM CO-EDITOR

Since the 1980s, the Mennonite church has been debating how it should relate to those who are same-sex attracted. It has been a long and difficult debate, and it isn't over yet. Since 2009, Mennonite Church Canada has been working on how to deal with this contentious issue through the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process. The BFC task force reported in July 2014 that Mennonites in Canada do not agree on how to interpret the Bible on this issue. All sides take the Bible seriously, but they interpret it differently. And so this passionate discussion continues.

Our feature article on page 4, "A biblical and better way," by Ron Sider, was specifically requested by readers from different parts of the country. While not all readers will agree with Sider's point of view, he presents a well-articulated argument that we have not carried in these pages recently. Meanwhile, this issue of the magazine also has a story of the first same-sex couple to be publicly married by MC Canada clergy (see page 13).

As the debate stretches on, many of us have heard arguments on both sides from people we respect. One side says that Jesus was welcoming and loving, and so should we be. If we exclude those who are same-sex attracted, we are guilty of injustice. The other side frames the issue in ethical terms. If sexual intimacy outside of a monogamous heterosexual marriage was a sin for so many centuries, how can we with integrity declare it is no longer

sinful?

It seems there are many of us who don't know what to think and wish a compromise would be possible. The BFC task force reported that most congregations responding to BFC 5, "Biblical perspectives on human sexuality," affirmed the church's traditional position, but at the same time wanted to be more welcoming. Our majority position seems to be that we don't want to be exclusionary, but neither do we want to abandon long-standing sexual ethics.

MC U.S.A. is having a similar discussion. A significant number of congrega-



All sides take the Bible seriously, but they interpret it differently. And so this passionate discussion continues.

tions chose to leave MC U.S.A. in 2014 after one of its conferences licensed a pastor living in a same-sex relationship. Whole conferences have debated withdrawing from MC U.S.A. A survey of U.S. Mennonite pastors in 2014 shows that younger people and those living in larger cities are more apt to be inclusive. Probably the same is true in Canada.

This is a difficult discussion, but it isn't going to go away. MC Canada congregations have been asked for further discernment through BFC 6, with reports due by Feb. 28. Fortunately, the BFC 6 document includes more resources for this discussion, including a video, "Discerning What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches,"

by Loren Johns, professor of New Testament at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, the text of which is also available for those who want to study it closely.

After looking at various biblical texts that relate to homosexuality, and explaining how they can be interpreted differently, Johns asks whether there are precedents in the Bible for a major theological shift like the one we are facing. He refers to two such shifts in the New Testament. Acts 10 recounts the story of Peter's vision in which God tells Peter in a dream to eat animals that are forbidden according to Leviticus 11. The message of the dream was confirmed when shortly afterward the Gentiles in Caesarea received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The other theological shift in the early church related to the question of whether Christians needed to be circumcised. A study of Acts 15 shows that the church considered not only Scripture, but also

experience, reason, tradition and the voice of the Holy Spirit in its discernment.

Johns does not take a position on whether the church should shift its theology on this issue, but points out the importance of loving each other in the midst of the discussion. He says, "So when knowledge and listening to the Spirit leave us short of the uniformity of perspective for which we had hoped—and it sometimes will, according to Paul in I Corinthians 13—faith, hope and love can still get us through."

As the church continues its discernment, may we all continue to pray for guidance, while exercising all the humility, patience and love we can muster.

ABOUT THE COVER:

Ahmed, head of the local water user association, stands near the channel that diverts water from the river and brings life to his rural Ethiopian community. He speaks with pride about the difference this six-kilometre channel has made to their lives, bringing not only water but food security, a school, a clinic and dignity. For more, read 'Reclaiming Ethiopia' on page 17.

PHOTO: EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU, CANADIAN MENNONITE

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GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH FEATURE

A biblical and better way

Churches should uphold biblical teaching about homosexuality—and be places to love and listen, rather than shame or exclude

BY RONALD J. SIDER

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

Surely, we can ask the Holy Spirit to show us how to teach and nurture biblical sexual practice without marginalizing and driving away from Christ those who struggle with biblical norms.

Theologically conservative Christians are widely perceived as hostile to gays. And it is largely our own fault. Many of us have actually been homophobic. Most of us tolerated gay bashers. We did not deal sensitively and lovingly with young people in our churches struggling with their sexual orientation. We even had the gall to blame gay people for the collapse of marriage in our society, ignoring the obvious fact that the main problem by far is that many heterosexuals do not keep their marriage vows. We have often failed to distinguish gay orientation from gay sexual activity.

If the devil had designed a strategy to discredit the historic Christian position on sexuality, he could not have done much better than what the evangelical community has actually done.

Some believe the track record of conservative Christians is so bad that we should just remain silent on this issue. But that would mean abandoning what I believe is clear biblical teaching. It would mean forgetting the nearly unanimous two-millennia-long teaching of Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians. And it would mean failing to listen to the vast majority of contemporary Christians who now live in the Global South.

Goodness and beauty

The primary biblical case against homosexual practice is not the few texts that explicitly mention it. Rather, it is the fact that again and again the Bible affirms the goodness and beauty of sexual intercourse—and everywhere, without exception, it is sexual intercourse between a man and a woman committed to each other for life.

In the creation account in Genesis, the “*man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame*” (Genesis 2:25). Their sexual attraction is good and beautiful. A whole book—Song of Solomon—celebrates the sexual love of a man and a woman. Many Old Testament laws and proverbs discuss the boundaries for sexual intercourse—and always it must be between a man and a woman. Jesus celebrates marriage (John 2:1-11) and tightens the restrictions on divorce—again, always in the context of a man and

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a woman. Paul urges a husband and wife to satisfy each other's sexual desires (I Corinthians 7:1-7).

This affirmation of sex within the life-long commitment of a man and a woman provides the context for understanding the few texts that explicitly mention same-sex intercourse: Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:24-27; I Corinthians 6:9; I Timothy 1:10.

Leviticus condemns lying “with a man as one lies with a woman.” It says nothing about motives or types of homosexual acts (rape or cult prostitution). It simply condemns, unconditionally, all sex between two males.

Reaffirmed or ignored?

But Christians today do not condemn every sexual activity denounced in Leviticus. So we must turn to the New Testament to see what prohibitions it ignores or sets aside and what ones it reaffirms.

The longest discussion is in Romans 1, where Paul argues that non-Jews without the law exchanged the truth about God revealed in nature for a lie. God's punishment was to give “them over to the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity.” Paul then cites several illustrations, including women exchanging “natural sexual relations for unnatural ones” and men committing “shameful acts with other men.”

Numerous authors argue that Paul does not mean all homosexual intercourse is wrong. Perhaps Paul only condemns pederasty (an older male with a boy was common), or cult prostitution, or uncommitted same-sex activity. Or perhaps Paul was thinking of the common view that it was a disgrace for a

man to play the part of a woman because women were inferior. But the text does not say any of those things. It simply condemns same-sex intercourse.

Contrary to God's will

In I Corinthians 6:9, Paul lists a number of sinful activities and declares that such “wrongdoers” will not inherit the kingdom. The list includes the greedy, slanderers, drunkards and *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. (It is tragic that many Christians spend much more time condemning the sexual activity mentioned in these two Greek words than they devote to opposing slander and greed.)

But what do *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* mean? Many scholars agree with Richard Hays, who points out that *malakoi* was often used in Hellenistic Greek as slang to refer to the passive (often younger) partner in homosexual activity. *Arsenokoitai* (also used in I Timothy 1:10) seems to be a compound word first used by Paul. It comes from *arsen* (male) and the verb *koitē* (lying with)—a male lying with a male. It is likely that this newly coined word emerged from reading Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, because the same two Greek words used in Paul's compound word *arsenokoitai* are in the Greek translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

Even scholars who defend homosexual practice by today's Christians agree that wherever the Bible refers to homosexual practice, it condemns it as contrary to God's will.

What's required today?

But Christians today do not take everything in the New Testament (for example, head coverings for women) as commands

for today. Some Christians advance a number of arguments to claim that (at least in the case of a monogamous, life-long commitment) same-sex intercourse is morally acceptable:

- **A GREAT** deal of homosexual intercourse in Greco-Roman society was pederastic (a dominant older male with a passive younger male) and not infrequently involved slavery and rape.
- **THE GRECO-ROMAN** world knew nothing about a life-long orientation or a long-term male-male sexual partnership.
- **MANY PEOPLE** in Paul's time condemned homosexual intercourse because it required a male to play the role of a woman, which was considered a disgrace because males were superior.
- **SOME GRECO-ROMAN** and Jewish writers condemned homosexual intercourse because it could not lead to procreation.

Obviously, a mutually supportive, life-long, caring, same-sex relationship is very different from the relationships described above. And we do not believe sexual intercourse must be for the purpose of procreation.

But two things are important to note. First, Paul never argues that homosexual practice is wrong because it is pederastic or oppressive or wrong for a male to play the role of a woman. He simply says it is wrong. Second, there are examples in ancient literature that talk about a long-term (even life-long) homosexual partnership, and a number of ancient authors talk about a life-long same-sex orientation.

Slavery and women

Some argue for abandoning the historic Christian teaching on same-sex intercourse by pointing out that Christians no longer accept what the Bible says about slavery and the inferiority of women. But in the case of both, a trajectory within Scripture points toward a very different view.

What Paul asked Philemon to do when his runaway slave Onesimus returned was so radical that, if widely implemented, it would end slavery. On women, Jesus defied male prejudices and treated women as equals. Women were apostles (Romans 16:7) and prophets (Acts 21:9; I Corinthians 11:5) in the early church. When Christians reject slavery and affirm the equality of women, they extend a trajectory that begins in the biblical canon. In the case of same-sex intercourse, nothing even hints at such a change.

Praise for celibacy

If the biblical teaching on sexual intercourse is decisive, then celibacy is the only option for those not in a heterosexual marriage. But many argue that celibacy is impossible or that the abundant life God wills for everyone involves sexual fulfillment.

Such an argument, however, would have astonished Jesus and Paul—both unmarried celibates. Both praised a celibate life. Furthermore, the historic position that sexual intercourse must be limited to married heterosexuals demands celibacy for vastly more people than just the relatively small number with a same-sex orientation. Widows and widowers, and those who long for marriage but cannot find a partner, are also called to celibacy.

In addition to the unanimous biblical teaching, church history's nearly unanimous condemnation of same-sex practice and the same teaching by churches that represent the overwhelming majority of Christians in the world today ought to give us great pause before we bless same-sex intercourse.

This is not enough

But simply repeating biblical truth is not enough. We need a substantially new approach:

• **FIRST, WE** must nurture Christian men

and women who keep their marriage vows and model healthy family life.

• **SECOND, WE** need to love and listen to gay people, especially gay Christians, in a way that most of us have not done.

Mennonites must also take the lead in several other vigorous activities related to gay people.

We ought to condemn and combat verbal or physical abuse of gay people.

We ought to develop programs so that our congregations are known as the best places in the world for gay and questioning youth (and adults) to seek God's will in a context that embraces, loves and listens, rather than shames, denounces and excludes.

Surely, we can ask the Holy Spirit to show us how to teach and nurture biblical sexual practice without marginalizing and driving away from Christ those who struggle with biblical norms.

