

# CANADIAN MAGAZINE MINONITE

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Healing the **wounded** city pg. 4



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## EDITORIAL

## The politicizing of CoSA

DICK BENNER  
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

**D**isturbing and perplexing is the only way to describe the cut in federal funding for a proven program of ex-prisoner rehabilitation called Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA).

For more than two decades, this partnership between church and government contributed to public safety by matching three to five volunteers who meet weekly with released high-risk sex offenders for support, friendship and accountability. (See *"A less safe environment for everybody"* by Will Braun on page 18.) For all of its success, acknowledged by an in-depth study of the government itself, funding will be cut as of March 31, with the exception of a previously signed contract specific to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario.

Lost in the bureaucratic maze—with obvious political undertones—are the stories of restoration and hope by the persons most affected. And it is a real snub to those dedicated volunteers following the call of *"when in prison, you visited me"* (Matthew 25:43). Listen to the cries of the prisoner as reported in an online story posted by MCC Ontario:

"When you come out of prison, I found that I don't belong anywhere. I don't belong in the city that I used to live in. I don't belong in this city where I moved. I don't belong anywhere. My friends are all gone, you have no more friends, and so Circles of Support is kind of like that

anchor that you can hold on to. They're people that you know, they're people that you can get on the phone and contact. And I can't stress how important that is when you feel alone. And you really have to be in that position to understand what I mean when I say you 'feel alone.'"

Or the heartfelt sentiments of another:

"When I look at how the inmates treated me in the pen,

and how they treat me here after being involved with CoSA, and that is a different attitude now. They show me a whole bunch of respect. And in the pen it was just different . . . just a downer. But when they see you here and you're living a positive lifestyle . . . and it has to do with being around healthy people. That's what it's all about: being around healthy people."

Or from a British Columbia circle:

"The circle creates an arena for me to be myself, and to not fear being judged or rejected. Before the circle, I didn't know what love is, or how to love. My mother killed herself when I was 18 and I shut down after that. Being in the circle, I am learning to function like everyone else in a healthy way, not having to fear going back to prison again, not having to live the way I used to live, not having to think the way I used to think. I was trapped in that whole thinking because, if you can't let it out and expose the secrets, they entrap you and enslave you completely.

CoSA represents freedom. It is nice to be accepted for who I really am despite what I have done."

When one hears these stories of transformation, it's hard to comprehend how government officials see this as unworthy of financial support, especially when volunteers give of their time in making friends with the most deserted and sometimes despised persons in our communities. And the study shows that sexual re-offences among CoSA participants were 2 percent over three years following release, compared to 28 percent among similar populations not enrolled in the program!

One can only conclude that, even though highly effective, spawning a model used across Canada and in nine countries around the world, CoSA doesn't fit the present government's narrative on law and order, whose primary emphasis is on punishment, rather than restorative justice. It brings hope, rather than fear, a dynamic that doesn't fit the political currency of the times.

We think that narrative is wrong and counterproductive. It has been proven that a strict law-and-order approach does not lessen crime in our society. Crime rates have gone down while the sloganeering about punishing violent crime has increased, its goal obviously to instill fear about our common safety. It is commonly acknowledged that our prison culture, rather than containing crime, fosters and enhances it.

What a waste of one of society's and the church's greatest assets!



## ABOUT THE COVER:

Despite its glittering skyline, Calgary—as is the case with other Canadian cities—needs to do something other than fix poverty; it needs healing for its citizens of all strata, including this homeless man, pictured in Calgary in 2009. Our feature story, 'Healing the wounded city: Why Jesus didn't talk very much about the poor,' begins on page 4.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK.COM/DAN\_PRAT (TOP) / ISTOCK.COM/SUBMAN (BOTTOM)

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**GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD  
FEATURE**

# Healing the wounded city

*Why Jesus didn't talk very much about the poor*

BY DEREK COOK

**F**or many people, the Christian faith and poverty are deeply interconnected. Acts of charity are widely viewed as a key aspect of the Christian life, and the church has a long history of providing relief and advocacy for justice for the poor.

It's somewhat puzzling then to discover that Christ himself said very little at all about poverty or the poor. And most of what he did say about poverty is actually rather troubling to those of us who have made tackling it a priority. In reading through the gospels there are, in fact, only five principle references to the poor, only one of which actually admonishes anyone to do anything about it. In that case, Jesus admonishes the rich young man to sell what he has and give it to the poor, but this seems to have much more to do with the plight of the rich man's soul than it does with the plight of the poor.

The other times Jesus mentions the poor, he tells us that they are "blessed," while the recounting of the poor widow putting her coins in the collection box praises the faith of the poor, but is silent on the condition of poverty itself. And in the most direct reference to the poor, Jesus admonishes the disciples for their charitable zeal, reminding them—and us—that "*the poor will be with you always.*" So when Jesus then instructs John's disciples to report to John that "*the good news is proclaimed to the poor,*" we are left wondering what good news that could possibly be.

Although Jesus makes little specific mention of poverty per se, the gospels are full of references to him as a healer. While the word "poor" appears only 25 times in all four gospels combined, the words "heal" or "healing" appears 93 times. Although healing and poverty may seem somewhat distinct from each other, when we look at who it is that Jesus was healing, it is those same people who, throughout the Bible, are referred to almost synonymously with the poor. In other words, the widow, the alien, the afflicted and the fatherless.

What did it mean to be widowed, alien, afflicted or fatherless in biblical society? It meant to be outside the structures of family and community that sustained people. It meant to



be excluded. So healing had a profound social dimension, as it involved intentionally engaging with those who were excluded. Where shunned, Jesus entered into relationship. The act of healing itself was a statement of the value he placed on those society chose to exclude.

And the impact of that healing was also deeply social. When he healed people with leprosy, he didn't simply treat the disease, but restored them to their community. When he healed people who were blind or lame, he restored to them the ability to actively participate in community life in a time before disability benefits or social security.

Healing, then, did more than just repair the body; it brought people back inside the shelter of the community. And since those Jesus was healing were also those most often thought of as poor, his ministry of healing is a ministry to the poor and gives a glimpse of a new understanding of poverty. The real healing that took place was not so much the healing of the body, but of the broken relationships within community that led to poverty.

### ***Not so much a problem to be fixed***

When we look at it this way, poverty isn't so much a problem to be fixed as it is a wound to be healed. Poverty separates. Poverty isolates. Poverty engenders guilt, shame and accusations. Poverty creates fear and helplessness.

A participant in a poverty workshop we held described poverty this way: "Emptiness, destitute, hopelessness, helplessness, sadness, darkness, lost, no identity, no self-esteem, coldness, ashamed, no voice, no family, no grandchildren, no smiles, no privacy, no laughter, no happiness. This is what living in poverty means."

Interestingly, she made no mention of money. Rather, she talked about broken relationships and isolation, and the pain that accompanies them. She didn't describe a problem; she spoke about a wound, a wound in the fabric of our community.

If poverty is a wound in the fabric of the community, it is a community of which we are all a part, and so we all are wounded. This is the wound that we experience, first, in our eagerness to disconnect from community as we idealize

the value of independence. We idolize the self-made man or woman and the ideal of self-reliance, seeing ourselves and each other as competitors in a game with scarce resources in which we must fight for our share.

When we buy into this notion of scarcity, we fail to acknowledge God as our sustainer and the source of our abundance. So, too, when we buy into the myth of self-reliance, we willingly deny the reality that nobody has done it alone, since we are all inter-dependent, existing within the bonds of community, humbly dependent upon God and each other.

We experience this wound next in how we define ourselves. Rather than viewing each other as children of God, we have come to view ourselves—and each other—as consumers, defined by our willingness and ability to consume. Somehow shopping has become a civic duty as our economic health seems based on our ability and desire to consume. Our need to consume leaves us working long hours, at the expense of family and community, and hopelessly in debt. Meanwhile, those who can't consume get left behind.

### ***The poor as a separate species***

This brokenness also appears in our eagerness to divide people into categories. We talk about the poor as though they are a separate species. Once we label people, though, it is easy to see them as something other than us, and once we do

*What did it mean to be widowed, alien, afflicted or fatherless in biblical society? It meant to be outside the structures of family and community that sustained people. It meant to be excluded.*

that, we can easily assign blame and deny rights, exacerbating the isolation of those we choose to exclude. It is easy to see the question of poverty as a competition between the poor and the non-poor, between us and them, between the deserving and the undeserving, and further tear the fabric of our community.

We then experience this wound in the broken relationships we have with each other. As the bonds of community weaken, more and more people experience isolation. Loneliness is one of the great scourges of our society, and both a cause and result of poverty. When we lack close relationships with family, friends and neighbours, we are at greater risk of spiralling into poverty when things go wrong. And once in poverty, that isolation often keeps us there.

Lacking the bonds of community, we then devise systems of care for those left behind that substitute for the rich relationships we might otherwise have had with each other. In their book *The Abundant Community*, authors John McKnight and Peter Block call us the “incompetent society” because we have lost the ability to do the most important functions of caring for each other as families and neighbours, relying instead on systems or services that can be provided by agencies or purchased in the marketplace. We have depersonalized even the

most intimate aspects of our lives.

These then are the deep wounds of community that are at the root of poverty and that diminish every one of us: the wounds of disconnectedness, of depersonalized relationships that allow us to define and relate to each other as something other than children of God worthy of dignity and respect. These are the wounds in need of healing and of which poverty is just a symptom.

Ultimately, poverty is about power. In the Bible, those identified as poor are the ones who, for various reasons, found themselves on the fringes of society, excluded from power and community life. If we think about our world today, we find that things are not that different. Those most likely to be poor in Canada are single-parent families or people without families, indigenous people dispossessed of their land, recent immigrants and temporary foreign workers, and people with disabilities. In short: the widow, the alien, the afflicted and the fatherless, who are also largely excluded

from our own structures of power and support.

### **Systems become substitutes for relationships**

In the Old Testament, laws and institutions were developed to keep power imbalances in check. This included the practice of Jubilee that allowed the poor to be released from debts every seven years and to reap from the fallow fields, or the practice of leaving some of the harvest untouched for others to reap and glean. In this way, social justice became embedded in the institutions of the Jewish state.

We, too, have embedded systems and laws that seek fairness and justice. We have labour laws and minimum wages, social security and healthcare paid for by our tax systems. We also have rules and systems in place to direct charitable contributions to organizations that support those in need. And we have programs and services, supported by public and private funds, available to assist people.

*We have turned our compassion into transactional relationships mediated by governments and institutions. We have truly become consumers and taxpayers, as opposed to citizens and neighbours.*

*Once we label people, though, it is easy to see them as something other than us, and once we do that, we can easily assign blame and deny rights, exacerbating the isolation of those we choose to exclude.*



We also have obligations under international law to provide for the economic and social rights of people. Such laws and institutions are good.

Our stumbling block, however, is that we have let these systems substitute for deep and nurturing human relationships. We no longer need to concern ourselves with the welfare of our employees, as we have systems that will take care of that. We no longer need to concern ourselves with the well-being of our neighbours as long as there are programs and services available to support them. We no longer need to provide caring and support in person if we can provide a charitable contribution instead and get a tax receipt in return.

We have turned our compassion into transactional relationships mediated by governments and institutions. We have truly become consumers and taxpayers, as opposed to citizens and neighbours. In good conscience we can walk around the homeless person on the street because we have all paid our taxes and made our charitable donations.

### ***The process of healing poverty***

But Jesus doesn't let us off the hook. He makes it personal. Jesus says I was a stranger. I was naked. I was hungry. I was in prison, and you didn't visit, clothe or feed me. Because, for Jesus, it's all about the relationship. In Jesus, we are

confronted with the human dimension that reminds us that we are connected to each other in relationships for which laws and institutions are no substitute.

Now there is nothing wrong with the systems and institutions we have developed. Indeed, the justice they embody is what the prophets have called us to do. And Jesus never suggested that the laws and exhortations to institutional justice were in any way wrong. But they are insufficient. Jesus told his disciples that he is here to fulfill the law, not to replace it, by restoring the broken relationships that required those laws and institutions in the first place.

This begins the process of healing poverty, rather than fixing it. Fixing poverty views poverty as a problem amenable to a solution. The problem must be defined and analyzed, with solutions planned, most likely by an expert. We will research best practices, create logic models, identify outcomes, mobilize resources, and monitor and evaluate results. We will treat people as objects to be manipulated with interventions, rather than as human beings in need of dignity and respect. In short, it will re-enforce the systems and structures that have come to substitute for genuine human compassion and relationship.