The best in the world

Our churches should be widely known as places where gay people can be open about their orientation and feel welcomed. Of course, Christians who engage in unbiblical sexual practices (whether

heterosexual or gay) should be disciplined (and disciplined) by the church and not allowed to be leaders or members in good standing if they persist in their sin. The same should be said for those who engage in unbiblical practices of any kind.

However, Christians who acknowledge a gay orientation but commit themselves to celibacy should be eligible for any role in the church their spiritual gifts suggest. Imagine the impact if Mennonite churches were known to be the best places in the world to find love, support and full affirmation of gifts if one is an openly gay, celibate Christian. ☼

Ronald J. Sider is a member of Oxford Circle Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, Pa., and a professor at Palmer Seminary of Eastern University.

This article is a summary of a chapter in a forthcoming book by Sider and Ben Lowe, A Faith For All Generations (Baker, © 2016, <http://www.bakerpublishinggroup.com>). Used by permission.



☼ For discussion

1. How has our society's attitude toward same-sex relationships changed in the past 20 or 30 years? Who or what has contributed to this shift? How much has the church changed its attitude on this issue?
2. For several years, Mennonite Church Canada has been involved in the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process and it has turned out that the people and congregations of MC Canada do not agree on how to interpret the Bible on matters of sexuality. Is it possible that we can agree to disagree? How much is this a congregational issue and how much a national or area church issue? Have we been showing humility and patience in this discussion?
3. The BFC task force says feedback to the BFC 5 document shows the majority of Mennonites affirm the denomination's historical documents on sexuality, but they also want to be more compassionate and welcoming to those who are same-sex attracted. Is this similar to the position taken by Ron Sider?
4. Christians in the Global South tend to have more traditional theological views. As we struggle with the implications of same-sex marriage, how much should North American Mennonites listen to Mennonites from around the world?

—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.

✉ Mennonites share their faith through their lives

RE: "SHARING THE faith" column by Willard Metzger, Sept. 29, 2014, page 7.

This warmed my heart and reminded me of a conversation and a Scripture text that has helped me over the years.

When I was younger in the faith and learning to hear God speak through the Bible's words proclaimed during the sermons on a Sunday, it was puzzling to me that an older brother, who had been walking with the Lord for a longer time than I, thought that the gospel was not being proclaimed. In this brother's view, it was not the gospel unless it's "fire and brimstone" preaching followed by an altar call.

Talking with him helped me to learn that I need to make my primary focus the words that are being proclaimed, rather than focussing on the speaker and his

(Continued on page 8)

FROM OUR LEADERS

'Walk alongside'

BRENT CHARETTE

Twitter informed me this morning that Bethany College in Hepburn, Sask., is closing in 2015 after 87 years of teaching. Ron Toews, director of the Canadian Conference of MB Churches' leadership development arm, says, "The closure of Bethany doesn't change the reality that we need to continue walking alongside young women and men as they think about the foundation of their lives. I'd say there's a whole new interest in what it means to be a disciple."

He's right, but denominational bodies need to encourage congregations to "walk alongside" in ways that young people want regardless of how it has been done for the last few decades. A stone's throw from my office sits Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, which has a thriving cohort of twenty-somethings. What is it doing differently that attracts and engages young people? When asked, most of them point to Stirling's commitment to social justice and community



engagement.

Josie Winterfeld is Stirling's missions, peace and justice, and outreach worker, whose title tells you something about

its commitment to peace. As well, the congregation walks-the-walk when it comes to peacebuilding. Notably, it hosts suppers at Stirling each Saturday for the six coldest months of the year, providing a warm meal but more importantly meaningful connection with Kitchener-Waterloo's homeless and precariously housed. Young people at Stirling tell me that it is this type of tangible service that brought them to the Stirling community.

Writers in this publication and elsewhere talk about the need for the church to be increasingly and intentionally missional. I could not agree more. But an even greater argument for getting off our collective pews and into the lives of our neighbours is that a new generation of Anabaptist disciples is leading this movement. They seem to understand

quite clearly that Scripture instructs us to feed the poor, not talk about rates of unemployment and the sad state of mental health infrastructure.

In addition to denominational bodies, I also follow Christian leaders like Shane Claiborne, who wrote the following tweet yesterday: "Most good things have been said far too many times, and just need to be lived." That seems to sum up the thinking of many young people in our church: Can we talk less and do more?

The closing of Bethany, and indeed the shrinking of many church-related institutions including congregations, is sad because there are things that institutions do very well, like education. Bethany has taught hundreds about Jesus over the years, but perhaps we all need to take the next step and contemplate "What does Jesus want us to do?" That is the relevant missiological question that we need to pay attention to.

Today's church is best served not by defending its institutions, but by following our young leaders. They seek to serve their community, get to know the poor, the hungry, the mournful and the meek. Sounds good to me, and also downright biblical.

Brent Charette is the church engagement minister for MC Eastern Canada.

(Continued from page 7)

particular style of preaching. Worship can bear good fruit if I work at shifting my focus to what God is saying or trying to say to me. Style or method can take the life out of things. This “fire and brimstone” approach lends itself toward the “getting-in-your-face” kind of evangelism that I never understood, nor do I respond well to.

I don't understand the claim that Christian Mennonites don't share their faith. They share it all the time and every day, in how they live in their families, with their neighbours and how they go about their work.

The text that helps me is I Peter 3:15-16: “*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the*

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Take on a demon

PHIL WAGLER

Whom are you battling? Can you picture them or it? Everyone is at war, some on numerous fronts. “Be kind,” wrote Philo of Alexandria. “Everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.”

This is an important point. To remember that every irritating person is human like I am, confronted daily by battles, would certainly make the world a better place.

However, the extension of kindness to someone else out of respect to the battle-weariness does nothing to crush the enemy they war against. There is, after all, a larger battle being waged. While many in the western world laugh at the thought of spiritual forces at work, you can't read the newspaper, let alone the Bible, without wondering if something else isn't plying its sinister trade. Behind the battles people fight more is at work.

The Apostle Paul, a decade or so after Philo's death, called the community of Christians to see that they “do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

This calls for more than kindness. In Paul's mind, it calls for spiritual armour and engagement. If we look at Jesus, we

discover “he appointed twelve . . . so that they might be with him and he might send them to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14-15). Jesus baptized them into the intimacy of his presence, the sent-ness of proclaiming the kingdom of God, and the authority to do battle in the spiritual realm. The children of the kingdom are about more than kindness; we are not about battle management, but about the arrival of freedom and liberty!

Many Christians have settled for two-thirds of Jesus' training purposes. We enjoy the presence and proclamation of the king, but we are skittish, scared and sometimes just plain unaware of the battle going on in heavenly places. This leaves us fighting battles—even church ones—with our wisdom, insight, plans, diagrams, budgets and philosophies. We see someone's scuffle and step in to end

true battle is never with flesh and blood. Ultimately, this alone enables true kindness towards those fighting battles and heightens our dignity as a people of the resurrection who follow a Lord who fought the great battle.

The redeemed and Spirit-filled children of God have been given armour and authority. We are to wage it wisely and rightly. We are to bring true freedom to those in foxholes who need the principalities and authorities disarmed and sent back to the pit of hell from whence they came. This is a spiritual battle and the people of God would do well to remember this as we bring the kingdom of God into tangible reality on our sideroads and streets.

So what would it look like for you to begin walking with this type of authority? What would change in your workplace, neighbourhood or church if you took on



[Y]ou can't read the newspaper, let alone the Bible, without wondering if something else isn't plying its sinister trade.

it, at least for a while. We think of our conflicts and see people to blame, an enemy with flesh and blood, and become functional agnostics, operating as if the only thing holding us back is those in our way in the material world.

If we are growing in Christ and being trained in his way, we will see that our

the demons and fought the real battle?

Phil Wagler (phil_wagler@yahoo.ca) has waged many a battle the wrong way, but is finally learning to identify the real enemy. He is author of Gain. Save. Give: Doing Well & Doing Good for the Glory of God.

reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that . . . those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander?"

Will I wait patiently, trusting in the redemptive power of God's Word for myself and others? Like the psalmist, I stray like a lost sheep and hope to be sought out by the Lord. Although I have not forgotten his

commands, I have not always followed them. Just ask my neighbour.

**GEORGE W. GOERTZEN,
NEW WESTMINSTER, B.C.**

George W. Goertzen is a member of Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond, B.C.

NEW ORDER VOICE

Changes for the church

KATIE DOKE SAWATZKY

If there was one book in 2014 that had me despairing and cursing, but fired up to hope, it was Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything* (Knopf Canada). Klein is a journalist-activist who writes game-changers that dismantle the powerful myths of corporate culture. In her most recent book, she makes the case that capitalism is destroying the planet, that shaking off fossil-fuel dependency is possible, and that signs of change are already visible in communities across the globe.

Sounds impressive. And it is. Klein's blue book is overwhelmingly well-researched, separated into three parts that explain how we created the extractivist, capitalist society we live in today, and how it harms the planet; the myths and messiness of Big Green (geoengineering and its billionaires); and the stories of how people fighting for

their rights—particularly indigenous peoples—has created a global phenomenon that is forcing industries like Big Oil and Gas to address the destruction of land and water they leave in their wake.

It's a powerful book that seems to cover all the bases for an aspiring activist like myself. She gives me ample reason to denounce the close relationship the Canadian government has with oil and gas companies, and to feel justified in my quest to get out of the car. But

there is one element that Klein doesn't really touch, and that's faith. Don't faith communities have a role to play in the "existential crisis of our era"?

Klein is quick to link the historical roots of our "extractive economy" with the biblical understanding of humans' God-given dominion over the earth. She credits science icon Francis Bacon (1561-1626) with the inaugural push towards an extractive mindset, stating that his view of nature as something to be dominated was a "biblically inspired framework."

Despite this problematic link, I was surprised by how Klein's argument—that climate change is an opportunity for us to build a better world, both democratically and environmentally—felt a lot like



Klein is quick to link the historical roots of our 'extractive economy' with the biblical understanding of humans' God-given dominion over the earth.

an altar call. She talks about a battle of worldviews—hierarchical/individualist vs. communitarian/egalitarian—emphasizing the former as part of the threat and describing the latter as the worldview that "can be our salvation."

The holistic change she advocates for reminds me of the redemption and renewal I've learned about from my faith community. Instead of an extractivist economy—one that takes and takes without giving back—Klein argues for a

regenerative one. Instead of an ingrown, selfish spirit, the church follows one motivated by love, joy and peace. I've grown up believing in a God who, together with believers, renews things when love for neighbours and creatures is present.

In her chapter, "Love will save this place," Klein acknowledges the role and power of love in the struggle against corporate influence. But it's not love for God that's stressed as much as love for place. From the Heiltsuk First Nation greeting a pipeline review panel with a welcoming dance and banquet, to the "Transition Town" movements in more than 450 locations worldwide, Klein holds up close-knit communities that celebrate their culture and care about each other and their land as examples to follow on the path to justice and survival.

For church folk, the path is strikingly similar. We seek justice, and our long-held practices of hospitality and peacemaking are necessary for commu-

nity-building. With these skills, we are well-poised to contribute to the regenerative change Klein seeks, especially when we care for the land on which we live. We must learn its history, question our possession of it, and become aware of how our behaviours threaten it. We must love our neighbourhood as well as our neighbours.

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

✉ Pentecostal pastor has the message of salvation—not MCC or Joe Clark

RE: “MCC MANITOBA stands with Buffalo Gals,” Dec. 15, 2014, page 22.

Senior writer Will Braun has been disingenuous in his definition of the traditional act and meaning of smudging, as well as of the traditional Christian belief about other religions and cultures. There are two distinct religions in the world: one that is authored by, acceptable and pleasing to God, and one that is not.

No amount of consensus-building or big-name endorsement will render shamanism and demonism acceptable to Christ or his Spirit-filled followers.

As an aboriginal descendent, I say that Pastor Scott Bullerwell of Immanuel Pentecostal Church in Winnipeg has well stated the Christian position and nothing was ever more attractive to marginalized people throughout the ages than the freedom from the slavery to sin and Satan that is offered in the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is a truth that transcends all cultures, and, yes, it is absolutely exclusively through Jesus Christ, in whom is eternal life, and without whom there is no hope of forgiveness and peace with God here or in the afterlife.

I believe the Buffalo Gals who claim to be Christian may well be able to “do all things through Christ who strengthens” and may also “possess a peace that surpasses all understanding” by trusting and relying on Christ’s finished work, confessing their sin and repenting of ancient pagan practices.

In the end, Mennonite Central Committee and Joe Clark are not the authority, but the Pentecostal church acted consistently with the position of traditional Christianity. Nothing is more loving and inclusive than being obedient to God’s Word and the words of his Son, Jesus Christ, and inviting all to enter into that hope also.

DAN RICARD (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ Standing with the Buffalo Gals was the right thing to do

RE: “MCC MANITOBA stands with Buffalo Gals,” Dec. 15, 2014, page 22.

I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry after reading this article of our Mennonite leaders supporting the Buffalo Gals in their wish to hold a smudging ceremony in a Winnipeg church.

The officials of the Pentecostal church blocked an aboriginal smudging ceremony in their church and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Manitoba organizers had the courage to cancel the event.

I enjoy irony and I suspect that these officials have

a Christmas tree in their church, exchange Christmas gifts and sing the carol, “We, Three Kings.” On our holiest day, Easter Sunday, they probably allow their grandchildren to run around with brightly coloured eggs exhorting the blessings from a mythical bunny. In spite of the hypocrisy of these pagan events, a smudging ceremony is pushing things too far for them!

When I participate in an aboriginal smudging, I remember my own baptism and experience the joy of being “cleansed.” I feel refreshed.

However, there are dangers! While attending a national conference in a major hotel, the smudging ceremony tripped the smoke alarm and all 25 floors were evacuated onto the Toronto streets! I both laugh and cry.

Good on our MCC Manitoba leaders.

DOUG DURST, REGINA

✉ Are our words faced ‘towards God’?

RE: “THE POWER of words” and other articles in the Dec. 15, 2014, issue.

Whether *Canadian Mennonite*, my favourite public radio program or the church I frequent, when a guest fills in for the regular editor, host or preacher, more often than not I experience a breath of fresh air over and above the valued accustomed programming.

Beginning with the guest editorial, “The power of words,” by Les Klassen Hamm on page 2, the issue is a fine representation of my experience. Clearly the words we choose affect what we feel and think about what we touch, see and hear! At the very moment we experience something, how we consciously or subconsciously choose to name and make sense of what we experience nudges our orientation either away from, or towards, what is godly.

Towards this end, I underline and support the final sentence in Helmut Lemke’s letter to the editor (“Controversial articles and letters are better than platitudes and clichés,” page 11). May *Canadian Mennonite* “continue to challenge us [with friction-causing articles] that we may mature and grow in our faith and attitude.”

The next letter by Don Procter (“MCC has broken trust ‘too often,’” page 13), lamenting the sudden loss of his contract with Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, makes me conclude that many of our church institutions are transitioning from a bottom-up service structure to that of a not-for-profit, incorporated, top-down, limited-liability, corporate power structure—as favoured by mammon.

Hamm’s thoughts on the power of words provide testamentary witness whether our words are faced “towards God” or not.

EDUARD HIEBERT, ST. FRANCOIS XAVIER, MAN.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Bauman—Reuben Howard (b. Aug. 23, 2014), to Greg McCorquodale and Nichelle Bauman, Floradale Mennonite, Ont., in Durham, Ont.

Klemp—Madeline Louise (b. Sept. 6, 2014), to Carrie and Jeff Klemp, Listowel Mennonite, Ont.

Plett—Natalie Jane (b. Sept. 20, 2014), to Angela Bergen Plett and Ben Plett, Home Street Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Steingart—Maya Burkhardt (b. Dec. 16, 2014), to Chris Steingart and Jillian Burkhardt, Breslau Mennonite, Ont.

Baptisms

Kaleigh Phillips—Floradale Mennonite, Ont., Dec. 7, 2014.

Marriages

Neufeld/Stobbe—Taylor Neufeld and Adam Stobbe, Leamington United Mennonite, Ont., Dec. 20, 2014.

Deaths

Dueck—Ben, 77 (b. Dec. 21, 1937; d. Dec. 29, 2014), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Forrest—Muriel (Mimi), 85 (b. May 27, 1929; d. Nov. 12, 2014), Rouge Valley Mennonite, Markham Ont.

Friesen—Heinrich, 87 (b. June 27, 1927; d. Dec. 14, 2014), Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Heinrichs—Peter, 88 (b. Feb. 15, 1926; d. Dec. 14, 2014), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Sawatzky—Henry Aldon, 86 (b. May 28, 1928; d. Dec. 13, 2014), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Thiessen—Marianne, 79 (b. April 5, 1935; d. Nov 8, 2014), charter member of Pineridge Christian Fellowship, Calgary, in Abbotsford, B.C.

/// Obituary

Marianne Thiessen, 79

April 5, 1935 - Nov 8, 2014



Marianne (Dyck) Thiessen, a charter member of Pineridge Christian Fellowship, Calgary, died on Nov. 8, 2014. Professionally a nurse, yet she was much more than that: a flower that never faded, a softener of hearts, an exemplary mother and wife, a gentle spirit who eased tensions and warmed relationships. Her journey began in Drake, Sask., on April 5, 1935, and ended in Abbotsford, B.C. It's the in-between years that are important. Her childhood family moves were not uncommon for teacher/pastor families in rural Canada. Both Marianne and her twin sister, Lilianne, as well as her younger sister, Connie, became nurses. Arnold, her brother, an entomologist, resides in Vienna, Austria. At Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, she met Bill Thiessen and not long after they married. Their lifetime of service, mostly with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), continued abroad: Nigeria, then back to Rosthern, Sask., then to Nigeria again. Their international experience was followed by work with MCC Alberta for 14 years, and since 1990 with MCC B.C. In these years she taught, worked as a nurse, hosted guests, parented Joanne and Byron, and constantly engaged in volunteer work. This continued throughout the years following her retirement until the day before her surgery. With her husband, she travelled abroad extensively, often engaged in service and in supporting MCC service workers. Her uniquely gentle touch on the hearts and lives of the family made her a much-loved wife, mother and friend. Her life was marked by an unwavering attitude of forgiveness. She was strong, wise and full of compassion. The family has established a Memorial/Endowment Fund through Mennonite Foundation of Canada, with MCC International Global Family Ministries as the beneficiary, to which anyone may contribute. Marianne is survived by Bill, Joanne and Byron (Kim), and two grandchildren: Meghan (Justin) and Jesse.

—BY HENRY NEUFELD

Pontius' Puddle



WOMEN WALKING TOGETHER IN FAITH

Looking back on a most incredible journey

BY GLORIA LAURENCE

A few years ago, when I prayed for a greater sense of social responsibility and deeper bonds with fellow Christians, I had no idea God would answer my prayer as creatively as he did.

That fall, I was invited to attend the MC B.C. Women's Ministry retreat weekend at Camp Squeah in Hope by a dear Mennonite friend, Wendy, and with more than a little trepidation, I agreed to go. The combination of my ignorance as to the philosophies and customs associated

MC B.C. WOMEN'S MINISTRY PHOTO



Gloria Laurence is dressed for 'high tea' at an MC B.C. Women's Ministry retreat at Camp Squeah.

with Mennonites, and the uncertainty of what the weekend would look like, caused my hesitation. However, the thought of not having to cook and the opportunity to rekindle my childhood love of camping piqued my curiosity. Besides, I needed a break! So, obediently, I set off to Camp Squeah and into a most incredible journey.

Needless to say, the mixture of meeting new friends, unleashing my creativity through unique and attainable crafts, and, most importantly, rekindling my relationship with God through a dynamic and soul-searching speaker, was exactly what I needed.

There was one catch, though. This was a Mennonite community and I was, well, not a Mennonite, but a Protestant whose home church was Peace Portal Alliance Church. However, I reasoned that our Father, Son and Holy Spirit were the same, and that was the only bond we needed.

It turned out that I was right. The love and acceptance



that were offered were beyond description. The environment could not have been more inclusive. Conversations flowed, and parallel life experiences made me feel as though I had known these women all my life.

Through the women's unconditional love and openness, similarities to my spiritual journey were obvious. I reasoned that any differences would be irrelevant, as God is unconditional love, and these ladies practised what they preached.

Throughout the year that followed, I prayed for a volunteer position that would have an impact for God's world. During the retreat that fall, I was moved to answer a call for help to join the retreat planning committee for the next year. And although I was still feeling reluctant, I was incredibly moved to see how the women responded to my "crashing" their Mennonite world.

To this day, I'm unsure whether the executive members were so exhausted that they would have welcomed just about anyone or they saw raw potential, but they appeared thrilled to accept me into their fold. I might add that Waltrude Gortzen leaped onto the stage to announce it before I could even consider changing my mind.

Four retreats later, I'm still an active, although somewhat "crazy," member of MC B.C.'s Women's Ministry Retreat Committee. And having been awarded the "coveted" position of master of ceremonies, my somewhat captive audience is subjected to my (God-given) gift of becoming funnier as my stagefright heightens. Besides, auction items move at alarming prices, and we all benefit from that!

The countless memories, laughs, "ah ha" moments and opportunities I have experienced at these retreats have shaped me into who I am today. The ability to witness women laughing at my stories, crying at my testimony, and sharing their innermost thoughts and feelings with me—all within 30 minutes or so—is incredibly rewarding.

My personal and spiritual growth have expanded exponentially because of the unconditional love and acceptance of my sisters who just happened to be Mennonites, and who so warmly welcomed me into their lives. ❧

To this day, I'm unsure whether the executive members were so exhausted that they would have welcomed just about anyone or they saw raw potential, but they appeared thrilled to accept me into their fold.

Gloria Laurence is a special education assistant with the Surrey, B.C., School District, and a behaviour interventionist for children with autism. A member of Peace Portal Alliance Church in Surrey, she has been attending the MC B.C. Women's Ministry retreats for a number of years.

GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

'It felt like a big deal . . . it was so powerful'

First MC Canada-officiated same-sex marriage takes place in Saskatchewan

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RACHEL BERGEN

Young Voices Co-editor

OSLER, SASK.

Craig Friesen and Matthew Wiens rang in 2015 by joining their hands and committing their lives to one another in front of friends and family at a New Year's Eve wedding, the first same-sex wedding to ever be publicly officiated by Mennonite Church Canada pastors.

Wiens and Friesen, who attend Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, were married by their co-pastors, Anita Retzlaff and Patrick Preheim, at Osler Mennonite Church, where Friesen is a member.