When we view poverty as a problem to be fixed, the solution itself begins

to reinforce the very causes of poverty by further entrenching the distinction between us and them, by defining and labelling people as poor, and by establishing a power relationship between the helper and the helped. When Jesus healed, however, he upset all of the power dynamics between the powerful and the weak. For Jesus, healing wasn't about devising impersonal systems or fixing things. For Jesus, healing was a very personal activity that almost always involved him establishing a relationship with the person being healed. It usually involved a conversation between the healer and the healed, the consent—and faith—of the person seeking healing, some physical connection and often at the end an act of restoration with the community. Healing then involved reciprocity and a breaking down of the power imbalances that kept people in poverty.

### ***Speaking of power***

Now while Jesus might not have said much about the poor, he did say a lot about power. The Beatitudes speak directly to what has been referred to as the "upside down kingdom," in which the first become last and the last become first; in which the powerless are the powerful; in which those who believe they have the solutions are left speechless, while

***(Continued on page 8)***



*(Continued from page 7)*

the healer and healed enter into a new relationship of reciprocity, consent and respect; and in which the weak are restored to the shelter of community life.

What does this suggest about how we should go about healing, as opposed to fixing, poverty?

• **FIRST**, I believe it challenges us to alter not only how we see others, but also how we see ourselves.

When we stop talking about fixing poverty and begin talking about healing it instead, we come to recognize that we all suffer the wounds of broken community and are all vulnerable. When we come to this place we can then move beyond the solutions that allow us to categorize people and establish power relationships in the guise of helping. Rather, we can establish authentic healing relationships in which both healer and healed experience the need and effects of healing.

• **SECOND**, WITH this approach, how we do what we do becomes as important as what we do.

Do the systems and interventions we devise in the guise of helping establish authentic human relationships based on reciprocity or do they further de-personalize and stigmatize? How can we re-personalize the relationships that institutions and the market have de-personalized, and reclaim them? This challenges us to think about our relationships with each other in all aspects of our public and private lives. How do our choices as consumers affect the rights of others? What is the impact of our business decisions on those in our workplaces? How does our obsession with lower taxes impact those with the least power?

• **FINALLY**, I think this view leads us to a place where power is central.

The goal of any healing work must be to restore the wholeness of community by actively including those who are excluded. While there is an important role here for institutional justice, it is also a deeply personal endeavour. We must ask ourselves how are we actively including vulnerable people in our workplaces?

How are we sharing power and decision-making with those who are being affected by our decisions? Are we, in fact, willing to become vulnerable by giving up power and control to new voices who may not have previously been at the table? Only when we start to answer these questions do we begin to address the challenge of including the excluded, which is at the root of healing. Only then can we begin to move beyond the many distinctions between us and them, and start to re-establish the broken bonds of community that lie at the heart of poverty and diminish us all.

### **No poor or non-poor**

So, perhaps the reason Jesus doesn't talk very much about the poor is because Jesus didn't divide the world into poor and non-poor. Jesus didn't make any distinctions between us and them because, in the end, it's not about the poor. In the end, it's about the relationships we nurture among each other as family members, neighbours, employers and citizens.

If we are truly committed to seeing every one of us as children of God, all equally loved and equally vulnerable, all equally in need of God's grace and reliant on God and each other, this will lead us to see and treat each other with dignity and respect.

When we come to this healing place, we will have begun relating to each other in ways that don't allow poverty to take root and flourish. We will still have our laws, institutions, programs and systems that provide support and execute justice, but they will no longer be the substitutes for the mercy and compassion that we are called to. We will have found the trust that allows community to flourish and in which we find our resilience. And that is the resilience that will mobilize the abundance around us. And this is the good news that Jesus proclaimed to the poor, which, in the end it turns out, is every single one of us. ❧

*Derek Cook is a social planner for the City of Calgary's Community and Neighbourhood Services. He is a board member of Canada Without Poverty, a national anti-poverty organization. His feature is based on his Iwassa Lecture on Urban Theology at the University of Calgary on Feb. 2.*



### ❧ For discussion

1. Have you or someone you know ever needed to depend on government assistance for food or shelter? What are the emotional implications of accepting that kind of help? How is it different from depending on family or friends for meeting daily needs? How do our church and family communities protect us from destitution?
2. What is the difference between being supported by a spouse or close family member and getting help from extended family or the church community? How are the relationships between donor and recipient different? Under what conditions might it be easier to ask for government assistance than the church community for help?
3. Who are the poor in your community? How much of their poverty is due to an imbalance of power and exclusion from the community?
4. Derek Cook says that if we view poverty as the problem, we will "treat people as objects to be manipulated with interventions, rather than as human beings in need of dignity and respect." Do you agree? How could your congregation develop more personal relationships with hurting people in your community?

—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](mailto: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.

## ✉ ‘Well-worn clichés’ can hide the truth

RE: “A FATHER’S struggle with his gay son,” March 2, page 29.

The well-worn cliché of “God loves the sinner but hates the sin,” just like the well-worn cliché of “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,” is the essence of the gospel. Because God loves the sinner, he sent his son Jesus. Because God hates the sin, he sent his son Jesus. Because God loves the sinner, those sinners who believe will be saved. Because God hates the sin, those sinners who do not believe are condemned already (John 3:18).

Some clichés express eternal truths. Some phrases, like “well-worn clichés,” hide the truth.

JOHN ZYLSTRA (ONLINE COMMENT)

## FROM OUR LEADERS

## ‘They have taken away my Lord’

DOUG KLASSEN

These Easter morning words from Mary (John 20:13b) are prophetic for the church today, a time when we may have lost our bearings in our discipleship-oriented denomination.

Peace themes are an integral part of our congregations. We are deeply involved in reconciliation and advocacy work. We seek to bring justice and relief to others. We quilt, we sew, we feed and we clothe. Some of us call for boycotts, divestments and sanctions of products that contribute to injustice.

But have we come to see Jesus’ teaching and ethical examples as the essence of the gospel? I believe we have, and we have said, “This is what the gospel is.” It’s about doing justice, loving mercy. It’s about clothing the naked, feeding the hungry. It’s about working for peace in many and varied situations.

These things are good, but when I study the Bible it reminds me that the

work we do is not what the gospel is. The “gospel” sermons in Acts through I Corinthians 15 make me re-think why the first four books of the New Testament are named the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The gospel is the story of Jesus; God-incarnate, is the gospel!

Did Jesus come among us simply to offer a list of ethical behaviours? Did he come to teach us about peace, primarily? Did the angels say to the shepherds, “Behold, we bring you good news [gospel] of great joy. . . . In 30 years you are going to hear some sermons.”

Jesus preached, yes, and modelled ethical living, but first and foremost he showed us how God is becoming king over creation. With teaching, and with signs and wonders, Jesus showed us what it is going to look like when God’s kingdom comes in its fullness.

Once sin was taken to the cross, once death was conquered on Easter morning, nothing could stand in the way. And

in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we are invited to not only join Jesus in that proclamation, but to do it through his power and his authority. In Acts 4:7b, the disciples were not asked, “By whose ethical/moral code did you do this?” Instead, they were asked, “By what power or by what name did you do this?”

Corporately, but also individually, we have been given the power to carry on with that task of demonstrating to the world what it is going to look like when God’s will is done on earth as it already is done in heaven. We’ve been given the same power through which Jesus spoke his words and performed signs and wonders.

I hear Mary’s words differently today. Instead of asking what the Roman soldiers might have done with Jesus’ body, to me they ask what the church may have done with him. In other words, how the church today may have unwittingly limited who Jesus is. “They have taken away my Lord . . . and replaced him with an ethicist, a wisdom teacher, a Ghandi-like figure who had good ideas but died too young.”

Doug Klassen is chair of MC Canada’s Faith and Life Committee and pastor of Foothills Mennonite Church, Calgary.



## ✉ 'Mennonite' name should stay

A RECENT PROPOSAL by senior management of Ontario's Mennonite Savings and Credit Union to remove the name "Mennonite" from its name needs to be challenged. They claim that an increase in membership is needed to ensure sustainable growth and profitability and that the name is a barrier to new membership. But the growth over the last several

years has averaged approximately 6 to 8 percent annually—hardly insignificant. Our CEO said we need 9 or 10 percent growth to remain profitable. In 2004 the assets of MSCU were \$444 million. Ten years later, in the spring of 2015, the assets of MSCU are approximately \$950 million, but apparently that is not enough. Why this obsession with growth? Is placing our focus on expansion in keeping with our Mennonite values? As a member of MSCU, I am concerned. We claim to

## FAMILY TIES

# Crucial conversations

MELISSA MILLER

My ears perked up at a recent seminar when a leader began to speak about crucial conversations. He defined such conversations as ones whose stakes are high, opinions vary and emotions run strong. I was even more eager to hear how he successfully led his extended family in a process related to his aging father. The material the leader used came from a book by Kerry Patterson and others—*Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes are High*—which explains why such interactions so often go awry and offers specific skills to improve our capacity to navigate our way to a satisfying outcome.

Patterson and colleagues speak helpfully about fear and safety in these intense encounters. They note that when people feel unsafe or afraid, they tend to resort either to silence, withholding meaningful participation, or with violence. Common forms of silence include sarcasm, sugar-coating and avoidance. Violence occurs when one or more persons turn to coercive, stereotyping or attacking behaviours. Fortunately, the authors offer strategies for how to address the safety factors to steer the conversation back towards healthy resolution.

Taking in this information, I thought of other descriptions of critical moments:

between a rock and a hard place; between a sword and a stone; at the foot of the cross (this from my spiritual director). The last phrase seems especially fitting since "crucial" derives from the Latin word for "cross," and includes definitions of "extremely trying," "severe" and "difficult."

Sometimes we find ourselves in precarious places in our relationships. We care deeply about the outcome. There is more than one opinion about how to proceed. The emotions are turbulent and overwhelming. We feel the terrain shifting under our feet, and it's scary. To cope, we may resort to avoidance or violence.

Perhaps you find yourself in such a place today. Like the seminar leader's example, it may involve aging parents. Who of us hasn't witnessed seniors and their adult children tied up in knots about a thorny situation? Grandpa's vision and

*God can always be found in places of deep love and deep pain.*

hearing limitations mean he shouldn't be driving, but it's so hard for him to give it up. Mom looks at the effects of cancer treatment and concludes she will let the illness take its course untreated. Aunt Mary's dementia has gotten to the point that she needs to move into assisted living, but she is still conscious enough to

protest and to grieve.

Or perhaps you are wrestling with a spirited child or teenager. Who of us hasn't agonized over a young person's determination to choose the opposite of what we think is best? Sam's passion for medieval weapons puts his parents' pacifism to the test. Emily's going to the guy-girl sleepover next weekend "because everyone else is going to be there." Kai is sliding down a slippery slope that appears to be full of risky dangers.

Not to mention the crucial conversations taking place in our churches, only one or two of which relate to sexuality. What about who gets to come to the communion table? Or how does baptism relate to church membership in an increasingly individualized context? And has mutual accountability lost any relevance in church practice?

Getting back to my spiritual director's understanding of being "at the foot of the cross," she adds that it is a place of deep love and deep pain. (Somehow that sounds better.) And she reminds me that God can always be found in such a place. And so we take heart. Difficult as such conversa-

tions are, we are not without resources, like the presence of God, who honours our willingness to be present to each other in times of deep love and deep pain.

*Melissa Miller has a passion for helping people develop healthy, vibrant relationships with God, self and others.*



be a faith-based organization, yet there seems to be a disconnect here.

The fate of the Niagara Credit Union is a case in point. It was started in the 1950s by a few Mennonite farmers; it expanded and eventually merged with Meridian. Now all that is left are a number of branches, cogs in a huge financial machine run out of Toronto. Is that what we wish for our Mennonite credit union? Before scrapping “Mennonite” from the name, I urge the senior management and board to consider

a greater focus on marketing and promotion of the MSCU brand. A few years ago, the bond was opened to allow members from churches other than Mennonite, BIC, and Amish to join MSCU, so long as they could sign a statement of shared convictions. Why is MSCU not being actively promoted and championed as an option for people of faith who would wish to conduct their financial business in a faith-based organization?

*(Continued on page 12)*

## GOD, MONEY AND ME

# Why should I give to your church?

MIKE STRATHDEE

Helping people give money away over the past 15 years has been a tremendously rewarding part of my work at Mennonite Foundation of Canada.

Many of these generous people are from the “builder generation” (born in or before 1945). The builders I’ve spoken with give generously, value church institutions and trust the people who run them.

Being told there is a need opens their wallets or cheque books. As these people age, become infirm and pass away, I miss their generous spirits. Increasingly, many churches, church agencies and related institutions are starting to feel the same sense of loss. That loss will intensify from dull ache to stabbing pain in coming years for those who don’t overhaul their approach and communication with donors.

Many in my generation and most in younger cohorts don’t see things the same way as their church-attending parents and grandparents did. This is true even of the much smaller fraction of boomers and millennials who still attend church more frequently than Christmas

and Easter.

Given this clear dichotomy in how different generations respond, it is sad to see people making appeals based on guilt and obligation near the end of a church’s financial year. That doesn’t work anymore. It reminds me of the father recounting to his young daughter how his family had purchased their first colour TV when he was 10 years old. After some reflection, the daughter replied: “Daddy, was the whole world black and white then?”



*Loyalty to church institutions is a foreign concept to a sizeable group of church attenders.*

Leave it to Beaver-era appeals don’t work in the digital age. Loyalty to church institutions is a foreign concept to a sizeable group of church attenders. Without new, compelling and repeated calls to commitment, the idea of supporting a congregation’s ministry is easily overlooked or dismissed.

J. Clif Christopher, in his book *Rich Church, Poor Church*, says he finds “far too many church leaders who are working on the answer to the question, ‘Why should I give?’ and not on the right

question for today, which is, ‘Why should I give to you?’”

Younger donors who are asking the latter question don’t want to hear about commitments made at a budget meeting they didn’t attend. They want to give to vision, to relationships. They want to hear about outcomes and changed lives.

As the number of charities competing for donor attention continues to multiply—and Sunday morning once in a while is the extent of many people’s exposure to church—a congregation that wants to succeed in growing givers’ hearts needs to have a compelling answer to Christopher’s question: “Is my church the best place for me to invest to make a difference and change lives?”

Getting positive responses to that question will require leaders willing to move beyond traditional approaches. As Christopher says, “Being taught to give is as integral to the mature Christian life as

learning how to read is to the adult life.”

Do we care enough about church to use proven stewardship best practices, even if they make us uncomfortable?

*Mike Strathdee is a stewardship consultant at Mennonite Foundation of Canada serving generous people in Ontario and the eastern provinces. For more information on impulsive generosity, stewardship education, and estate and charitable gift planning, contact your nearest MFC office or visit [MennoFoundation.ca](http://MennoFoundation.ca).*

(Continued from page 11)

In the end all we have left to pass on is our legacy. Will our grandchildren and great-grandchildren say, "It was amazing, they built the biggest financial institution in the history of the Mennonites" or will they be able to say, "Our grandparents tried their best to live up to their faith and ideals."

ALBERT ISAAC, WATERLOO, ONT.

### ✉ MC Canada needs to find 'the way to life'

RE: "THE CHURCH will prevail" editorial, Feb. 16, page 2.

I regret editor Dick Benner's stated impressions of what transpired in God's church during his sabbatical: that by now we are a wounded and immobilized faith community.

Although he may be right, he seems to suggest that the only way for the church to prevail is to "make every effort" by cooperating with the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) 6 document. The "Last call" letter from Mennonite Church Canada moderator Hilda Hildebrand and executive director Willard Metzger on page 14 of the same issue makes the same appeal.

I do not see BFC 6 as the only way out of the morass. There are other hints of life that I see in the Feb. 16 issue:

- **PHIL WAGLER'S** "For better or worse we are Pharisees" column on page 10 that invites us to discover Jesus again.
- **DIONISIO BYLER'S** account of a fresh Spirit among European Anabaptists ("Spain: Old churches in new Europe," page 22);
- **THE LETTERS** on pages 12 and 13 that show a strong resistance to same-sex marriage; and
- **AS ONE** who also spends countless hours among truckers and working class citizens of this country, I am totally inspired by a picture of Vernon Erb standing humbly beside one of his hundreds of trucks after 56 years of honourable service to our economy ("Another cool move," page 28). We are still a simple people whose best witness is an unassuming modesty.

The way to life is not through more scholarly articles, not through diplomacy and nuanced Bible teaching looking for societally non-offensive interpretation, followed by plebiscites or votes.

The way out is to receive the "easy Scriptures," as Loren Johns calls them, and by publishing articles of how they are celebrated among our common ordinary congregations all across this country. Our church will not prevail if we try to be something that we are not.

JACOB FROESE, CALGARY

### ✉ Calling author 'angry' is just mean

RE: "AUTHOR HINTS at his own personal story" book review, Feb. 16, page 32.

I appreciated the book review, but the following line in it was unkind and unnecessary: "There are a number of fine Mennonite writers, but too many are angry—I think of Miriam Toews—and time and again beat up their loyal Mennonite readers, and I am one."

Does the reviewer know Toews, and does he have the right to make a personal comment about her being angry? Toews has indicated that some things in her books are connected to her own life, but the work is still fiction. Besides, if a writer's work is, in fact, angry—although I don't think that accurately represents Toews's books—maybe there's a good reason for that.

I love the church, but there are aspects of it that are worth getting upset about, and working with others to change. To shine a light on uncomfortable truths about the church is not to "beat up" loyal readers. One could make the case that her work can move readers to work for greater justice and peace.

Toews's work is brilliant, hilarious, heartbreakingly sad and unbelievably joyful, by turns. I don't know her, but at a few readings, and in one brief conversation, I was amazed by how joyful a person she is, particularly given the losses of loved ones she has experienced.

To say "too many" Mennonite writers are angry is an unfairly cheap shot that requires a whole article to discuss, one as thoughtfully written as the rest of the review is. And while the reviewer may not have intended it, to specifically name one person in such a disrespectful way is just mean.

Yorifumi Yaguchi, a Mennonite poet, said, "If it is Mennonite literature, it should be about one thing: peace." Perhaps reviews in Mennonite publications should take the same mandate: Critiques of literature can rate work anywhere from excellent to terrible while still being respectful, and adding to the peace of our own community and the larger literary world.

KRISTEN MATHIES, WATERLOO, ONT.

### ✉ Forcing gays to be celibate doesn't meet their 'deeper needs'

RE: "A BIBLICAL and better way" feature, Jan. 19, page 4.

I appreciate Ronald J. Sider's feature as a proposal to bring harmony into a debate that threatens to divide the church. However, I find that the solution he gives—let gays be celibate—offers nothing towards meeting the deeper needs of the gay and lesbian communities.

I admit I am biased on the side of gays. I feel their

pain, their fear, their social isolation, their spiritual and emotional deprivation. I was a family therapist; gays shared their secrets with me. I believe that, as Christians, we are called to minister to their suffering.

If we require gays to be celibate, we leave them open to sexual temptation, and some to promiscuity, which leads to disease. We have seen the devastation of the AIDS epidemic.

Perhaps in our zeal to uphold scriptural law, we can go too far and find ourselves transgressing Christ's way of compassion and grace. Have gays not suffered enough? When we require them to be celibate, are we not adding to their deprivation and suffering?

Consider what we are taking from gays when we ask them to be celibate: the security of a life-long partner, and the mutual support and intimacy of home and family life. These are God's good gifts to all humankind, the gifts of "common grace," meant to bless and enrich our lives.

Which is more important: to uphold the law against homosexuality or to promote the well-being of gays? It seems we cannot do both.

I find my response in the gospels, where Jesus set aside the rules based on the fourth commandment. He chose to heal people on the Sabbath and let his disciples pluck wheat kernels to eat, thus breaking the required observances of his day. Jesus chose to put the well-being of people above rule-keeping on the occasions when the law and human needs would collide.

My response to the homosexuality dilemma follows from Jesus' example. For me, it is more important to seek the well-being of gay and lesbian persons; to be life-giving, rather than life-denying; and to welcome them to the blessings of home, family and faithful partnership.

This, to me, is more important than requiring them to be celibate in order to uphold the law, and more in keeping with the undeserved grace we enjoy in Jesus the Saviour.

JOYCE GLADWELL, WATERLOO, ONT.

## ✉ Bible reading meant less *Canadian Mennonite* reading

RE: "365 DAYS later . . . A Year of Reading Biblically concludes," Feb. 2, page 35.

I hope this letter is an encouragement to Aaron Epp, who believes that about 25 people participated in A Year of Reading Biblically, but I really hope that the number is higher. We really are the "quiet in the land," and don't blow our horn, but I guess I'm No. 26. I started on Boxing Day in 2013, after reading Epp's first article.

Here are some observations:

- I USED a bookmark and did not read daily, but read

a lot when I did.

- I KEPT the Bible in the middle of the house, where I got a constant reminder.

- I DIDN'T skip the hard parts; instead, I asked why this was put in here.

- I PUT away other books and even *Canadian Mennonite* was read less. I noticed that when I read elsewhere I didn't get back to the Bible.

As a new Christian in my youth, I read the Bible cover to cover five times in five years, but it took 40 years before I could complete it again. I read through the Bible using the NIV translation and finished last August. And then what should I do?

I enjoyed it enough to start again, using an unfamiliar translation put out by the Roman Catholic Church, as it had the extra books like the Maccabees and Tobit. I am learning a lot about where my Catholic-turned-Mennonite friends came from.

When people started reading the Bible for themselves nearly 500 years ago, a Reformation happened—even a new church called Mennonite. I think that when we read the Bible for ourselves, we can get a direct message that is less filtered by the thoughts and beliefs of our Christian authors and pastors.

EARL MARTIN, STRATFORD, ONT.

## /// Corrections: March 2 issue

Incorrect names and titles appeared in a letter printed on page 14, "MCC provides anti-abuse network in three provinces." Stephen Siemens is the restorative justice coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee Canada. Eileen Henderson is from the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Resource Team of MCC Ontario. Virginia Froese is the Abuse and Response Prevention coordinator for MCC Manitoba.

The Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization statement quoted in the article on page 42, "Saskatchewan youth speak out," should have read, "We're often called the future of the church . . ."

Peggy Barz was a member of the Grace Mennonite Church delegation that met with MP Ted Falk on Jan. 6 over concerns about murdered and missing indigenous women. She was incorrectly identified in the March 2 article on page 22, "Grace Mennonite meets with local MP"

*Canadian Mennonite* regrets the errors.

## VIEWPOINT

## It's time for a vote

RUSSEL SNYDER-PENNER

*"I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15-16).*

There is so much handwringing going on in Mennonite circles about same-sex relationships, the threat to church unity and the possibility of raised voices, that we are forgetting the point. We have been confronted for several decades by people who, by their very presence, ask whether the church will embrace them not just as individuals but as couples. They have grown old waiting for our response. Our deliberations have grown tired.

I am not advocating a particular answer, but pointing to the proper question. Not: "How will we weather this storm?" "How will we manage this conflict?" "How will we avoid division?" Rather: "How shall we respond to these couples who have challenged us by the fact of their relationships?"

And there really is more than one legitimate answer. One may be to advocate celibacy for gays, lesbians and unmarried heterosexuals. Another would open the institution of marriage to same-sex couples. Either could generate conflict and division.

But recall that Anabaptism itself began with a question that shattered the church. In 1525, George Blaurock asked to be baptized upon confession of faith. Conrad Grebel responded with an act that set "*a man against his father, a daughter against her mother*," and turned the predecessors of Mennonites into hunted fugitives. One wonders where Mennonites would be now if the question of baptism had instead triggered a season of discernment.

This is not to say that how we deliberate is of no importance. Should we offer counsel with humility? Absolutely! Should we consider contrary counsel with seriousness and respect? Of course!

Ironically, the Mennonite establishment's dedication to notions of discernment, consensus and reconciliation has inhibited counsel, humble or otherwise, and precluded a forum where opposing views can be aired and debated.

Proponents of consensus cannot help but aspire to a moment when everyone is saying the same thing. The temptation and the practice in Mennonite circles is to structure conversation to discourage public statements that generate dispute. The classic exercise is to fragment discussion into multiple table groups. The theory: We thus place value on each and every voice. The practice: We muffle what needs to be said and mute the debate by compartmentalizing conversation.

Strong, intense or angry voices are constrained within a small circle, and the participant designated to report to the larger group presents a summary of "what was discussed" that, in an effort to represent every voice in the table group, is unable to properly advance any position.

"Motherhood statements" are the norm—proposals crafted to which nobody can object. Motions that could generate dispute are deferred as long as possible in the hope of "moving the community" to a point where it is ready to accept the suggestion with a shrug. Unfortunately, the effect is to paralyze the institution during exactly those times when decision is most important. The shrinking number of contrarian voices are muffled by the process, or worn out by it, until overwhelmed by the tide of a new Canadian social consensus.

Ultimately, we may anticipate that congregations will be encouraged to each set their own course in a kind of "you're okay, I'm okay" mentality. The final irony: By prioritizing conflict management and

consensus over responding directly to same-sex couples, the Mennonite church will have fractured itself in fact, while maintaining the facade of institutional unity.

So what is to be done? Consider the following:

- **SOMETIMES CONVICTION** demands protest. This applies both to those who consider the past position of the church on same-sex relationships to be an affront to the neighbour, and to those who see the recent trajectory of openness as an exclusion of God from the realm of sexual morality. Either side may conclude that conscience requires separation, even if only temporarily, from a community that has lost its way.