It was important for Friesen and Wiens to be married in a Mennonite church, even though MC Canada isn't publicly welcoming of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) couples. But despite the denomination's stance—whose *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* states, "We believe that God intends marriage

to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life"—the couple couldn't believe the amount of support they received from friends, family and their faith communities.

"It felt like a big deal because we had all these people here overwhelmingly and unequivocally supportive of our relationship," says Friesen. "It was so powerful."

Becoming a welcoming community

Nutana Park Mennonite didn't become welcoming overnight, however. According to members, this marriage is the outcome of a process that spanned nearly 20 years, through a gradual and intentional culture shift.

It began to take shape because of Connie Gutwin, who has attended the church for more than 30 years. Her daughter Catherine is a lesbian, and although she doesn't attend church, Gutwin felt it important for the church to welcome those who are same-sex attracted.

Ten years after Catherine came out, Nutana Park began adult education classes on same-sex relationships that drew LGBTQ people and their friends and family from all over the province.

Seven years later, the church sent a letter to MC Saskatchewan's pastoral leadership committee stating its intention to engage all members of the church fully in all aspects of church life.

According to Trish St. Onge, Nutana Park's congregational chair, the assumption was that this included marriage, although it wasn't stated in so many words. "There were subtle cultural shifts over the



Craig Friesen and Matthew Wiens, who attend Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, were married by pastors Patrick Preheim, left, and Anita Retzlaff on New Years Eve at Osler (Sask.) Mennonite Church.

years that came together that allowed us to confidently make that statement," she says.

Retzlaff believed so strongly in Nutana Park's welcoming statement, she says she was ready to put her career on the line if that was what it took.

Members of the congregation believe it was a profound moment of courage.

In October 2014, the area church's pastoral leadership commission released a statement in response to questions throughout the province wondering what would happen to pastors who perform same-sex marriages. The commission said individual congregations can decide if they will marry same-sex couples or not, and that no action will be taken against pastors for doing so.

The statement asks that "respect and kindness be demonstrated, regardless of the perspective taken, and that sensitivity be shown to persons and families involved in same-sex marriages who find themselves in the centre of this disagreement."

According to Willard Metzger, executive director of MC Canada, the denomination is at different points in its Being a Faithful Church process, a time of discernment that is looking at issues of faithfulness, including in areas of human sexuality. "Individual congregations may need to respond to their specific ministry contexts before the discernment period is completed," he says.

For Nutana Park, that meant marrying Friesen and Wiens, who they felt were ready

(Continued on page 14)



Wearing their wedding bands, Craig Friesen and Matthew Wiens clasp hands.

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(Continued from page 13)

to commit to each other and their faith community after getting engaged.

“Craig and Matt are a gift to our congregation, to MC Saskatchewan, to MC Canada, and to the kingdom of God,” Preheim says.

Hope for the future

Friesen and Wiens say their church experiences have generally been positive, and their church communities mostly open and accepting of their same-sex attraction.

“We’ve been really lucky to live in the city where there are two affirming churches,” Wiens says. Friesen grew up attending Osler Mennonite, which is also welcoming.

But that’s not the experience of many LGBTQ people, they say. Wiens and Friesen aren’t sure if their marriage will trigger change in their area church or the denomination as a whole, but they do hope it will inspire hope in the LGBTQ community.

Despite differences of opinion across the country, the couple hope churches will refer vulnerable LGBTQ people to welcoming churches like the ones they attend. They also hope that more congregations will come out as being publicly affirming, not just privately.

“It would be wonderful if one day silence was enough,” Wiens says, “but I think that we have to recognize that positive action is required at the moment.”

“There’s a history of the church being really oppressive,” Friesen adds. “The silence still oppresses.”



Anita Retzlaff and Patrick Preheim, pastors of Nutana Park Mennonite Church, presided over Craig Friesen and Matthew Wiens’s wedding on Dec. 31, 2014.

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MC Manitoba in considerable flux

Director of camping ministry position ends as area church reorganizes for the future

BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

Manitoba Correspondent

Buffed by the winds of change, Mennonite Church Manitoba staff and board continue to work hard at charting a path towards a vibrant and sustainable future in keeping with the area church's vision and ministry.

Camping ministry is one of the areas experiencing considerable flux. Last year, MC Manitoba sought proposals for its two smaller camps, Koinonia and Moose Lake, while discerning how to reshape and expand the ministry of Camp Assiniboia. Those proposals are now being studied by the board and a decision will be brought to the annual delegate sessions on Feb. 27 and 28.

However, it has become apparent that new models of mission, lifelong learning and campsite ownership require a change of staffing for the ongoing camping ministry of MC Manitoba, says Darryl Neustaedter-Barg, associate director of communications. As a result, after three-and-a-half years as director of camping ministries, Justin Zacharias is drawing this position to a close by the end of the month.

"MC Manitoba is deeply grateful for the gifts and energy Justin Zacharias has brought to his work for the past three-and-a-half years," says Neustaedter-Barg. "During his remaining time he will work on transitioning key responsibilities."

Norm Voth, director of evangelism and service ministries, will take over

responsibilities for the existing camping ministry and design a new business plan for the future.

"A process for transferring the ownership

'A staffing model to reflect the future ownership and ministry goals is part of the ongoing transition.'
(Darryl Neustaedter-Barg)

of the two smaller camps to more regional ownership is underway and more information will be forthcoming at the [delegate sessions] in February," says Neustaedter-Barg, adding, "A staffing model to reflect the future ownership and ministry goals is part of the ongoing transition." All inquiries about the camping ministry can now be directed to Voth.

Despite the changes, "Camps with Meaning will be offering summer Bible camp programming for 2015 in much the same way as it has been for the last 60-plus years," says Neustaedter-Barg.

MC Manitoba is also accepting applications for the position of director of leadership ministries. Henry Kliewer left this post last fall and Ken Warkentin, executive director, has been filling in during the interim. The director works with congregations in pastoral transitions, pastoral skill development and credentialling.

"We see this position as a permanent one even in a time of change and flux," says Warkentin. "This will always be one position we require."

At next month's annual delegate sessions, to be held at Douglas Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, delegates will have the opportunity to hear more details

about transitions and restructuring in MC Manitoba ministries and join in this discernment process.

MC Canada's Future Directions Task Force also plans to bring a test piece to the sessions that will offer a denominational restructuring proposal for area churches and the national church.

Chuck Neufeld, retiring director of the Illinois Mennonite Conference, will be the guest speaker; although he has lived most of his adult life in the U.S., his roots are in Winnipeg. ☿



Justin Zacharias



Norm Voth

/// Staff changes

Pastor in transition in Ontario

• **SARAH FREEMAN** became the associate minister of outreach and faith formation of Elmira Mennonite Church, Ont., on Dec. 1, 2014. Freeman has written curriculum for Gather 'Round, coordinated the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre and the Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholar's Network in Toronto, and served as a youth minister at First Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont. She has a master of theological studies degree from Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., and a master of theology and doctorate from St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. Her doctorate focusses on peace theology and Mennonite preaching.

—BY DAVE ROGALSKY



Sarah Freeman

Bethany College announces planned closure

Declining enrolment precipitates a difficult decision

BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent
HEPBURN, SASK.

Difficult choices can sometimes leave everyone involved feeling bereft. Such was the case when the Bethany College board of directors decided to close the school at the end of the 2014-15 academic year.

Bethany College, situated in Hepburn, Sask., about 45 kilometres north of Saskatoon, is sponsored by the Mennonite Brethren conferences of Saskatchewan and Alberta and also the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference of Saskatchewan.

In a Dec. 9, 2014, letter announcing the planned closure, board chair Brian Heinrichs cited “the persistent trend of

declining enrolment and the lack of clarity regarding how to reverse it” as the most significant factor contributing to the decision. While the school had been struggling with decreasing enrolment for the past decade, last spring witnessed an additional 40 percent drop in first-year applications.

In order to operate for at least another year, the board set a minimum of 61 students and appealed to donors for financial support. That support came through, and enrolment reached 64 students, allowing classes to resume in September.

On Oct. 4, 2014, the school held a discernment summit, to which it invited church leaders to discuss the college’s



BETHANY COLLEGE PHOTO

Bethany College in Hepburn, Sask., will close its doors after this spring's semester ends. Declining enrolment and increasing debt are the two major contributing factors.

future. According to advancement director Rick Guenther, several scenarios emerged at that meeting, but the success of each of them relied on increased student enrolment, which could not be guaranteed. Additionally, the school’s debt load would make continued operation challenging. And so, said Guenther, the board concluded “that it was better to close the school at this point, rather than keep it going and risk further problems down the road.”

Heinrichs expressed the board’s “sincere desire that this decision will not mark the end of the conversation around discipleship and theological formation among young adults [within] our churches and partners.”

Guenther reiterated this hope, saying, “We would love to see conversation happening as to how to carry on discipling youth.”

Although it will not be easy to see the school close, Guenther said faculty and staff are committed to finishing the year well. They are already working with those students who would have been returning, in order to make their transition to other institutions as seamless as possible.

For their part, the students have shown a deep concern for their instructors and other staff members who will be forced to seek other employment come spring. Guenther said that during the school’s recent Christmas banquet, students encircled staff members and prayed for them as a way of showing their support.

Citing Jesus words in John 12:24, Heinrichs concluded, “Our confidence, even in the midst of deep sorrow, is in the God who brings new life and promises that none of the seeds that we plant [is] ever wasted.”

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GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

PHOTOS BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU



Ethiopia is a country undergoing transformation. Stu Clark, senior policy advisor for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, writes, 'The challenge now is to ensure that rural Ethiopians enjoy the same rapid growth as those in Addis Ababa [pictured]. While food aid expenditures have declined, Foodgrains Bank expenditures for agricultural development in Ethiopia have increased over the past decade to about \$1 million a year.'

COVER STORY

Reclaiming Ethiopia

Manitoba correspondent Evelyn Rempel Petkau journeyed to Ethiopia last fall as part of a Canadian Foodgrains Bank-sponsored learning tour and reports her findings of the NGO's work with Mennonite Central Committee, Meserete Kristos Church, and other relief and development agencies

Thirty years ago, the world was gripped by images of people ravaged by hunger in famine-stricken Ethiopia, ranked as one of the deadliest disasters of the 20th century. It was in response to that famine that the then newly formed Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGFB) launched its very first response to hunger. Through the Foodgrains Bank and its member partners, Canadian farmers donated nearly 110,000 tonnes of food that was shipped to Ethiopia and distributed to the devastated areas.

Today, 30 years later, the Foodgrains Bank is still involved in Ethiopia. Of the 42 countries in which it is working, no country has more projects than Ethiopia. Currently, 14 different projects worth

almost \$4.6 million are operating throughout the country.

It's not that Ethiopia is still in the throes of famine. The country has seen considerable progress and transformation in the area of food security since the 1980s.

Stu Clark, a Foodgrains Bank special policy advisor, writes that, although Ethiopia "has enjoyed close to double-digit economic growth for a decade and . . . Ethiopia's government says it is on course to meet most of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, and by 2025 . . . expects to be a middle-income country," it remains in a precarious state of food insecurity.

While food aid expenditures "have declined, Foodgrains Bank expenditures for

agricultural development in Ethiopia have increased over the past decade to about \$1 million a year," according to Clark.

The country's progress has given the Foodgrains Bank opportunity to shift its focus from responding to hunger with hand-outs to enabling farmers to avert food crises.