- **RE-CONCEPTUALIZE VOTING.** Voting is not about determining who wins. It is about every participant agreeing on how to lose. It is the procedural version of being subject to one another. All voters consent to the notion that the vote will govern, even if things do not go their way. Voting is systematic humility.

- **VOTING CONFERS** dignity to dissent. The risk of consensus decisions is that pressure to conform can whitewash over sincere and serious opposition. Properly held votes allow dissenters to make their case or propose amendments that could make a resolution palatable. If compromise is out of reach, principled opposition can be recorded and respected by an opposing vote. A mature community that understands the ethos of a formal vote can sustain greater diversity than a community that insists decisions be made by consensus, because it offers documented dissent as a middle ground between unanimity and separation.

How might a New Testament outlook inform the mechanics and implementation of a decision by vote? Might a successful majority, having clearly articulated its conviction of how the community ought to respond to same-sex couples, nevertheless offer to an equally convinced minority to forbear implementation of the vote, at least for a time? Such an offer

would reflect the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, or the counsel given by the Apostle Paul in Romans 14:14 to those sufficiently mature in faith to understand that nothing is unclean in and of itself. If a majority were to support a recommendation affirming same-sex relationships, it might yet refrain from performing marriages in order to maintain communion with dissenting congregations.

Neither consensus decision-making nor voting mechanisms guarantee happy outcomes. As far as what the Bible says, conservatives will continue to know for sure, and liberals will continue to know better. The problem, however, is that the agenda has been hijacked by the lukewarm middle, invoking the ethos of consensus. The passion of both the hot and the cold, a passion to respond, has been

suppressed, and our area and national churches and too many of our congregations still have nothing real to offer same-sex couples waiting at the fringes of their communities. It's time for a vote. ❧

*Russel Snyder-Penner is a corporate/commercial lawyer in Kitchener, Ont., who attends Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Waterloo.*

## Pontius' Puddle



## /// Milestones

### Births/Adoptions

**Friesen**—Caleb Jonathan Kurtis (b. Feb. 8, 2015), to Ken and Lisa Friesen, Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

**Harms**—Carter Emerson (b. Jan. 12, 2015), to Amanda (Heidebrecht) and Alex Harms, Foothills Mennonite, Calgary.

**McCrimmon**—Caleb Elijah (b. Jan. 4, 2015), to Dan and Amanda McCrimmon, Emmanuel Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.

**Neudorf**—Troy Justice Daniel (b. Aug. 9, 2012), adopted by Randell and Susan Neudorf, The Commons, Hamilton, Ont., on Jan. 21, 2015.

**Sas**—Hamish Bartholomew (b. Nov. 13, 2014), to Casey and Lara Sas, Emmanuel Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.

**Unger Alexander**—Willem Geoffrey (b. Feb. 17, 2015), to Dora Alexander and Lori Unger, Toronto United Mennonite, in Georgina, Ont.

**Wallace**—Avery Ann (b. Nov. 17, 2014), to Terry and Jen Wallace, Emmanuel Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.

**Winger**—Steven Ray (b. Jan. 6, 2015), to Jesse and Leane Winger, Emmanuel Mennonite, Abbotsford.

### Baptisms

**Austin Janz**—First Mennonite, Calgary, Feb. 22, 2015.

### Deaths

**Derksen**—Peter, 86 (b. Aug. 12, 1928; d. Nov. 15, 2014), Emmanuel Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.

**Dyck**—Tina (nee Banman), 80 (b. July 20, 1934; d. Feb. 10, 2015), Osler Mennonite, Sask.

**Epp**—Gertrude Judith (Judy), 69 (b. June 30, 1945; d. Jan. 26, 2015), First Mennonite, Edmonton.

**Friesen-Wiebe**—Betty (nee Neudorf), 79 (b. Oct. 5, 1935; d. Feb. 23, 2015), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

**Hildebrandt**—Irma, 72 (b. Aug. 27, 1942; d. Feb. 20, 2015), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

**Peters**—Helen (nee Bargaen), 91 (b. Oct. 17, 1923; d. Feb. 22, 2015), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

**Schultz**—Elsie, 94 (b. April 8, 1920; d. Feb. 16, 2015), Grace Mennonite, St. Catharines, Ont.

**Warkentin**—Albert, 82 (b. June 2, 1932; d. Feb. 26, 2015), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

**Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones announcements within four months of the event. Please send Milestones announcements by e-mail to [milestones@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:milestones@canadianmennonite.org), including the congregation name and location. When sending death notices, please also include birth date and last name at birth if available.**

## LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

## Thin places (Pt. 2)

TROY WATSON

So what does the Bible say about thin places?

Interestingly enough, in our Scriptures the human story begins in a thin place: the Garden of Eden. Regardless of one's theology, and whether one believes the Garden of Eden is literal or symbolic, the narrative is clearly describing a thin place where humans experienced intimate and immediate fellowship with God, where the holy and human mingled. The story goes on to tell us that human beings were expelled from this special place after the Fall, when humanity chose to follow the way of evil, instead of God's way.

So did the Fall mark the end of thin places on earth? According to the Bible, the answer is no.

Later on in the Book of Genesis, chapter 28, Jacob is travelling and stops at a place called Bethel. He spends the night there and has a dream of a stairway leading up to heaven, with angels ascending and descending, and the Lord, the God of Abraham, standing at the top.

In Genesis 28:16-17, we read Jacob's reaction to this vivid dream: "When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'"

It is intriguing that Jacob marvels at how awesome the place is. He immediately focusses on the physical location he is in, assuming it must possess an especially sacred quality. It wasn't a random divine encounter in his eyes; geography had something to do with it.

In the Bible, Bethel has a prolific



history as a holy place for the Israelites. It was where Abraham built one of the very first altars to God, and later on Bethel housed the Ark of the Covenant. It was also where Israelites came to offer sacrifices and receive oracles from God. For Abraham, Jacob and their descendants, Bethel was a thin place.

In Exodus 3, we read about Moses meeting God in another place with a curious reputation as a holy or thin place. Moses is tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, when he comes to Horeb or Sinai; both names are traditionally understood to be referring to the same mountain. Horeb was known as the mountain of God and here Moses

comes across a bush that is engulfed in flames but isn't consumed.

As Moses approaches the strange sight, a voice speaks to him from the flames, saying, "Moses, Moses . . . Do not come any closer. . . . Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. . . . I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Genesis 3:4-6).

God tells Moses that the very ground he is standing on, the physical place he is in, is holy. One understanding is that the ground was only holy at that particular moment because God was revealing God's presence at the time. But the fact that this mountain was already known to people in the area as the mountain of God means that Moses was undoubtedly

not the first person to have had a profound God encounter there. Could it really be coincidence that Moses meets God on a mountain that people had already named the mountain of God?

Furthermore, Moses routinely ascends this particular mountain in order to communicate with God throughout the Exodus story. In fact, he ascends a total of eight, possibly nine, times to hear from the Lord. Immediately after the Hebrews escape Egypt, God leads the Hebrews south into the desert to this mountain, instead of along a direct route to the Promised Land of Canaan. When Moses and the liberated Hebrew slaves arrive in the desert of Sinai and set up camp beside this mountain, we read, "Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain" (Exodus 19:3).

Moses repeatedly goes to the same place, up the same mountain, to meet with God. It is there Moses receives the Ten Commandments, other laws and commands, instructions for the tabernacle and the details of the new covenant.

*Could it really be coincidence that Moses meets God on a mountain that people had already named the mountain of God?*

It is there he spends 40 days with God, without food or water, and returns with a face that is glowing so bright that Aaron and the Israelites are afraid to go near him.

This mountain was clearly a very thin place. ❧

Troy Watson is pastor of Avon Mennonite Church in Stratford, Ont.




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

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



## GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLIFF AND WILMA DERKSEN



*'We wish it was over,' says Wilma Derksen, who, along with her husband Cliff, waited 27 years to learn what happened to their daughter. 'I waffle about a new trial.'*

## 'Our truth has been discovered'

*Supreme Court overturns conviction of man sentenced in the murder of Candace Derksen*

BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU  
Manitoba Correspondent

"God has given us a toolkit," said Wilma Derksen. First it was forgiveness when Wilma and Cliff's daughter Candace was murdered in 1984. Then it was learning to love when they learned that Mark Edward Grant was arrested and charged with her murder in 2007, and then truth and justice as they sat through his trial in 2011.

But on March 5 of this year, as the Supreme Court of Canada came down with its decision to overturn Grant's 2011 conviction of second-degree murder, Wilma expressed gratitude that "we chose forgiveness to begin with. Forgiveness has held us to the course, and in hindsight has become even more valuable to us than we imagined. It has set us up for this moment and given us resilience for this. This isn't what we wanted or expected, but maybe this is something other people might need."

Besides forgiveness, shock and surprise also coursed through the Derksens' very being. With the decision to uphold the Manitoba Court of Appeal in overturning Grant's conviction, it was left up to Manitoba Attorney General James Allum to decide whether to stay the proceedings or order a new trial. On March 20, he decided that Grant would be retried.

"We wish it was over," said Wilma, who waited 27 years to learn what happened to her daughter. "I waffle about a new trial."

For the couple, the "truth" about what happened to Candace was discovered during Grant's original trial and they do not need another trial to convince them, but they believe that another trial may help to bring more truth to light. "Our truth has been discovered," said Wilma, "but there is the truth of the judge and the jurors that this whole appeal process has cast into

doubt, and it has victimized a whole other group of people and I think they need redemption."

"This trial will be different," she said. "We no longer feel sorry for ourselves. We won't be entering into this trial with the same parental obligations and parental pain that we did before."

Their approach to the trial this time will be to learn.

"We want to learn what it is all about because we are no longer clouded with personal interest as much," she said. "We are convinced about the truth. I am open to being challenged and if there is a new truth that I don't know, I am open to hearing it. If there was complete resolution, that would be new territory for us, but to go back into the process and wait and wonder and not have everyone agree on the same thing is familiar territory to us."

Art and writing continue to be outlets and places of healing for the Derksen family. From April 3 to 11, Wilma, Cliff and their daughter Odia Reimer are presenting an art show in Winnipeg, at which Cliff will talk about "Healing through creativity."

"I think art and writing have become our survival," said Wilma, whose most recent e-book, *This Mortal Coil*, is about the trial. It includes "the stories of the family trauma, the police investigation and the ongoing public debate that has lasted almost three decades," according to the book's Kindle description.

"Writing and doing the research has been a form of accountability and expression of emotion," she said. "It was an enormous research project that has given us, as a family, confidence and an anchor of truth. When we work at the truth, that is where we will find our healing and our freedom."

She plans to have this book available in print form in time for the art show. "I'm really scared, though, terrified to put myself out there with the book," she said, since the Supreme Court has come down with its decision to order a retrial.

"Prayer and our faith in God, who said he makes all things work together for good, has given us strength for 30 years. He hasn't promised us a good life, but that good things will come out of it," Wilma concluded. ☸

# 'A less safe environment for everybody'

*Report shows public safety benefits of CoSA as feds cut funding*

BY WILL BRAUN  
Senior Writer

When a high-risk, low functioning, repeat child abuser was released from prison in the Hamilton, Ont., area in 1994, many locals responded with predictable revulsion. Harry Nigh, a Mennonite pastor, was not among them. He gathered a small group of people who reached out to the man, offering support and accountability. The man never reoffended.

That later turned into 16 Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) organizations across Canada, and similar initiatives in nine other countries. The CoSA model matches released high-risk sex offenders with three to five volunteers who generally meet weekly to offer support, friendship and accountability.

A recently released report shows that CoSA has been effective in working toward its motto: "No more victims." The federally funded report found that sexual offences among CoSA participants were 2 percent over three years following release, compared to 28 percent among similar populations not enrolled in the program. The study calculated that the cost of preventing a repeat sexual assault within the CoSA context was \$53,000. The societal cost of a sexual assault was calculated at \$240,000. The bottom line conclusion is that CoSA reduces sexual offences, improves public safety and ultimately saves money.

Despite that, federal funding for CoSA will be cut as of March 31, with the exception of a previously signed contract specific to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario.

CoSA had received funding from Correctional Services Canada (CSC) since 1996 and more recently from Public Safety Canada (PSC) as well. The PSC funding came in the form of a \$7.5-million demonstration project that involved 13 CoSA

sites from 2009-14, allowing for significant expansion of CoSA services. Despite the fact that the recent study documented the effectiveness of the demonstration project, PSC has not provided any follow-up funding. As a result, CoSA staff capacity across the country dropped by about a third, according to David Byrne, who speaks for CoSA Canada.

PSC spokesperson Josée Sirois said, "The [CoSA] project evaluation results will be used to inform future direction and evidence-based approaches regarding crime prevention and impacts on recidivism rates," but the department is not considering provision of further funding for CoSA at this time.

The other source of funding has been CSC, which is a separate government department. In recent years, CSC support has involved about \$650,000 per year in core funding for the various CoSA sites. More than half of that funding will stop on March 31. The other \$325,000 is a previously signed five-year contract with MCC Ontario for its CoSA programs. That funding extends until 2018, and MCC has been told it will not continue beyond that.

In response to questions about the funding cuts, CSC spokesperson Sara Parkes said, "A significant portion of CoSA activity . . . falls outside of CSC's formal mandate." If someone receives a 10-year sentence, CSC is only technically responsible for that person for those 10 years. If the person is let out on parole after eight years, CSC will still fund certain programs for the two years of parole, but does not technically have responsibilities beyond that, although for nearly 20 years CSC worked around that.

CoSA is specifically intended for people who never get parole, due to the high risk of reoffending, and are then released from

jail at the end of their sentence without the supervision and supports that would have been in place had they received parole. This increases their chances of re-offending—thus the crucial role of CoSA.

According to an e-mail from Parkes, "The management and safe reintegration of sex offenders into the community is a high priority for CSC," but she gave no indication that CSC would reconsider its decision to cut funding to CoSA. Instead, she said CSC "strongly encourages its partners" to consider alternate sources of funding.

Byrne said two CoSA sites will likely have to close immediately after the March cuts, and only a handful are likely to survive into 2016 unless core funding is found. These changes "create a less safe environment for everybody," he said.

With cuts looming, CoSA Canada is exploring the innovative Social Impact Bond funding model. Under this approach private investors would front money for CoSA operations and if the programs demonstrate results that save government money by avoiding the costs related with people re-offending, then the government would pay back the investors with interest. Social Impact Bonds have been used for young offender programs in the U.K. and U.S.

In February, the federal Standing Committee on Public Safety issued a report on the matter that recommended that the department identify programs that could be transitioned to this form of funding.

Stephen Siemens, who coordinated restorative justice work for MCC Canada, and heads the CoSA work on social financing, said he is hopeful that this approach could provide a stable future for CoSA as well as a meaningful way for Mennonites to "invest in the infrastructure of community safety."

Sirois said PSC has "no specific comment at this time" on the possibility of Social Impact Bond funding for CoSA.

Stephen Blaney, the minister responsible for CSC and PSC, did not respond to a request for comment on CoSA funding. ❧

*For more on this topic, visit [canadianmennonite.org/cosa-extras](http://canadianmennonite.org/cosa-extras).*

# Breaking down walls in Edmonton

*Mennonites and Muslims give generously to ministry of sharing faith and friendship*

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alberta Correspondent

As western media reports become more fearful and the word “terrorism” is regularly in the news, Mennonites and Muslims in Edmonton are building bonds of respect and understanding between their communities.

The more than 100 faces around banquet tables at King’s University College on March 7 were happily diverse at a fundraiser for Mennonite Church Alberta/Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Alberta’s joint North Edmonton Ministry. Musicians and speakers entertained and informed, raising more than \$4,000 to continue the ministry of sharing faith and friendship.

Artist Rhonda Harder Epp’s “Walls” display and the music of a harp; *santur*, a Persian dulcimer; and violin created visual and auditory examples of breaking down barriers between diverse people. Around the tables, Mennonites and Muslims, black and white, men and women, enjoyed fellowship and the affirmation that all are neighbours under God.

Brenda Tiessen-Wiens, chair of MC Alberta’s missions committee, said the North Edmonton Ministry is important because “it brings ‘mission’ work right home to our doorstep and invites us to be involved, [and] it challenges the barrage of messages that surround us that we should fear our neighbour. God’s vision for his world unfolds when we build relationships with others and join in his reconciling work.”

MC Alberta began the ministry in 2010 with a vision to build relationships, share the gospel of Jesus, and grow a multi-cultural community of faith based on Anabaptist/Mennonite principles. Donna Entz, a lifelong mission worker who served in Burkina Faso for more than 30 years along with her husband Loren, was hired

to head up the project.

Entz is passionate about sharing the story of Jesus with her Muslim friends, whose beliefs about Jesus differ from Mennonites. For example, Muslims call Jesus a prophet, while Christians worship him as Redeemer.

Abe Janzen, director of MCC Alberta, told stories of a recent trip to Iraq where he was encouraged to hear tales of hope that contrasted with what is generally reported in mainstream news. He especially remembers an Iraqi who reminded him to pay attention to more than the mosquito in the room. “There is so much more going on [good things] than just the mosquito,” Janzen said of the experience.

Financial support from MC Alberta and MCC Alberta is essential for the continuation of the North Edmonton Ministry. Donations can be made through MC Alberta at [www.mennonitechurch.ab.ca](http://www.mennonitechurch.ab.ca). ❧



*Farhad Khosravi plays a santur, a Persian dulcimer, for the crowd of Mennonites and Muslims gathered to raise funds for Mennonite Church Alberta/Mennonite Central Committee Alberta’s joint North Edmonton Ministry. Khosravi is an electrical engineering student who hopes to someday go back to his home in Iraq.*

## ❧ Briefly noted

### MCC Ontario cancels meat canning efforts for 2015

KITCHENER, ONT.—Just weeks before it was scheduled to begin work in Ontario, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario cancelled its 2015 meat canning events in Leamington and Elmira in April. According to Bob Lebold, MCC material resources coordinator, despite yearly updates to the 23-year-old canner trailer, it did not meet safety requirements this year. “A new canner is being built right now,” in Pennsylvania, he says. It will be state of the art and be able to produce more of the one-kilogram cans of meat more quickly. Last year, MCC produced more than 60,000 cans of meat during stops across North America. In the meantime, fundraising for the new canner trailer began with the annual breakfast on March 21. Other donations are welcome. In order to give the volunteers an outlet for their service energies, a comforter-knotting blitz is being planned for Elmira from April 20 to 23 at the Elmira Produce Auction; the goal is to knot up to 500 comforters to be shipped to the Middle East in June. To volunteer, call Keith and Diane Snyder at 519-669-4084.

—BY DAVE ROGALSKY

# Finding a place to belong

BY DICK BENNER

Editor/Publisher  
WATERLOO, ONT.

Their stories are heart-rending, but their hopes are high. Navigating Canada's increasingly complex immigration system wears them down, but their resilience still shows.

Listening for nearly two hours in teacher Lynn Schulze's English-as-a-second-language classroom at Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI) to these painful, winding journeys was at once bone-chilling and spine-tingling. They have formed a tight bond in a presentation tour group called Crossing Borders.



Lynn Schulze

Maria Alejandra was born in Colombia and came to Canada via Miami when she was 15, after living in limbo for four years as a refugee claimant. "I felt my life was on hold much of this time," she says.

But with the help of the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support located in Kitchener, Ont., she could work through her emotional struggles while attending school. The refugee coalition is a not-for-profit organization that welcomes and supports refugee claimants through the refugee claim process.

"It's almost impossible to keep up your grades and maintain any kind of social life while waiting and then wading through a court case," says Schulze.

After graduating from WCI, Alejandra's family received a positive decision on their Humanitarian and Compassionate Application. She is now working as a lifeguard/instructor and is enrolled in the public relations degree program at Conestoga College in Kitchener.

Shegofa Alizada, born in Kabul, Afghanistan, was 15 when she participated in a government exchange program to the United States. After defecting from the program, she quickly navigated her way across the U.S. to Buffalo, from which she made the crossing into Canada,

which she heard could be her "refuge." Serendipitously, a Fort Erie, Ont., cabbie knew just where to take her—Viva La Casa—a shelter from which she could file her claim of asylum. She is now living in Toronto on her own.

"Even though the expectation in Afghanistan is for a girl to marry young and have kids, I always wanted a career and a life of my own," Alizada says. At WCI, from which she graduated, she said she was helped on her journey by her teachers and was even welcomed by the students. "I had the feeling I found a place where I belong." She is now studying business at George Brown College in Toronto and dreams of bringing her family to Canada.

Born to a well-to-do family in Iraq, Huda Al-Obaidi had to flee her homeland for Jordan when war broke out in 2003. After uncertainty and a long wait, she came to Canada with her parents and three sisters in 2013. An articulate spokesperson for Crossing Borders, she plans to study pharmacy after graduating from WCI.

A brother and sister duo, Elias and Rachel Nyirabakire, were born in the Democratic Republic of Congo and had to flee to Uganda during civil unrest in 1998. Rachel, a refugee all her life, was literally carried out of the country in her mother's arms at the age of three months. Elias has produced a documentary of their journey and new life in Canada, especially at WCI.

These are only a sampling of many similar stories of

hardship by young people seeking a better life in Canada, some as refugees and others coming as immigrants seeking permanent residency. Some have become passionate promoters of WCI's Crossing Borders, working in tandem with refugee coalition staff such as Kaylee Perez. Born in Canada to a Cuban father and a Palestinian-Colombian mother,



Kaylee Perez

*'Even though the expectation in Afghanistan is for a girl to marry young and have kids, I always wanted a career and a life of my own.'*  
(Shegofa Alizada)

Perez says she has always been fascinated by cross-cultural communication.

She began volunteering at the refugee coalition during her third year as an undergraduate student in global studies and fell in love with its work. She now acts as its youth coordinator. In addition, as a recent graduate of the master of peace and conflict studies program at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, she says she has "gained an in-depth perspective on the crucial role that civil society plays in building long-lasting peace."

How do they view the politics of immigration as its policies change and restrictions toughen in recent years? Reluctant to criticize a government that has helped them achieve a new life, both students and teacher alike did admit that the processes have become more "politically-driven," favouring the skilled labour segment over other qualified applicants.

How has Crossing Borders changed their lives since coming here? It has instilled self-confidence, heightened their sense of self-worth and provided a place to belong, were the sentiments echoed around the circle.

The group has received financial support over the last two years from the Canadian Council for Refugees and the Laidlaw Foundation. ❧



Huda  
Al-Obaidi



Elias  
Nyirabakire



Rachel  
Nyirabakire

# Dream like a mustard seed

BY DEBORAH FROESE  
Mennonite Church Canada

Just like a tiny mustard seed, Nathan and Taryn Dirks's dream of building a futsal (soccer) field with a playground in the rundown, poorly lit neighbourhood of Bontleng in Gaborone, Botswana, is blossoming into a much broader, community-embraced project.

The Dirks, a young Mennonite Church Canada Witness worker couple, focus on ministry with youth and young adults from local African Initiated Churches—congregations begun by Africans and not by missionaries from another continent.

The futsal court and playground were originally intended to provide a safe place for children and young people in the neighbourhood, which is home to several drinking establishments and has a bad reputation. (See "A place of beauty," Nov. 24, 2014, page 39.) A traditional *kgotla*, or meeting area, at the corner of the court would offer a place for older people to gather. But as plans for the project developed with green goals in mind—including local production and local sustainability—it sprouted excitement and new ideas.

The futsal court design now includes a slightly angled surface for drainage during the rainy season. Underground storage tanks are planned for the collection of run-off to support an urban aquaponics system—a compact, self-sustaining farm raising fish and vegetables. Futsal Park Committee volunteers will learn how to operate the system and train others to create their own, providing potential for income as well as sustenance. The collected water will also drip-irrigate a vegetable garden.

Food vendors often frequent the area to serve businesspeople working nearby. That prompted plans for an open-air, thatched-roof eco café. Waste products such as cans and bottles, and leftover concrete from local construction sites will form café knee-walls. Adding shredded waste materials to that concrete will extend coverage and create a product less conductive to heat and cold. Local artisans are using recycled skids and other found materials like tires

and scrap metal to construct furniture.

Plans for a solar-powered Wi-Fi hotspot in the café will cater to students and businesspeople alike. The café designer has computer technology skills and hopes to use the finished café as a space to provide free Internet technology seminars to community members.

But plans don't end there. Other stalls will be constructed around the site from recycled materials to give local craftspeople a clean and safe space to sell their wares, including a local older man in a wheelchair who currently does shoe repairs under sheets of tin.