Current challenges to food security

Ethiopia is a country that has the potential to feed its population, says Sam Vander Ende, who has lived in Addis Ababa and worked as a Foodgrains Bank field staffer for the past 20 years. However, he says it faces two very significant challenges that continue to dog food security: rapid population growth and climate change.

In the last quarter-century, the population has doubled, to nearly 97 million. At the same time, household land size has gotten smaller. The same amount of land is now needed to feed a greater number of people. Such rampant growth has put increased pressure on land and other resources.

Addis Ababa, a teeming and rapidly growing city, reflects the dichotomy of progress and poverty. Construction is happening at a phenomenal rate. Modern structures, concrete skeletons and eucalyptus scaffolding convey a city burgeoning with development. A sea of tightly packed shanties flows around and between these large structures, each metal roof bearing a satellite dish. Large multi-storied buildings that rise out of the rubble are becoming homes to the people who have been displaced from the shanties that used to sit on the land.

However, 85 percent of Ethiopia's population is rural. Many of them farm less than a hectare of land, land that is owned by the government. Unreliable rainfall can mean either a shortened growing season or excessive flooding. Cultivation practices over the years have contributed to environmental degradation. Mountainsides have been deforested, resulting in severe erosion of land and valuable topsoil being washed away. A way of life that has been practised for generations is being severely threatened.

MCC, Meserete Kristos Church involvement

Nowhere is the destructive force of climate change and conventional practices on land more glaring than in the Boricha District,

where the Foodgrains Bank has partnered with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Meserete Kristos Church Relief and Development Association to address this issue.

Boricha is a chronically food-insecure region of Ethiopia. With its local partner, CFGB/MCC Ethiopia has been working in the area for more than a decade, initially with emergency food assistance, but increasingly with agriculture and livelihood training. The area has been hit by consecutive disasters that have negatively impacted the agricultural community. Hillsides are completely denuded not just of trees and flora, but also of soil, exposing brown rock gashed with deep ravines and huge gullies.

Descending down the slope of a steep hillside that was completely barren five years ago, associate project manager Solomon Teferi; MCC Ethiopia rep Peter Woolner of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont.; project manager Zerihun Zena; and food security officer Wondeassen Assefa explain to the learning tour the reclamation work that began five years ago.

Terraced rows of deep trenches were dug on the mountainside. Between the trenches, a variety of fast-growing leguminous trees were planted, fixing nitrogen into the soil. The work had begun at the top of the mountain and there the five-year growth is well-established.

More recent work of trenching and planting continues down the mountain, showing the stages of land gradually returning to its former self. The trenches catch the rain-water and allow it to soak into the ground, and the trees secure the soil, giving other plants a chance to take root.

A decade ago, farmers in the area abandoned their farms, moving to higher lands because of the degradation of their farmland. Recently, they have been moving back down and reclaiming their farms.

Elias Tola, a local farmer, tells us, "Before, my farm was a very rocky area because of wind and rain erosion. Now it is as you see. We are looking at good change. Now we are using conservation farming methods."

He speaks with gratitude of the difference a road construction project—a food-for-work program supported by CFGB/MCC Ethiopia—has made: "Before, we



MCC Ethiopia and Meserete Kristos Church have partnered with the Foodgrains Bank in the Boricha District, where farmers are being paid to work on soil- and water-conservation activities, building terraces and check-dams to catch the rain, and planting trees to stabilize the soil.

couldn't take our children to the health clinic. Now we can go anywhere."

CFGB/MCC Ethiopia's ongoing work of reforestation and land reclamation is done through cash-for-work programs from March through May, when food is available for purchase, and a food-for-work program during July and August, when food is getting scarce and expensive.

With 34 local staff working on environmental rehabilitation and infrastructure development, the Foodgrains Bank, MCC and Meserete Kristos Church are working together to meet the challenges of critical water issues, land degradation and erosion. Local staff are involved with teaching water and soil conservation methods,

building check-dams and micro basins, reforestation, diversifying crops, and making available good quality seed and livestock. A cooperative yard site has been established, where seed is collected and a seed bank has been created.

Tola, 50 and a father of eight children, is chair of the cooperative. "The members had nothing before," he says. "Before, they were leaving this dead and rocky land, but now they are returning. Now we are improving our lives. I am planting mangoes, avocados. I am diversifying my livelihood. My harvest is starting to improve three-fold and now I can pay the school fees and send my children to school."

Conservation agriculture a big hit with local farmers

It's the end of the rainy season, and the countryside looks lush and green compared to an early blast of winter back in Canada. The harvest is being brought in to the granaries and markets on the backs of donkeys and in ox-drawn carts.

It has been a good harvest for Ginjo. A pair of oxen pull the plow as he prepares the field for another season. He urges them on with his singing. "You are doing well. You are doing good to me," he sings in his dialect as he leads them over the field.

What has made him so happy with the harvest this year is the yield that he got from the field where he used conservation agriculture methods. For the first time last March he planted a small field using no-tilling methods while applying compost and mulch. The yield was noticeably better. When the rainy season starts in March he looks forward to expanding the practice to other fields.

Tesfaye Falaha, director of the Terepeza Development Association, a partner of the Foodgrains Bank and World Relief Canada in Wolayta-Soddo, oversees this project in the hilly regions of Offa District and Kindo Koiysha District.

"We started promoting conservation agriculture with 42 farmers as a pilot project. Now there are more than 250 copy farmers," Falaha says.

Like Ginjo, 60, farmers have been very impressed with the yields that come off these fields relative to fields farmed in a conventional manner. Ginjo hopes that

this more-productive way of farming, which conserves both soil and water, will make it more viable to support his family of 10.

Development based on irrigation

The Afar region in the Rift Valley is home to many of the nine million pastoralists in Ethiopia who have followed their herds of goats, sheep and camels for millennia. They, too, are feeling the devastating impact of population growth and climate change. According to the seasons, they move with their herds from place to place in search of food, water and grazing land. Due to mounting pressure on pasture land and other factors, pastoralists are increasingly vulnerable to recurring droughts and have become increasingly dependent on food and relief assistance.

In Aura Woreda, Support for Sustainable Development and the Canadian Lutheran Church have partnered with the

Foodgrains Bank to promote irrigation-based development. Providing food for work, they have constructed irrigation systems. In the last 10 years, they have diverted water from numerous rivers that flow from the highlands and have constructed 15 small-scale irrigation schemes. The final project is just months away from being completed.

Literally oases in the desert, the communities that form around these water diversion projects provide a lifeline for these pastoral groups. Changing from an age-old way of life is not fast or easy, but it is being energetically embraced by the Afar people as they recognize that their nomadic way of life is no longer sustainable.

An elder speaks on behalf of his community: “We used to walk 140 kilometres to the highlands to barter our livestock for food grain. Today, we are saved from those terrible times. Now we have reserve

food. Now those people in the highlands come down here to buy our maize and sorghum. Now we have food here and there is no need for moving to the highlands to buy foodgrain. We have good water now, we have land and farming implements. Now we stand by ourselves. Now we see ourselves as human beings. Before, we saw ourselves as animals.”

“With all the local leadership that is emerging, it gives me hope that this will be sustainable,” says Woolner.

Solomon Teferi gets the last word: “People in North America who have never been here are sending their support. Thank you. It is bringing us hope and transforming the lives of people.” ❧

For links to more stories and photos, visit www.canadianmennonite.org/reclaiming-ethiopia.



A way of life is being dramatically changed as the pastoralist people learn to grow crops. The Foodgrains Bank and Canadian World Lutheran Relief are working through the Support for Sustainable Development organization on food-for-work projects that build irrigation systems. They provide training on how to grow and market crops.

A month never to be forgotten

Edmonton's Sudanese community remembers, prays and works for peace

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD
Alberta Correspondent

On Dec. 15, 2014, children were asked to leave the sanctuary of the Beverly Alliance Church in Edmonton, so they would not see the photos of the violently slain and terrified survivors of a year-old massacre. Adults sat quietly, though, witnessing the tragedy from afar and grieving for family and friends lost in horrible violence in Juba, South Sudan.

Mach Ter, the Nuer community president, said, "Today, we are mourning thousands of lives lost on Dec. 15 [2013]. This is the month we can never forget what happened to our people," referring to the thousands who were killed or fled their homes and are now in refugee camps in neighbouring countries.

The great hope that swept over South Sudan when it gained independence in 2011 has, so far, been a bitter disappointment to its people. Intertribal conflicts, disagreements between cattle farmers and crop growers, government corruption and ongoing poverty in the wake of years of civil war continue to cripple the country.

The new government of South Sudan has left the people of Edmonton's Sudanese community feeling deeply betrayed. An elder at Edmonton's South Sudanese Mennonite Church, Peter Kueth Chol, said, "It is hard to see your own government, that is supposed to be protecting you, turn against you for their own interest."

Nuer people, in particular, were targeted in the 2013 violence.

Madame Bwonga, a speaker at the memorial service, said, "There is no honourable way to justify the killing of innocent civilians in Juba. . . . [I] feel it was a calculated move by the government. If there are problems with the vice-president, they should have dealt with him, not massacred civilians."

While the service began with expressions of memory, prayers and short speeches, there was also a strong focus on actions to bring peace in the future. Chol appealed to the words of I Corinthians 13, saying, "Here in Canada we have to change ourselves and embrace each other. Money is not a solution. Unity is in our hearts. Love others. Love your brother as yourself. We are brothers and sisters."

The Sudanese community in Edmonton, many of them refugees themselves, are strongly committed to helping their people, both in Canada and in Sudan. On Nov. 30, 2014, the Edmonton South Sudanese Mennonite Church held a fundraiser specifically to help support people, including many of their friends and relatives, who



Elizabeth Tut wears a T-shirt that expresses the feelings of many South Sudanese toward their president after the Dec. 15, 2013, massacre in Juba.

are currently in refugee camps in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and the Central African Republic. Nearly \$3,400 was raised and sent to Sudan through Mennonite Central Committee Alberta. ❧

/// Briefly noted

Grebel hosts South Sudanese peacebuilding course

WATERLOO, ONT.—Thirteen months ago, South Sudan fell into debilitating internal violence. Last fall, the newly created MSCU Centre for Peace Advancement at Conrad Grebel University College responded to a call from the South Sudanese community in Waterloo Region and its peacebuilding taskforce by coordinating a six-week conflict management course. Twenty-five participants were drawn from various ethnic and tribal groups, young and old, women and men. Mediator Keith Regehr, a retired lawyer, led the seminars with assistance from Noe Gonzalia, a Mennonite pastor originally from Colombia. Funding was provided by First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, and the MSCU Centre for Peace Advancement (CPA). Project Ploughshares, another CPA participant, brought together the partners in this venture, and Reina Neufeldt from Grebel's peace and conflict studies faculty assisted in the planning process. Participant Nyrini Pal observed that, "many trainees began to realize that although everyone was responsible for a solution, not everyone had the same idea on solutions. This caused tensions within the class; however, it was the kind of tension that demanded a patient ear and selective tongues, which many of us soon learned. This gave us an idea on how difficult it must be for the mediators who are involved back home."

—Conrad Grebel University College

VIEWPOINT

Holy recklessness

Second of two columns on pension investments

WILL BRAUN
SENIOR WRITER



I recall saying in my youth that “Christianity does not come equipped with standard airbags and anti-lock brakes,” features commonly advertised for cars at the time. I felt society’s fixation on safety and security should not be adopted by Christians. Faith is risky.