To help establish a safer environment, solar-powered lighting will illuminate the futsal field for late-night activities. It is expected to be well used by school physical programs, and social and competitive leagues, and for training purposes with the

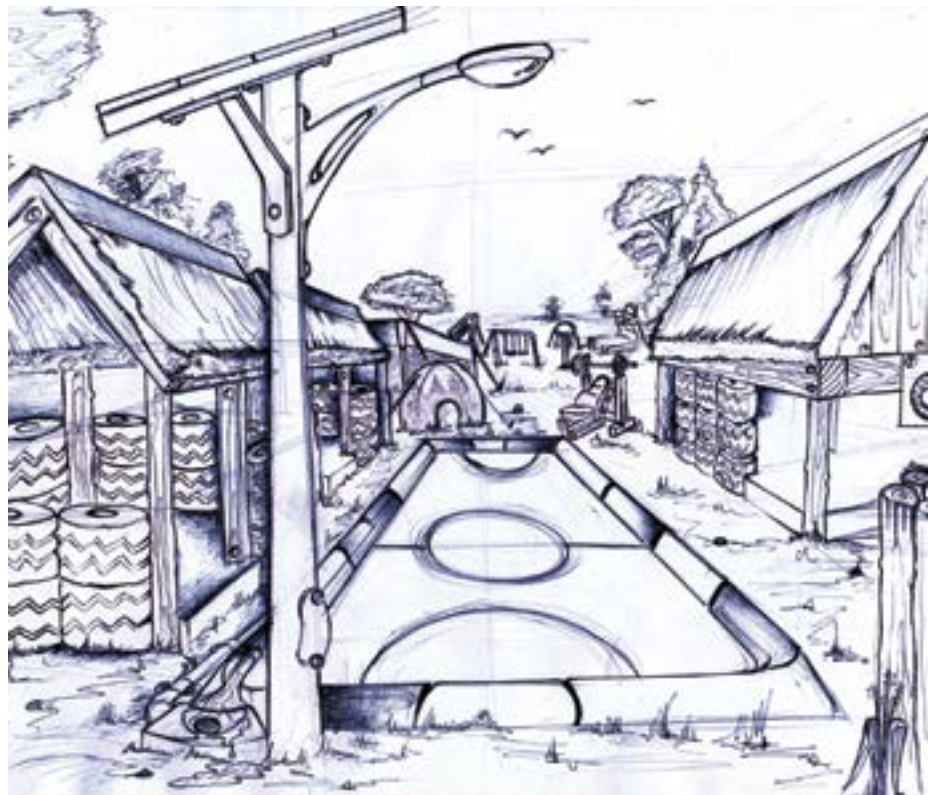
project's soccer development affiliates.

All plans have been carefully designed for easy replication in other communities in the city and around the country.

The Dirks say a large number of people are involved in project development. They are particularly grateful for Swift, Slim, Sbu, Wame and Fox—five energetic young people who manage a number of the logistics by contacting politicians, inviting donations, preparing proposals for major corporations, hashing out details with architects, and more.

Last fall, the Futsal Park project initiative inspired eight teams of cyclists from MC Canada congregations across the country to participate in a Ride for Refuge, raising nearly \$20,000. ☼

*Nathan and Taryn Dirks invite Canadians to encourage the Futsal Park team by colouring copies of a Futsal Park drawing by Bontleng youth Michael Zachariah and e-mailing scans of the coloured pictures to [ntdirks@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:ntdirks@mennonitechurch.ca). To download a copy of the Futsal Park Sketch for colouring, visit [bit.ly/1zhG6i0](http://bit.ly/1zhG6i0). ☼*



*A sketch of the future Futsal Park, drawn by local Bontleng youth Michael Zachariah, provides a rough idea of its layout.*



*Since 2004, land and buildings are wasting away on a 90-hectare section of prime real estate in south Winnipeg. Formerly the home of Kapyong Barracks, a military base, ownership of the land is the subject of an ongoing court battle between the Canadian government and seven first nation communities that want to build an urban reserve on the land.*

## A healing bridge

*Proposed urban reserve on former military base may pave the way beyond the destructive impact of colonialism*

STORY AND PHOTO BY DEBORAH FROESE

Mennonite Church Canada  
WINNIPEG

It may not look like much, but the abandoned 90-hectare site of Kapyong Barracks is prime real estate in Winnipeg. It could also be a healing bridge, according to Steve Heinrichs, Mennonite Church Canada's director of indigenous relations.

The former military base is currently at the centre of ongoing litigation between the federal government and seven first nation communities in Manitoba that want to transform it into an urban reserve.

Heinrichs views the development as a terrific opportunity for first nations and settler peoples to find a way beyond the destructive impact of colonialism. "Land issues are foundational issues for the church to grapple with in their relationships with first nations and indigenous communities, because land is so important to them," he said.

On March 5, MC Canada and Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) co-hosted a Face2Face discussion about the potential impact of an urban reserve in the well-off Tuxedo neighbourhood of Winnipeg. About 300 people crammed into the

Marpeck Commons, located within two kilometres of the barracks, for "On being good neighbours: An urban reserve at Kapyong?"

Panelists included Chief Glenn Hudson of Peguis First Nation; Jamie Wilson, commissioner of the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba; and Leah Gazan, faculty/special projects coordinator at the University of Winnipeg and president of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. They did not shy away from the challenges they face.

"A lot of people haven't been on a reserve and don't know more than the negative stories they see on the news," said Wilson. "We need to share positive stories."

He pointed to successful urban reserves developed in other provinces. In Saskatoon, Muskeg Lake Cree Nation turned a derelict train yard into a thriving commercial hub for first nation and settler businesses, while Huron-Wendat First Nation created a successful tourism centre just outside Quebec City, and developed a four-star hotel in the city's downtown.

"We're not talking about lowered property values, but green space and business," he said.

Kapyong was abandoned in 2004 when the military base relocated to Canadian Forces Base Shilo in southwestern Manitoba. Three years later, the federal Treasury Board attempted to sell the site to the Canada Lands Company, a Crown corporation, for dispersal. But before that sale could be completed, a group of first nation communities challenged it in court on the basis of treaty agreements with the federal government.

In 1871, the government promised more land to Treaty One signatories than it delivered. In order to meet that deficit, the federal government is legally required to offer any Crown lands labelled as surplus—such as Kapyong Barracks—to Treaty One communities, explained Heinrichs in a conversation following the event.

Gazan told the audience that Winnipeg is in the midst of a housing crisis. Had the urban reserve been allowed to proceed when the land was vacated in 2004, Kapyong could have been used as rental or affordable housing. Now the buildings are dilapidated. In addition, millions of taxpayer dollars have been spent in court. "There is a downside to not developing Kapyong," she said.

Sharon Braun Stone, whose backyard faces Kapyong, expressed concerns about what an urban reserve might consist of, how it could affect property values and what impact it could have on local lifestyles. A resident for 17 years, she said that more than 500 homeowners back onto the abandoned barracks. "We want to know what's going on."

With ongoing litigation, it's too soon to develop a concrete plan, although the panel pointed to the potential for both residential and economic development, and affirmed the necessity for ongoing conversation with Winnipeggers.

Hudson noted that first nations are seeking ways "to reach out to Tuxedo and get input from surrounding community, including high schools and young people," just as his great grandfather, Yellow Quill, had sought the opinions of his community before signing the original treaties.

He said that developing an urban reserve

at Kapyong provides an opportunity to heal some of the relationships that have been damaged by colonialism.

Kapyong would not be the first urban reserve in Winnipeg, but it would be the largest. Currently, Long Plain First Nation owns land close to Polo Park, a major shopping centre that is home to Yellow Quill College and a convenience store, and Peguis First Nation recently purchased the

former Motor Vehicles Branch building on Portage Avenue. Other business or office buildings throughout the city are owned by first nations and are technically considered urban reserves.

Gazan said that she viewed the Face2Face session as the beginning of many discussions addressing the potential for Kapyong. She invited the community to respond to *Maclean's Magazine's*

recent labelling of Winnipeg as the most racist city in Canada. "Maybe Kapyong could make us the most responsive," she suggested.

"Legal proceeding may determine who gets the land," said moderator David Balzer as the discussion drew to a close, "but love may determine what kind of neighbours we will be." ❧

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## GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

## 'Covenanted around Jesus Christ, not our confession of faith'

*MC Saskatchewan looks at what it means to 'remain the church of God' in the face of differences*

BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent  
SASKATOON, SASK.

**“W**e don't all know God in the same way,” Bruce Jantzen reflected at the recent Mennonite Church Saskatchewan annual delegate sessions, “but that doesn't change who God is.”

Jantzen, named moderator in January after Gerhard Luitjens resigned, said, “I don't counsel anything other than that you speak out of your understanding of who God is and who we are as part of God's family. Respond in [such a way] that we can remain the church of God.”

The sessions, held at Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon on March 13 and 14, saw significant attention focussed on the issue of same-sex marriage. Jantzen, who is pastor of Laird Mennonite Church, urged delegates to “maintain an attitude of worship” throughout the business sessions, saying, “We are here to do God's business. When we worship, we acknowledge God's worth; when we acknowledge one another, created in God's image, we worship God.”

Jantzen's words helped foster a spirit of respect, which would be reflected in the

PHOTO BY D. MICHAEL HOSTETLER



*Kirsten Hamm-Epp, area church youth minister, left, and Jerry Buhler, outgoing area church minister, prepare to serve the Lord's Supper at the Mennonite Church Saskatchewan annual delegate sessions held in Saskatoon recently.*

### /// Briefly noted

#### MC Saskatchewan bids farewell to Jerry Buhler

With appreciation and affection, participants at Mennonite Church Saskatchewan's annual delegate sessions said thank you and farewell to Jerry Buhler, who served as area church minister for nine year years. It was clear from the standing ovation he received that he made many friends during that time. An ice cream social on March 13 gave participants opportunity to thank Buhler personally and sign a farewell notebook. During the next day's session, friends encircled Buhler and his wife Kara, while others lifted hands toward them in a prayer of blessing. The Buhlers plan to move to British Columbia.

—BY DONNA SCHULZ

worship and deliberations that followed.

#### Response to same-sex wedding

Gary Peters reported that the Pastoral Leadership Commission, which he chairs, had been asked to respond to the same-sex wedding held in Osler at the end of 2014, and whether pastors Anita Retzlaff and Patrick Preheim would be disciplined for conducting the wedding.

After meeting with Retzlaff and Preheim, Peters said the commission found “no grounds for credential withdrawal [as] no pastoral misconduct had taken place.” The pastors were following the “direction set by [their] congregation over the previous 10 to 15 years.” Referring to the covenant delegates signed at the 2005 annual delegate sessions, Peters added, “It is clear we are covenanted around Jesus Christ, not our confession of faith.”

The debate surrounding this issue led Hague Mennonite Church to withdraw its membership. Area church minister Jerry Buhler cited a letter from the congregation, expressing hope that friendship and cooperation between Hague and

### /// Briefly noted

#### Decreased giving leads to budget cuts

Like her counterparts in other area churches, Ida Buhler has the unenviable task of making budget cuts. At the recent Mennonite Church Saskatchewan annual delegate sessions, the finance chair reported a \$40,000 shortfall in church donations to the area church in 2014. However, by using money held in reserve, council was able to come in \$10,000 under budget, a feat that likely won't be repeated. The approved 2015 budget will see projected church donations remain at \$260,000. The Camp Coordinating Commission will suffer a \$4,000 reduction in funding, while Rosthern Junior College will face a \$15,000 reduction. Total expenditures for 2015 are projected to be just over \$418,000.

—BY DONNA SCHULZ



MC Saskatchewan would continue even though the formal relationship has ended. Buhler offered a prayer of blessing for the Hague congregation.

Sonya Zabaleta of Hope Mennonite Fellowship, North Battleford, and Greg Redekopp of Laird Mennonite presented the first of three resolutions on the topic to the delegate body. It called for all members of MC Saskatchewan churches to vote on whether or not pastors credentialed by the area church should be allowed to conduct same-sex weddings. Results of the vote would be submitted to council by June 2015 and presented to next year's delegate sessions for a decision.

Craig Neufeld of Rosthern Mennonite said that his congregation's delegates were "troubled" by the resolution, and that voting on the matter "will cause harm and further division." Calling it "a no-win resolution," Neufeld moved that it be suppressed. A ballot vote on Neufeld's motion received the required two-thirds majority and was carried.

A second resolution by Joe Heikman and Cheryl Woelk, both of Wildwood Mennonite, Saskatoon, called on the commission to appoint an ad hoc committee that would guide a discernment process related to MC Saskatchewan congregations conducting same-sex weddings. The resolution states, "The committee will design and facilitate the process, communicate its learnings to the congregations, and prepare a recommendation for decision by delegates at the 2016 [annual delegate sessions]." The resolution, drafted by the five Wildwood delegates, would complement the Being a Faithful Church process, said Heikman,

Ric Driediger, speaking on behalf of Rosthern delegates, affirmed the call for a discernment process, but said "the emphasis must be on listening, not on coming to a decision." Driediger moved an amendment, removing the deadline from the resolution. A ballot vote on the amended resolution was carried.

A third resolution, proposed by George Epp and Pauline Roth, both of Eigenheim Mennonite, called for the matter of same-sex marriage and inclusion of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer individuals to be left to the "prayerful and sincere

discernment of each member congregation." This resolution was withdrawn following adoption of the previous resolution.

Hosted by Mount Royal, Warman and Aberdeen Mennonite churches, the sessions included worship focussed on "Walking with God, with each other, with

the stranger beyond our walls." At the end of the day, how delegates behaved inside their walls gave some a sense of hopefulness. Ben Pauls of Zoar Mennonite Church, Waldheim, said, "I hear uncertainty about the future, and yet, underlying that, the certainty that there is a future for MC Saskatchewan." ❧

### /// Briefly noted

#### Saskatchewan youth want to be in the loop

"We want a church that is for everyone, and we want to be part of making that happen." This statement from a Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization (SMYO) report to the Mennonite Church Saskatchewan annual delegate sessions appeared to be borne out by the level of engagement witnessed in members of the SMYO Committee at the March 13 and 14 meetings. In response to the MC Saskatchewan Communication Policy, Krista Loewen, associate pastor of Wildwood Mennonite, Saskatoon, and Gabby Martin, SMYO Committee member from Zoar Mennonite, Langham, charged that the policy is "not youth-friendly." SMYO, they said, would like to be kept "in the loop," and suggested that minutes from the various committees and organizations be "sent out with bullet points," in addition to the longer version that is required by the area church policy.

—BY DONNA SCHULZ

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# A loss and a disappointment

*Plum Coulee Bergthaler leaves area, national churches over the 'erosion of the authority of God's Word' and gay wedding*

BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

Manitoba Correspondent

“Any loss for me is a grief,” said Willard Metzger, executive director of Mennonite Church Canada, in response to the withdrawal of Plum Coulee Bergthaler Mennonite Church from the national church.

The congregation decided at a meeting last November to withdraw its membership from both MC Manitoba and MC Canada, but chose to wait until the new year before sending a letter informing the area and national churches of its intent.

Plum Coulee Bergthaler began in 1897 after Mennonites first moved to the Plum Coulee area between Altona and Winkler in southern Manitoba. The congregation grew out of a division from the Sommerfelder Mennonites and moved from facility to facility before purchasing the local Baptist meetinghouse in 1925. In later years, as the church became a vibrant and growing congregation, it built a new structure. Today, the church has 211 members, with 200 people regularly attending. Glen Siemens has been serving as senior pastor since 1993.

Siemens told *Canadian Mennonite* that the church “had made a commitment . . . we would not talk about this in the press. We sent them [MC Manitoba and MC Canada] a letter and they can give you the information.”

Ken Warkentin, executive director of MC Manitoba, said, “Their primary reason to disassociate or withdraw from MC Manitoba was driven by our association with MC Canada. Their larger concern is with the national church, particularly with the issue of marriage.”

According to Warkentin, the letter goes on to say, “The decision comes as a result of MC Canada’s direction and decisions of dealing with the issue of marriage. It

seems MC Canada is seeking a response to sin at the expense of the authority of God’s Word. The erosion of the authority of God’s Word is reason for our resolve to break ties with MC Canada.”

The congregation has experienced declining passion for the ministries of MC Manitoba over the last number of years, particularly the camping ministry, according to Warkentin. “Their camping ministry is rooted in Pembina Valley Bible Camp and Winkler Bible Camp, where they have close ties and staff members,” he said. “Many of their children attend these camps.”

Metzger said the letter MC Canada received from Plum Coulee refers to a disregard by MC Canada for the authority of God’s Word. “The letter mainly refers to the marriage that took place in Osler [Sask.],” he said, “but that wedding, I think, served as a confirmation that they are not represented in the values that are being

seen in the MC Canada family. I think they are seeing themselves as moving to an independent congregation. They indicated a strong connection with the local ministerial and feel quite positive about working with other congregations in Winkler. I think they have felt themselves distancing over a number of years and don’t feel represented anymore.”

The Plum Coulee Bergthaler website states: “We are a congregation with Anabaptist Mennonite roots. Our plus one hundred years of church history is a witness of Jesus’ power to break down dividing walls as we have worked through changes like language and music styles. We are a work in progress aiming to keep Jesus Christ at the centre and join him in his work.”

“I would like to see us continue to have conversations and dialogue, and acknowledge our disagreements as congregations, and yet still remain the same family of faith,” Metzger said. “I am disappointed in this case, that we are not able to have that conversation. I certainly acknowledge that the Plum Coulee congregation wants to be true to their sense of faithfulness, to their desire to serve God and their community, but it is disappointing that we are not able to do that as a larger corporate family of faith. They are a vibrant congregation with good youth and young adult participation. This feels like a loss and it is a disappointment.” ❧



*Plum Coulee Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Man., is no longer a member of either Mennonite Church Manitoba or MC Canada.*

# 'Evangelism is dangerous'

*When new people come into a church, 'the insiders might become marginalized,' Sze-Kar Wan tells MC Eastern Canada School for Ministers*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent  
WATERLOO, ONT.

**"E**vangalism is dangerous," Sze-Kar Wan said in conclusion of his three-day exegesis of the first three chapters of Galatians at the 2015 Mennonite Church Eastern Canada School for Ministers. "When you evangelize, you include new people in your group and you have to expect change," he said, noting that it's possible "the insiders might become marginalized."

Wan came to this conclusion through careful thinking about what and why Paul wrote this letter to the Gauls living in the northern part of Asia Minor that is now part of present-day Turkey.

Focused on "Relationships and the new people of God: Exploring ministry in a multilingual, multicultural context," this year's School for Ministers attracted many new Mennonite pastors as well as pastors from traditional congregations.

Workshops looked at Mennonite Central Committee's refugee work; "Things newcomers need to know about money" with



*Lori and Charlie Derksen, children of Kevin Derksen, one of the pastors of St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, dance as Menno Valley Sound performs at the 2015 MC Eastern Canada School for Ministers fun evening.*

Mennonite Foundation of Canada; and the two-session "One and many: Being the multicultural church," which gave room for pastors from traditional congregations to hear the voices of pastors from new Canadian congregations.

But it was Wan's keynote addresses on Galatians that drew intense interest, conversation and questions. His thesis was that Paul was arguing a marginal opinion throughout his ministry. The idea that non-circumcised, non-Mosaic-law-following Gentiles could be full members in the church did not win majority approval until late in the first century.

Paul spends the first chapter of Galatians arguing for his independence and importance. Then in the second chapter he makes a case for the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch having supported his view that Gentiles could become full members of this Jewish sect, focussing on the Messiah Jesus.

But Wan, supported by Tom Yoder Neufeld, his long-time friend and colleague, believes that Paul actually lost the argument in Antioch. While from our 21st-century point of view Paul looks like one of the major founders of the church, this was not true in the first century. Instead, James, the brother of Jesus, held the preeminent position, even over the Apostle Peter, and never mind the upstart Paul, Wan said.

So in chapter three of Galatians Paul continues his argument that "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, NRSV). In Christ, everyone has become "the seed of Abraham," promised to Abraham in his covenant with God.

Since this precedes circumcision or any Mosaic law, these are not necessary for anyone to be part of God's family. The scandal of the church is that already in



*Brian Bauman, MC Eastern Canada missions minister, left, and Pastor Jehu Lian of the Chin Christian Church in Kitchener, right, listen as Bernard Sejour, newly hired Ottawa catalyst, speaks during the 2015 MC Eastern Canada School for Ministers.*

Paul's lifetime Jews were being excluded in some places. Paul works with this in his Letter to the Romans in particular, arguing that it is Gentiles who have been grafted into a Jewish tree.

Wan sees James, Peter and Paul in a massive power struggle, which only dissipated after the fall of Jerusalem and Christianity became something other than a Jewish sect focussed on the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. Power and its uses came up repeatedly in Wan's presentations, leading him to once say, "No one easily gives up power."

Hence his conclusion that "evangelism is dangerous." It can lead to newcomers and old-timers in conflict over how the church is to go forward.

Far from suggesting that evangelism is a bad thing—Wan himself had what he termed a significant conversion experience and is a Chinese-American born in Hong Kong and now an Episcopal priest—he was showing how the early church itself struggled with what "in Christ" meant to insiders and newcomers, suggesting that the church needs to pay attention to these dynamics. ☚

For more photos of this event, visit [www.canadianmennonite.org/school-for-ministers](http://www.canadianmennonite.org/school-for-ministers).



*Evangelism . . . can lead to newcomers and old-timers in conflict over how the church is to go forward.*



Vicki Johnson, pastor of Pine River United Church, Ont., left, Shoua Vang from First Hmong Mennonite Church in Kitchener, and Shirley Kennel from the Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden, discuss what they learned at a seminar on leading council, committee and congregational meetings on March 7.

## Focus on why you're there

*How to lead council, committee and congregational meetings*

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent  
WATERLOO, ONT.

A quarter to a third of the time a committee or congregation spends in any meeting should be focussed on devotional content that connects with the content of the

meeting or on learning to know each other.

That was the advice of Keith Regehr, a mediator and communications trainer, to those attending a seminar on leading

council, committee and congregational meetings put on by Associates Resourcing the Church and Conrad Grebel University College on March 7.

Since he suggested that meetings go no longer than two hours, that means that anywhere from 30 to 40 minutes should be spent on prayer, devotions, lectio divina (divine reading of Scripture) or storytelling.

The purpose for such content in meetings is to get committee or council members focussing on why they are in the church and why they have chosen to serve, or to help congregants remember why they attend and why the church exists.

The seminar was full of practical principles:

- **MEETINGS ARE** places for spiritual growth.
- **MEETINGS ARE** places for discerning God's leading.
- **THE PERSON** leading has primary responsibility for how well the meeting functions.
- **THE REST** of the group shares responsibility for how the meeting functions.
- **PLANNING THE** meeting is crucial to the outcome.

Participants asked questions about how to get reticent members to speak up or how to keep some from monopolizing or bullying; what to do with confidential discussions like staff reviews; and how to keep the conversation in the meeting and not "out on the parking lot afterward."

One group asked about the use of Robert's Rules of Order. Regehr said he believes that Robert's Rules, coming as they do from an adversarial situation, can keep committees or congregations from dealing with the real issues. He also noted that it is important to ascertain whether an agenda point is "for information, to be discussed, or to be voted on" in the present meeting. Each of these requires different planning on the part of the chair, and different time allowances in the meeting.

The 20 participants included six leaders from First Hmong Mennonite Church in Kitchener, as well as pastors and lay leaders from seven other Mennonite and United Church congregations. ❧



### IMPORTANT NOTICE

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### The Canadian Mennonite team



## CAMP REFLECTION

Looking back  
with fondnessTARYN HALUZA-DELAY  
SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

**S**now camp is an event put on each year by Mennonite Church Alberta's Youth Leadership Team at Camp Valaqua. It's a weekend of snow-filled fun with thought-provoking sessions.

The best part of snow camp is hanging out with the other youth. Most people arrive only knowing their own youth group, but they all mingle and quickly become friends with people from other places.

This year, there was a big project involving straightening one guy's curly hair. There was a crowd around him and his hairstylists for quite a while on Feb. 21, which we laughed about for the rest of the weekend.

I also enjoy spending time in God's creation in such a beautiful place. At snow camp, there are plenty of opportunities to be outside. There are games at the top of the hill, broomball, and the midnight walk where we can see stars and shooting stars without interference from city light pollution.

The theme for this year's snow camp was "Faith in transit," with speaker Ryan Dueck. He shared stories from important points in his own faith journey and

things that others, mainly his children, have said and done that raised faith-related questions for him.

This year, snow camp was a different experience for me because I was part of the Youth Leadership Team, which runs all of the activities at snow camp, from get-to-know-you games on Friday night and the "punk" meal, to the cleaning challenge before everyone goes home. Being part of the team did not mean we couldn't participate and have fun. We still sang fun camp songs, enjoyed great food and conversation, and played enthusiastic games of broomball.

PHOTO BY DANIELLE KLASSEN



*Menmonite Church Alberta senior high snow camp participants enjoy games in the snow at the top of the hill at Camp Valaqua.*

Sadly this is the last snow camp for me, as I will be graduating this year, but I will always look back on it with fondness. ❧

*Taryn Haluza-Delay is a Grade 12 student who attends First Mennonite Church in Edmonton. She is a member of Mennonite Church Alberta's Youth Leadership Team.*

PHOTO BY DARIAN WIEBE-NEUFELD



*Hotdogs roast over a fire at Mennonite Church Alberta's senior snow camp.*

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## GOD AT WORK IN US

# Like mother, like daughter

*From generosity to red lipstick*

STORY AND PHOTO BY MEGHAN MAST

Mennonite Central Committee  
WINNIPEG

Gerry Loewen runs her fingers along a row of books and moves toward a clothing rack packed with sweaters and cardigans. She is explaining what sort of donations come in to the thrift shop when a customer approaches her. He holds out a business card and tells his story. She listens patiently and, once he's finished, asks if this is his first time visiting the shop. He answers yes.