I was young and idealistic then. Some older folks said I’d get over it.

Well, now I am older, married, a father, and the owner of an ’06 Jetta with airbags and anti-lock brakes. Despite my imperfections and compromises, I still value risk. I have not gotten over it.

But I do face tough choices. Like when I joined the staff of this magazine and was given the Mennonite Church Canada retirement guide. (We fall under its pension plan.) The booklet cover showed a carefree silver-haired guy on a sailboat.

It felt like a punch in the spiritual gut. I thought we did things differently. In a world mesmerized by money, I want church to help take my gaze away from self-centred materialism, not invite me to conform to the pattern of this world. Actually, it wasn’t an invitation; participation in the pension plan is compulsory, although there is a grace period.

I opted for the grace period, reluctantly foregoing the employer top-up—an amount equal to 5 percent of my salary that would have gone into my pension. I wasn’t comfortable putting money into big banks, oil companies, mega-pedlars of mainstream consumption and dozens of unknown companies.

I did not find the Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) options in the booklet compelling. The SRI rationale sounds good, but I don’t consider BlackBerry, BMO and Bombardier—which makes

military training and surveillance equipment—socially responsible. Not to mention Pepsi, Suncor and Talisman Energy.

Porn is screened out, but climate change is in. Beer is bad, but unfettered banking greed is good. Gaming is taboo, but govern-

ment bonds are cool, although Ottawa spends about 6 percent of its money on the military.

But there’s a deeper issue. Arnold Snyder, a former Conrad Grebel College professor, has written that 16th-century Anabaptists “uniformly rejected the charging of interest” as well as its collection. Surplus was to go to the poor.

There are numerous biblical warnings about “usury,” or interest, although little

I want to keep my eye on the dusty, lovingly reckless misfit of the gospel.

rationale is given. My sense is that usury is the game of the accumulators, of Bay Street. It tends to serve the rich: money begetting money.

But there’s a deeper issue. Matthew 6 says we should store up treasure in heaven. The essence of life is not material. Like the lilies of the field, do not worry about tomorrow. Trust God. These are bona fide biblical themes. And challenging ones. They make my gut tighten. But they also make my soul glimmer.

Matthew 6 is poetic and glorious in its offer of freedom and spiritual wealth. I want that. I will be a better person if I “invest” in community, and trust God, rather than the market, for my future. And no, it’s not as easy as doing both: “No one can serve two masters.”

But how badly do I want what God

offers? For now, at least, I will continue to opt out of the MC Canada pension plan. I can duck compulsory participation under provincial rules by keeping my salary below 35 percent of the “maximum pensionable earnings.” Full-timers don’t have that option.

As for the 5 percent top-up, I essentially traded it in for more time off. Theoretically, I will invest that time in family and community.

I risk sounding self-righteous, but I am no more righteous than the few billion “least of these” who have far less financial security than I. I am no more righteous than the hundred other ethical inconsistencies in my life. That’s why I remind myself that heaven and earth overflow with grace. That grace is not an excuse for inaction, but the space in which to work out our salvation.

I recognize the questions I raise are impossibly sensitive. They come with scary stakes. I suggest we put aside defensiveness and focus on God’s wild offer of rich liberty. I suggest we discuss what it might actually look like to store up treasure in

heaven.

I don’t want to have my eye on a silver-haired, self-indulgent beach-goer. I want to keep my eye on the dusty, lovingly reckless misfit of the gospel.

I want to be drawn to risk and simplicity. Henry David Thoreau wrote: “My greatest skill has been to want but little.” I have a couple decades to hone that skill.

There are good reasons to invest for retirement. I just don’t think they outweigh the reasons not to. Maybe I’ll get over my qualms when I near retirement age. Maybe I won’t. ❧

For more, including Steve Heinrich’s gutsy Facebook post on MC Canada pensions, and responses to it, visit www.canadianmennonite.org/pensions2.



GOD AT WORK IN US

'Sky pilot' lands in Black Creek

BY HAROLD MACY

Mennonite Church Canada

In the 1800s, church clergy were often called "sky pilots," in part in reference to their heavenly themes from the pulpit.

Aviator Gerry Binnema has recently become the new pastor of United Mennonite Church in Black Creek, B.C., Mennonite Church Canada's most westerly congregation, and brings a contemporary meaning to this old nickname. He is part of a new trend of bi-vocational pastors who work part-time for the church but also have another occupation. Aside from his duties at United Mennonite, he is also a professional aviator and safety consultant to the industry.

His wife Elaine counsels individuals and couples, and has started practising out of their home in Stories Beach.

Pilots require a clear vision and good planning to fly safely. Recently, Binnema brought these skills to the church in a visioning process. The goal was to find the place where the gifts and passions of the congregation intersect with the needs of the community. Many ideas arose during the day-long session.

"We realized our rural community was no longer the country paradise with nuclear families it was in 1937, when our church was founded by German-speaking immigrants from the Soviet Union," Binnema said. "Much has changed. There are many low-income, single-parent families living out here because of the less expensive rents. In many ways, we are a rural community with inner city issues."

The visioning process identified an opportunity to serve the area by providing a break for parents by looking after their children for an evening. The congregation also hopes to open its church building for use by other people and groups in the community.

"We want to have music evenings,

hootenanny style, for all budding and accomplished musicians to drop in with guitars, accordions, ukuleles or just voices," Binnema said.

One of the challenges to the church is a lingering notion that people have to be from an ethnic Mennonite background to feel welcome. Some in Black Creek picture Mennonites as rural people who wear bonnets and travel in horse-drawn buggies. Nothing could be farther from the truth. People at United Mennonite come from all circumstances, but share common beliefs of peace, service, community and putting faith into action.

One of the church's projects is called "Beyond our Doors," which supports soup kitchens in Campbell River and Courtenay; the Miracle Beach School breakfast

PHOTO BY INGRID THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHY



Gerry Binnema, the new bi-vocational pilot/pastor of United Mennonite Church in Black Creek, B.C., is pictured with his wife Elaine, a counsellor.

program; Communitas Supportive Care Society; and international development and relief programs through Mennonite Central Committee.

"We are a small church, very friendly and easy-going," said Binnema. "Our worship is not especially slick, loud or rehearsed, but we welcome you just as you are, coming to hear real teaching from God's Word for our everyday lives."

The 77-year-old congregation is a member of MC British Columbia and re-joined MC Canada in 2013. Up to 50 people gather for worship on any given Sunday. ❧

/// Briefly noted

Osler man wins lifetime achievement award for volunteer work

Art Zacharias is a handyman. He doesn't generally seek the limelight. That's why it was such a surprise to him when he received a lifetime achievement award from the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism, a non-profit, umbrella organization bringing together programs and services for older adults. His award was one of four given out at organization's annual awards banquet in Regina on Oct. 5, 2014. Zacharias, a member of Osler Mennonite Church, is treasurer of the local seniors club and sits on the board of the Osler housing authority. In that capacity, he helps maintain the low-income rental units. As notable as these involvements are, it is largely his work with faith-based organizations that drew the judges' attention. Zacharias and his wife Edna served under Mennonite Central Committee at the Hopi Mission School in Arizona. They have also served at Shekinah Retreat Centre and have given their time and talents to Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) in numerous locations. "I just do what I enjoy doing," says Zacharias. Retirement has afforded him time to volunteer in various capacities, but, he says, "I do a little less and it takes me longer to do it." Rather than resting on his laurels, Zacharias and his wife will embark on another MDS assignment this year, this time to Jamestown, Col., where they will cook for volunteers helping with flood clean-up.

—BY DONNA SCHULZ

ARTBEAT

FILM REVIEW

‘What kind of fanatics worship such a God?’

Exodus: Gods and Kings.

Directed by Ridley Scott. Starring Christian Bale, Sigourney Weaver, Ben Kingsley. A 20th Century Fox release, 2014. Rated PG-13.

REVIEWED BY VIC THIESSEN

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

Nine months after Darren Aronofsky’s biblical spectacle, *Noah*, we get Ridley Scott’s biblical spectacle, *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. I wasn’t a big fan of *Noah*, but at least it was original and made some effort to bring a 21st-century perspective to the familiar Sunday school story.

No such luck with the disappointing *Exodus*. Despite the many critics who thought *Exodus* was controversial and unfaithful to Scripture, I cannot imagine a less controversial attempt at filming *Exodus* in 2014, unless that attempt was made by Sunday school teachers.

The story of *Exodus* is, as I mentioned, very familiar, and so there is no danger of providing spoilers here. *Exodus: Gods and Kings* begins with Moses (played by Christian Bale) as an adult, just before he discovers that he is not an Egyptian, but the son of Hebrew slaves. Given his position as a virtual son to the pharaoh Seti (played by John Turturro) and a virtual brother to Ramses (Joel Edgerton), this revelation has dramatic consequences. When Ramses becomes pharaoh after his father’s death, Moses is sent into exile, where he lives as a shepherd for nine years before God sends him back to Egypt to lead his people out of bondage.

For this film version of the *Exodus* story, Scott has chosen to highlight the crossing of the Red Sea as well as the 10 plagues that preceded the crossing. This allows him to use his genius for magnificent special effects and stunning visuals to maximum advantage. The crossing of

the Red Sea is particularly impressive. But it is curious that Scott has taken pains to make most of the plagues look like natural occurrences when they are clearly depicted as the handiwork of God. The final plague—death of the Egyptian firstborns—and the crossing of the Red Sea are depicted as anything but natural, however.

This ambiguity extends to Scott’s other attempts to provide a modern perspective on the old story. One of the supposedly controversial elements in *Exodus* is Scott’s choice to have God represented by a petulant 10-year-old boy, who appears after Moses sees the burning bush. This does seem a little risky, but the boy doesn’t say anything that God might not have said to Moses from the burning bush or as a disembodied voice. Moses argues with God a lot, especially about the necessity of the plagues, but eventually seems to decide that God knows best and does what has to be done to bring God’s people from slavery in Egypt to the promised land.

This ending takes the edge off of a second potentially controversial element. After the death of his firstborn son, Ramses confronts Moses with the body, saying: “This is your god? Killer of children? What kind of fanatics worship such a god?”

Such a question deserves serious consideration, but Moses ignores it, not least because it comes from a man who himself would not hesitate to kill innocent children to protect his people. With

20TH CENTURY FOX PHOTO



Christian Bale as Moses in *Exodus*.

God and Moses smiling at each other by the film’s end, there is no attempt to revisit Ramses’ profound question, thus minimizing any controversy.

As for the casting controversy—Scott chose to cast actors who are clearly not Middle-Eastern—it points to something that is hardly unusual in Hollywood.

Bale’s performance as a flawed and conflicted Moses is one of the film’s few highlights; another is the excellent cinematography. The rest of the actors didn’t impress me. Neither did the unoriginal and boring screenplay, written by a team of writers who wasted the opportunities to develop characters and create a truly memorable and thought-provoking dialogue between Moses and God.

Early in *Exodus*, Moses clarifies for Ramses that Jacob didn’t fight with God; he wrestled with God. As I heard this, I thought perhaps it was foreshadowing Scott’s own wrestling with God in filming the story of the *Exodus*, or at least the wrestling with God that Moses himself would undertake in the film.

“You don’t always agree with me,” God says to Moses, suggesting that it’s okay to wrestle with God. But the film’s attempts to wrestle with God were, in my opinion, far too tame to have any impact on viewers.

Ascribing the horrific deaths of thousands of innocent children to God is a serious matter, although I don’t want to suggest that the deaths of thousands of Egyptian soldiers in the Red Sea are less problematic. Such deaths demand that all who believe in God wrestle with Ramses’ question far more conscientiously and persuasively than Moses does in *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. ❧

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROSCO FILMS



The Rosco boys, from left to right: Trevor Hunsberger, producer; Ken Ogasawara, writer/actor; and Jonathan Steckley, writer/director.

Normal people doing normal things

*Rosco Films creates modern look at volunteerism with **The Volunteer***

BY DAVE ROGALSKY
Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

When filmmakers get around to showing their work to their family and community, it is usually a past project for them.

Such was the case for Rosco Films, whose principals—Jon Steckley, Ken Ogasawara and Trevor Hunsburger—grew

up at Shantz Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont.

They showed *The Volunteer* at the Princess Twin Cinema in Waterloo last November to full houses, but had premiered it at the juried Cinéfest Sudbury International Film Festival in September,

and had finished work on the project nearly a year earlier. The chance to show their film in Sudbury was a huge boost for them as they were there together with the royalty of Canadian filmmaking.

The Volunteer, an 84-minute feature, follows Ken, played by Ogasawara, who has recently moved into an unnamed community to work for an unnamed organization that works with youth. That's his job. In his spare time, he "volunteers" around the community, trying to help various people by giving rides, moving grain and cleaning up on a farm, providing counsel of various kinds to various needy people, and on and on.

By the midpoint of the movie, the mood is overwhelmingly depressing, as Ken gets more and more exhausted and nothing seems to be helping anyone. In one harrowing scene, he pays for a woman to sleep off her binge in a motel, only to face her wrath the next day when she berates him for having to "walk home in my clubbing clothes and high heels."

The mood lightens for a few minutes as we see Ken cared for by his new friends and co-workers, only to dive even deeper as one of the youths runs away.

Steckley, the director, says that watching his parents' involvement in various volunteer agencies over the years made him want to make a film that looks at the upside of volunteerism, at the great cost to the volunteers, and the need for volunteers to think about their own needs as well.

Shooting the movie with volunteer actors—a few professionals but mostly amateurs—as well as with friends and family who did the filming and catering, among other jobs, kept the costs down. Funding came from a Waterloo Region Arts grant, an Indiegogo online fundraiser and



*Ken Ogasawara, right, hangs out with a friend in **The Volunteer**, exchanging stories and working through bad relationships.*



Canadian rap video wins UN award

'Deepening Community' encourages people to move from fear-based community to deep community like neighbourhoods

Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement
NEW YORK CITY

At a time when the world is horrified and afraid of the actions of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, four young men joined together to produce a rap video to help combat that fear. Their efforts have resulted in recognition by the United Nations.

The UN flew the youths to New York in early December for the Plural+ Awards, where, at the Paley Center for Media, they received the 2014 International Jury Award in the 13- to 17-year-old age category for "Deepening Community," their call for peace that provides great hope to a broken world. Their video was one of 175 entries in various age categories submitted to the video festival sponsored by the UN Alliance of Civilizations and the International Organization of Migration. Festival entries from around the world explored the themes of migration, social exclusion and diversity.

Of their winning video, Michael Born says, "We wanted to better understand the difference between fear-based communities and true community, communities that cause us to organize against others vs. those communities that cause us to work together for the common good."

During their Grade 12 year at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener, Ont., rappers Born and Matthew Steinman invited friends William Snyder (videographer) and Nathan Martin (singer) to help them put their words and music into a video.

Based on the book *Deepening Community: Finding Joy Together in Chaotic Times* by Born's father, Paul, and originally commissioned by the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, the rap video encourages people to move from fear-based community like terrorism, to deep community like neighbourhoods.

Festival organizers described "Deepening Community" as "outstanding," adding that all of the "young media-makers are hoping for a better world, a world of greater respect and better opportunities across cultural and religious boundaries and beyond borders."

Besides the trip to New York, the winners also received a cash prize for their efforts. ☘

To view "Deepening Community," visit <http://bit.ly/1zNZ7OV>.



monies Rosco—Ogasawara's nickname for Steckley's father, Ross—saved from paying jobs.

The movie was shot over 30 days in August 2013 in every township in Waterloo Region. When shooting started, they had a script but the dialogue and action felt wooden as the actors weren't getting into their roles. So Steckley would describe the scene and what he wanted of it for the movie, instead, and the actors adlibbed their way through. What resulted feels like normal people doing normal things, with normal emotions.

Ogasawara noted with satisfaction that the Sunday morning after the Princess Twin shows there was great discussion about the nature of volunteering, its joys and costs at Shantz Mennonite.

Since *The Volunteer's* debut, Rosco's principals have completed a web-based series, several shorts that they will enter in festivals in 2015. They continue to do "paid" work for business and not-for-profits like Mennonite Central Committee Ontario and the Mennonite Foundation of Canada. ☘

The *Volunteer* is available as an HD download and a DVD/Blu-ray pre-order from www.buy.thevolunteerfilm.com.



UNITED NATIONS PHOTO



'Deepening Community' creators Matthew Steinman, left, Michael Born and William Snyder receive their UN-sponsored Polar+ Award from Kim Brizzolara and Laurent Imbault at the Paley Center for Media in New York City on Dec. 4, 2014.

From Macau to Manitoba

Mennonite graphic designer helps win entrepreneurship grant

BY RACHEL BERGEN

Young Voices Co-editor
WINNIPEG

Winnipeg graphic designer Matt Veith stepped out of his comfort zone last November and helped develop a business idea at Ramp Up Manitoba, an entrepreneurial festival. It paid off. He and his project partner, Chris Karasewich, were presented with a provincial tech award worth \$7,500 by the province's minister of jobs and the economy.

Veith, 25, attends Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, and is a graduate of the communications and media program offered by Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). Together, he and Karasewich, a local entrepreneur with ASAP Marketing, developed an app called InstaTemp, a low-cost alternative to the typical temporary worker agency.

He hopes to continue working with Karasewich on InstaTemp in the future, but on a freelance basis.

Opportunities at CMU

Veith is a mostly self-taught graphic designer, but says he gained a lot of the core principles of design and communications from his time at CMU. Some of these lessons took place in the classroom, others came through experience.

Veith says doors began to open at CMU that helped foster his love of design, noting that the school's small class sizes allowed him to get involved with projects that interested him, including the school magazine, *The Doxa*, and rub shoulders with

'Design has the power to preserve, celebrate and further develop a culture respectfully. But it can also destroy, abandon and devalue it.'
(Matt Veith)

PHOTO COURTESY OF
INNOVATION MANITOBA



Chris Karasewich, a local entrepreneur with ASAP Marketing, left, and Matt Veith, a Mennonite graphic designer, centre, are presented with a provincial tech award worth \$7,500 by Kevin Chief, Manitoba's minister of jobs and the economy, at last November's Ramp Up festival for entrepreneurs.

"It reduces the middleman fee and creates a platform where you can hire someone temporarily, and potentially keep them permanently," Veith says, noting that temp agencies typically charge a large fee and keep workers from being hired on permanently.

The Ramp Up festival spans 48 hours, during which time entrepreneurs develop ideas and business plans with the support of experienced business people who are there to give advice.

Veith helped design the InstaTemp website, logo, promotional graphics and the

people who fostered important qualities in him. He believes he wouldn't have had these opportunities at a larger university.

"Ultimately, graphic design is communications work that's visual," Veith says. "You have to be able to work with the organization or institution and understand how they tick."

Life in Macau

He also says that his early years as a "missionary kid" informed his love of design. Veith grew up in Macau, a region of China, where his family worked as Mennonite

Church Canada Witness workers for most of his life.

The family recently settled in Winnipeg, but Veith says he spent his childhood admiring the rich design ethic of the Portuguese colony that was repatriated by China in 1999.

“Design-wise, Macau is full of material to inspire visually creative people,” he says. “There are a multitude of colonial buildings alongside traditional Chinese dwellings, temples, buildings and gardens.”

Veith says the Macanese artistic style has emerged after centuries of intermarriage between the Portuguese and Chinese, but Macau’s growing casino industry is displacing a lot of these traditionally designed places.

Although he isn’t really sure how life in Macau has affected how he designs, Veith says it has caused him to question what his work is contributing to. “Design has the power to preserve, celebrate and further develop a culture respectfully,” he says. “But it can also destroy, abandon and devalue it. But design is supposed to make

the world better, empower people, bring people together.”

That’s Veith’s goal as he works to make the world a more beautiful place.

Back to business

Veith says his experience at Ramp Up gave him some insight into the business world that he hadn’t seen before, even working as a freelance designer for businesses. He observes that many Mennonites work in the non-profit sector and tend to steer away from profit-driven careers in business.

“There’s a lot happening in the business and entrepreneurial spheres,” he says. “Joining those circles can be kind of bizarre. The conversations are different, but it’s a sphere where a lot of things are happening that influence society. There should be places for Mennonites in the business world,” he concludes.

Although the business world wasn’t what Veith was expecting, and it was a little out of his comfort zone, Ramp Up helped him understand that more Mennonites need to enter into it. ❧

‘An even bigger vision’

Involvement in Young Anabaptists Committee fuels woman’s passion for global church

BY AARON EPP

Young Voices Co-editor

If you are a young adult considering going to the Global Youth Summit that will immediately precede the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) assembly in July, Kristina Toews thinks you should do it.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, because who knows when it will come back to North America?” says Toews, who is a consultant on the Young Anabaptists (YABs) Committee, the group of young adults who are planning the event. “People from all around the world are getting excited to come and see how our [North American] churches are in real life—not how we are in movies or stereotyped in the news. It’s really important for us to show up and be real.”

At the same time, anyone who attends will have the opportunity to hear from their Anabaptist brothers and sisters from around the world. “We have so much to learn from them,” the 28-year-old says. “The mutual learning is so huge.”

The YABs Committee is hoping the Summit will draw between 600 and 1,000 participants. The event, which takes place from July 15 to 19 on campus at Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, Pa., is for young Anabaptists from around the world aged 18 and older. The Summit will feature a mix of worship, discussions, workshops, fellowship, games, concerts, late-evening activities, sports and free time. The MWC assembly takes place in nearby Harrisburg at the Farm

(Continued on page 28)

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KRISTINA TOEWS



Kristina Toews, pictured outside of Bogotá, Colombia, where she works for Mennonite World Conference, encourages young adults to attend the Global Youth Summit in Mechanicsburg, Pa., this summer.



Kristina Toews, left, stands with members of the YABs Committee at a meeting in 2013.



Kristina Toews, left, pictured with a church member at Iglesia Menonita de la Ciudad Berna. Toews's experience at the Global Youth Summit in Paraguay in 2009 and her involvement with the Young Anabaptists (YABs) Committee have fuelled her passion for the global church.

(Continued from page 27)

Show Complex from July 21 to 26.

The first Summit was held in Zimbabwe in 2003, when more than 220 young adults from 28 countries gathered. More than 700 from around 34 countries attended the second Summit, held in Paraguay in 2009.

Toews is originally from Abbotsford, B.C., where she is a member at Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church. She attended the Summit in Paraguay as the youth delegate from Mennonite Church Canada. The best part, she says, was meeting many new people.

"I met young Anabaptist leaders from around the world, and just to see how passionate they were about the church was really exciting," Toews says, noting that often in North America the mainstream media highlight the things people in other countries are lacking. Meeting young Anabaptists from around the world led her to re-evaluate some of the stereotypes she had as a result. "To hear these young leaders talk about the blessings and the strengths they have really changed the way I see the world," she says.

In Paraguay, one delegate from each continental region was chosen to sit on a youth task force that created a blueprint for the YABs Committee. Toews was selected to be the North American representative.

MWC approved the blueprint in 2010 and the YABs Committee was fully formed in 2011. Toews served as the committee's chair until mid-2013, when she took on a new role as an MWC web communications worker in Bogotá, Colombia.

The YABs Committee works to build and strengthen connections and relationships in the global Anabaptist family, and has focussed its work during the last two years on preparing for the upcoming Summit.

Toews describes her involvement with the committee as challenging at times, but ultimately a blessing: "I got to know people from around the world, and I am really thankful to count them as my friends now and to have their insights."

Working with the YABs Committee has also fuelled Toews' passion for the global church. "It's been really life-changing for me and just opened my eyes," she says. "There's so much more to church than what I'd seen before, and to what it means to be a Mennonite and an Anabaptist. The way we are Mennonite and Anabaptist in Canada is good, but just to be open to having an even bigger vision than that is really powerful." ❧

For more information about the Summit and how to register, visit www.mwc-cmm.org/gys.



What's so funny?

Winnipeg filmmakers explore the roots of Mennonite humour in new documentary

BY AARON EPP

Young Voices Co-editor

PHOTO BY AARON EPP



When forming the idea for his latest documentary, Winnipeg filmmaker Orlando Braun turned to his Mennonite background for inspiration.

Orlando Braun has always been fascinated by filmmaking. He recalls being a child and making detective films with his father's camcorder, but never thought he could one day make a living making movies.

"It didn't even occur to me this is what people do as a job," the 33-year-old Winnipegger says.

Following high school, Braun enrolled at the University of Manitoba to study architecture. After discovering it wouldn't be a good fit, he dropped those classes and

picked up film and drama ones instead.

It was a wise move. After completing a bachelor of arts degree in film, he earned a master of fine arts degree in producing from the New York Film Academy at Universal Studios in California. He has worked in Los Angeles and New York, and completed a half-dozen short films.

In 2013, he partnered with long-time friend Jorge Requena to create Prairie Boy Productions, which aims to create "high-quality, strong and wholesome stories for

film, TV and other multimedia platforms.” Last year, the duo finished their first production, a 30-minute documentary about hip-hop culture in Winnipeg called *Graffiti Stories*.

For their latest project, they turned to Braun’s Mennonite background for inspiration. Currently in production, *That Mennonite Joke* is a 30-minute “doc-comedy” that Braun is directing and Requena is producing. The film explores the roots of Mennonite humour in North and South America, and what that humour says about Mennonites. It also focusses on *Plautdietsch*—Low German—and the way that language is used by many to comedic effect.

Braun was born in Paraguay and moved to Winnipeg with his family when he was 5. Growing up, humour was always a big part of the interactions he had with members of his immediate and extended family. At the same time, the stereotype of Mennonites is that they are stiff, humourless farmers who ride horses and buggies.

“Mennonite humour is something no one ever talks about,” Braun says. “Yet it was intrinsic to my upbringing.”

The film follows Manitoba-born Mennonite comedian Matt Falk as he interviews other Mennonite entertainers like 3molPlaut, a comedic musical trio with four albums of music sung in Low German; Corny Rempel, a radio host by day and Elvis impersonator by night; and acclaimed writers like Armin Wiebe and Miriam Toews.

Braun says that after being exposed to Falk’s work, approaching the comedian to star in the documentary was a no-brainer.

Falk, who placed second in the World Series of Comedy in Las Vegas in 2010, has dealt with his Mennonite upbringing in his material before. When Braun approached him about being in the documentary, Falk was at a point in his career where he was looking to increase the amount of Mennonite material in his act, after receiving encouragement to do so from a handful of people, including Rob Schneider, a veteran stand-up comedian and former *Saturday Night Live* cast member.

“I’m really excited about this film because, throughout the course of it I’ve learned so much about my culture and I’ve

gotten so passionate about it and so excited about it,” says Falk, 25. “I understand the humour in [North American Mennonite] culture so much more.”


Falk, who has a new comedy special coming out later this year, adds that what he is learning as the documentary films is impacting his act. “It’s already started to transform not just the way I’ve been thinking about my heritage, but the way I talk about my heritage, the way I write jokes, how deep I delve into some of these characters, and how universal these characters are, and how to put a spin on them,” he says.

Requena, 32, says that working with Falk is a delight: “We’re actually watching someone genuinely discover something about his own heritage, which is massively valuable for any story. To watch someone . . . going to discover about his own heritage and feel proud about it is a real treat, and I think is going to be really valuable for the [documentary].”

The filmmakers believe the documentary will help non-Mennonites understand Mennonite culture, while, at the same time, hopefully teaching Mennonites who watch the film something about themselves.

Interest in the film is already spreading. This past July, Braun and Requena won \$20,000 in a pitch competition at the Gimli (Man.) Film Festival to help make the film. BravoFACT, a foundation that assists Canadian talent, also gave the duo a BravoFACTUAL award that is helping fund the project.

Braun says that even without the funding he and Requena have been awarded, he would have found a way to make *That Mennonite Joke*. “The more I work on the film, the more I realize it’s a story that has to be told,” he says. ❧

For more information about  That Mennonite Joke, visit www.prairieboyproductions.com.

CANADIAN MENNONITE



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

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PHOTOS BY MARGITA BRAUN



Long-time friends Jorge Requena, left, and Orlando Braun formed Prairie Boy Productions in 2013. That Mennonite Joke is the company’s second project.



On the set for That Mennonite Joke. The documentary explores the roots of Mennonite humour in North and South America.



Winnipeg-raised Orlando Braun, worked in the film industry in Los Angeles and New York before returning to his hometown. His latest project is a story ‘that has to be told,’ he says.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT FALK



Matt Falk stars in That Mennonite Joke.

Calendar

British Columbia

Feb. 7: Third Stolo history and culture learning day, at St. Mary's Residential School, Mission, from 1 to 4:30 p.m.

Feb. 20: LEAD conference, at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond, 1 to 5 p.m.

Feb. 21: MC B.C. annual meeting, at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond. Registration through local church offices.

Alberta

Feb. 7: MC Alberta general council meeting, at Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Feb. 20-22: Senior high snow camp at Camp Valaqua, Water Valley. Theme: "Faith in transit." Speaker: Ryan Dueck. For more information, e-mail yltalberta@gmail.com.

Feb. 28: "Sweet Interlude" fundraising event, at Menno Simons School, Calgary, from 6 to 10 p.m. Dessert buffet, silent and live auctions, and

entertainment, with proceeds going toward the school's mortgage.

March 20-21: MC Alberta annual general meeting, hosted by Edmonton Vietnamese Mennonite Church.

Saskatchewan

Feb. 6: RJC Friday Night Live youth event.

March 13-14: MC Saskatchewan annual delegate sessions, at Mount Royal Mennonite, Saskatoon. Theme: "Walking with God, with each other, with the stranger, and beyond our walls. For more information, call 306-249-4844 or visit www.mcsask.ca

March 22: RJC Guys and Pies concert fundraiser, at 7 p.m.

April 25: Saskatchewan Women in Mission annual meeting and Enrichment Day, at Zoar Mennonite Church, Waldheim, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Manitoba

Feb. 4: Open house at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, at 7 p.m. For

more information, call 204-775-7111.

Feb. 6: New Music Festival featuring all CMU choirs, at Centennial Concert Hall, Winnipeg.

Feb. 10: Face2Face community discussion: "You lost me: The church and young adults," featuring Irma Fast Dueck and Peter Epp; at CMU's Great Hall, at 7 p.m.

March 5: Face2Face community discussion: "On being good neighbours: An urban reserve shopping centre, housing complex or casino at Kapyong?" featuring Steve Heinrichs, MC Canada's indigenous relations director; at CMU's Great Hall, at 7 p.m.

March 13: CMU dessert fundraiser, at Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite.

March 28: Jazz at CMU, in the Great Hall, at 7:30 p.m.

March 29: "Bells and Whistles with Strings Attached" concert, at CMU's Laudamus Auditorium.

Ontario

Feb. 4: Mennonite/s Writing, a free public reading series with celebrated Canadian authors, at Conrad Grebel Chapel, at 7:30 p.m.: Di Brandt will read from a collection of poems-in-progress. For more information, visit grebel.ca/mennolit.

Feb. 5: "If you have eyes to see: God's 'presence' at the movies," with Robert Johnston, 2015 Sawatsky Visiting Scholar, at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Room 2202, at 7:30 p.m.

Feb. 6-7: "Reading the Bible with Jesus" retreat at Willowgrove, Stouffville, with Bryan Moyer Suderman: sponsored by MC Eastern Canada, the Markham-Stouffville Mennonite Ministerial and Willowgrove. Pt. 3: "John: If you believed Moses, you would believe me." For more information, e-mail

miriam@willowgrove.ca.

Feb. 16: Family Day open house at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. Free indoor and outdoor activities from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Lunch available for purchase or bring your own. For more information, or to register, call 519-625-8602 or e-mail info@hiddenacres.ca.

Feb. 18: Mennonite/s Writing, a free public reading series with celebrated Canadian authors, at Conrad Grebel Chapel, at 7:30 p.m.: David Bergen will read from his new book, *Leaving Tomorrow*. For more information, visit grebel.ca/mennolit.

Feb. 21: Grand Philharmonic Choir presents "Grant Us Peace," a concert featuring Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass* and Estacio's "The Houses Stand Not Far Apart," at Centre in the Square, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m. For more information or tickets, call 519-578-1570.

March 4: Mennonite/s Writing, a free public reading series with celebrated Canadian authors, at Conrad Grebel Chapel, at 7:30 p.m.: Grebel alumna Carrie Snyder will read from her new novel, *Girl Runner*, set for release in the U.S. in 2015. For more information, visit grebel.ca/mennolit.

March 6-7: The Engaged Workshop, a marriage preparation course focussing on communication, is being held at Living Water Fellowship in New Hamburg for engaged or newly married couples. For more information, e-mail denise_bender@yahoo.com.

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

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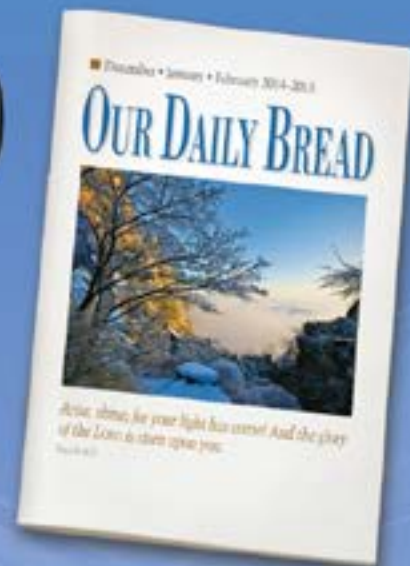


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