"I hope you'll come back again soon," she tells him.

Gerry has managed the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) thrift shop on Selkirk Avenue in Winnipeg for nearly nine years. But her family's thrift shop roots run much deeper. Her mother, Selma Loewen, was one of four women who opened the first MCC thrift shop, in Altona, Man., in 1972.

"I still remember the shop," she says with a laugh. "It was so dingy."

The women used a curtain to cover the dressing room and sorted incoming items in what Gerry describes as a "little hovel."

That first shop, run by Linie Friesen, Susan Giesbrecht, Sara Stoesz and Selma Loewen, quickly grew into a network. Today there are more than 115 shops in

Canada and the U.S., and they contribute a significant portion of MCC's annual revenue.

Selma passed away in January at the age of 87.

Gerry describes her mom as a very spirited woman who "liked funny things and dressing up." During the last few months of her life, the family could tell how Selma was feeling by the colour of her lips. She loved red lipstick and near the end of her life put it on whenever she felt well.

"She had a very sharp mind," recalls Gerry. "She loved poetry, she loved reading. She couldn't do a lot of physical things anymore, so these things became very important to her."

Gerry remembers the moment she told her mom about her new job. After working as a nurse for 31 years, Gerry was feeling burned out, but wasn't ready to stop working altogether. So when a woman from her church who managed the Selkirk Avenue shop suggested volunteering there, Gerry jumped at the opportunity.

Her mother was pleased as well. "She was just happy I had found something I also could enjoy," Gerry says.

The Loewen family was no stranger to



*Gerry Loewen manages an MCC thrift shop in Winnipeg. She is the daughter of Selma Loewen, one of the founders of the first MCC thrift shop, in Altona, Man. That shop grew into a network of more than 115 shops in Canada and the United States.*

thrift, even before Selma opened the shop. Growing up, Gerry and her sister got toys and many of their clothes from the local Goodwill store. As teenagers, she says they foraged for lumberjack jackets and "hippy sweaters." Their parents bought them winter coats from the "seconds" piles in the warehouse district.

Sometimes the coats had too many buttonholes; other times there weren't enough. This was never a problem for Selma, who would pick up a needle and scissors to remedy the glitch. Like Gerry, she needed to keep her hands occupied.

"Those are the kinds of things she's really instilled in me," Gerry says. "[Along with] being very respectful, very kind. She was a very generous person. You have to have a certain generosity to work in a thrift store, I think."

But these aren't the only tendencies she inherited from her mother. As the interview ended and it was time for photographs, Gerry ran off to the bathroom and then emerged with her lips painted red! ❧

*For an audio clip of Gerry sharing memories of her mother, Selma Loewen, visit [mcccanada.ca/stories/mother-daughter](http://mcccanada.ca/stories/mother-daughter).*



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## ARTBEAT

# Writer engages themes of faith and death

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

B.C. Correspondent  
LANGLEY, B.C.

**F**aith and death: An evening with Rudy Wiebe” drew an interested crowd to hear the noted Canadian Mennonite author speak at Trinity Western University (TWU) on March 3.

Wiebe read from his latest novel, *Come Back*, a story in which protagonist Hal Wiens processes the death of his son, who committed suicide decades earlier. That struggle is one Wiebe knows intimately, as his own son committed suicide.

The Hal Wiens character first appeared

as a child in *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Wiebe’s groundbreaking 1962 novel. He described *Come Back* as “a book about an aging man who is remembering his life.”

Following the book reading and comments, Wiebe answered questions from the audience. One involved fact vs. fiction, and how closely this book reflects Wiebe’s own experience. He answered that he likes creating something new and more effective than facts themselves. “A fact is something that was done,” he said. “In fiction

*‘At one point I thought I might be an opera singer, but I got lured away into writing. Music is a marvellous, marvellous solace to the soul.’*  
(Author Rudy Wiebe)

[the writer is] freer.”

Another person asked what role music played in Wiebe’s faith. “At one point I thought I might be an opera singer, but I got lured away into writing,” responded Wiebe, who lives in Edmonton, where he is professor emeritus of English at the University of Alberta. “Music is a marvellous, marvellous solace to the soul.”

The lecture was sponsored by TWU’s Anabaptist-Mennonite Centre for Faith and Learning and emceed by Myron Penner, the centre’s director. ❧

## /// Briefly noted

### Grebel launches book by the late A. James Reimer

WATERLOO, ONT.—Conrad Grebel University College recently hosted a book launch for *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology: Law, Order and Civil Society* (Wipf & Stock, 2014), a collection of essays by the late A. James Reimer. Reimer, who died in 2010, was professor of religious studies and Christian theology at Grebel and the Toronto School of Theology, and was named distinguished professor emeritus upon his retirement in 2008. According to Jeremy Bergen, professor of theology at Grebel, “Jim has shaped the contemporary theological landscape, especially for Mennonites, as a teacher and as a researcher and writer.” Reimer’s thesis for this theologically derived political book focusses on the necessity to take seriously the biblical-trinitarian foundations for all Christian social ethics, but also on the importance of astute and faithful engagement by Christians in public institutional life, including the political realm.

—Conrad Grebel University College



*Pictured at the launch of *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology* are Paul G. Doerksen, associate professor of theology and Anabaptist studies at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, who edited the book, and Reimer’s widow, Margaret Loewen Reimer.*



*Rudy Wiebe shares themes from his new book, *Come Back*, with an audience at Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C.*

### Notice of the 2015 Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service Annual Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Members of Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service (CMPS) for the year ending December 31, 2014, is scheduled for April 18, 2015, 4 p.m., at Level Ground Mennonite Church, 31216 King Rd., Abbotsford, BC, V2T 6C2. CMPS is the non-profit corporation that publishes *Canadian Mennonite*.

The agenda includes receiving reports from the Board of Directors, the 2014 financial statements, and elections of new Directors. The meeting is public but voting is limited to CMPS members (individuals who donated at least \$25 in 2014 and who register in advance), and board members who represent the area and national Mennonite Church (see names and nominating bodies on page 3). To register as a member for the annual meeting, please e-mail [office@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:office@canadianmennonite.org), by April 14, noting "CMPS annual meeting" in the subject line.

The annual report and audited financial statements will also be posted at [www.canadianmennonite.org](http://www.canadianmennonite.org) after the meeting.

### Upcoming

#### Brander McDonald to address banquet

LANGLEY, B.C.—Brander McDonald, indigenous relations coordinator for Mennonite Church British Columbia, will share his music and talk about his work as the main feature of Canadian Mennonite's annual banquet to be held at Langley Mennonite Fellowship, 20997 40 Ave., Langley, B.C., on April 18 at 6 p.m. McDonald, billing himself as a Cree First Nation believer in Jesus, speaks of his two passions: "One, the passion of what it means to be a first nations cultural person and to be fully engaged as a lifelong follower of Jesus. Not the Jesus of residential schools of the past, not of government policy, but the Saviour represented in the gospels and even of Anabaptist traditions. I have a passion to share what it means to carry this cross-cultural heart for the healing of my native peoples and the church community to which I grew up in. The second passion is being a singer/songwriter who can share these same stories and lessons through song and speech." Tickets to the event are free. This is a fundraising event open to all Mennonite churches, and a call for donations will be made at the end of the night. Space is limited, so reserve your tickets early by calling the church at 604-530-0333 or e-mailing the church office at [langfell@telus.net](mailto:langfell@telus.net).

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## Nerdy fun

*Bible quizzing a longstanding tradition in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregations*

BY RACHEL BERGEN

Young Voices Co-editor

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JERAMIE RAIMBAULT



*Community Mennonite Church face off against East Zorra Mennonite Church at the 2014 Bible quizzing event.*

For about 30 years, youth from several Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregations in Ontario have looked forward to their annual Bible quizzing event. It's centred around friendly competition, memorization of minute biblical details and application of biblical principles to everyday life.

Competing in pairs until a winner is chosen, Bible quizzing teams are asked 23 questions on a particular book of the Bible.

team won last year's event, and she took home the scholarship. Cento isn't certain what her plans are after high school, but says she may use the scholarship to take classes at Grebel.

Cento says she's really looking forward to the upcoming event. It will be her fourth year and each year she really enjoys studying the Bible with the others on her team.

"We put in about three or four months of preparation," she says. "We look into the

*'We put in about three or four months of preparation. We look into the book [of the Bible] more deeply than you'd normally look at texts.'*  
(Liv Cento)

The first team to hit the buzzer and answer correctly gets the point. In the middle of the match, the teams work on two long-answer questions; after discussion among themselves, a representative from each team is elected to present the answer. The team gets points for accuracy and applicability to everyday life.

The winning team gets bragging rights, while a special contestant who demonstrates particular skill gets a \$500 scholarship to either Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg or Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont.

### **Studying, competition are lots of fun**

Liv Cento is participating in this year's quizzing tournament, to be held at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Markham, on April 11. The 17-year-old attends Hawkesville Mennonite Church, whose

book [of the Bible] more deeply than you'd normally look at texts."

Rebecca Steiner was a Bible quizzing contestant from 2005-07 when she lived in Stouffville, and she helped organize the 2009 competition. Steiner says it's a little nerdy, but her youth group always had lots of fun studying for, and competing in, the competition.

"It brought our youth group closer together," she says. "We hung out and were in an intensive manner for those months leading up to it."

Jeramie Raimbault competed as a youth, too, but is now a volunteer on the Youth Bible Quizzing Task Group. He says he sees the value of the competition firsthand. "It provides motivation for people to intensively study a book and know minute facts," he says. "It's great to meet people from other congregations to get to

know more youth from around your area. It's something that combines competitive spirit and spiritual learning, which I feel don't get combined very often."

### **Equipping participants for life**

Raimbault says the competitive spirit promotes an interest in the Bible and biblical teachings, at least for him.

"When I was competing with Hawkesville, we always had a big rivalry with Markham," he says. "It drove us to try harder, memorize more. We know we need to study the Bible, it's a great resource. But sometimes reading for the sake of reading . . . it can be a bit dry. The competition motivates us to read more, and that's a good thing."

But Bible quizzing seems to do more than just promote an interest in reading Scripture.

Steiner says she now knows Matthew, Acts and Joshua in great detail, thanks to her time participating in Bible quizzing. But it also helped her recognize her pastoral leadership skills.

"One time when I was Bible quizzing, an elderly man came up to me after I presented our long answer and asked, 'Have you ever considered being a pastor?' I think seeds were planted that pastoral leadership was something I could do," Steiner recalls.

Until recently, Steiner worked as the enrichment coordinator at Community Mennonite Church in Stouffville, where she was involved in worship planning and leadership.

Cento says her public speaking skills have improved since participating in Bible quizzing. "The whole experience is a confidence booster for leadership," she says. "You're helping the team to prepare, and everyone encouraging each other. The questions where you have to present, those are hard at first because everyone's watching and you kind of have to make up some of it on the spot. But it helps to show that I can do those kinds of things."

Cento is very excited to compete in the upcoming event, which will focus on the Gospel of John, saying her team has logged "a lot of hours" studying John. ✎



*Hawkesville Bible quizzers Liv Cento, left, Irian Fast-Sittler, Paul Cento and Ciaran Fast-Sittler discuss a team question at last year's event.*

## **Morning prayers at the Y**

*A grandson reflects on his grandfather's daily cross-cultural worship routine*

**BY JONAS CORNELSEN**

Special to Young Voices

**T**here is a natural dignity in the morning routine of a 95-year-old man living alone. Especially when the routine is based on building friendships across cultures.

At 6:42 a.m., the Langara Family YMCA may be the noisiest spot in South Vancouver. Among the squeaks of gym shoes and hiss of locker room showers, you can even catch a chorus of gospel music—in Mandarin.

Retired Mennonite pastor Erwin Cornelsen has heard the shoes and showers every day for decades. One day he heard familiar tunes in a different language echo in the hallways, so he went looking. Since then, he has sung and prayed daily with a group of Chinese Christians.

A narrow concrete room beside the

squash court becomes sanctuary each morning. Bright yellow and green floor tiles clash under the low table and plastic chairs. The door says "Youth Games Room," but the gathered faithful are mostly retired. Cornelsen is usually the oldest, and the only white person.

Friends assemble in sweatpants and T-shirts from their morning exercise. The early hour, plain walls and dim fluorescent lights don't dull them. Chatter is constant as newcomers walk in and sip jasmine tea from old church mugs. Booklets are passed out and a voice shouts, "No. 7!" Singing erupts, about half in Mandarin, half English. Gospel classics like "Blessed Assurance" are photocopied in both languages.

*(Continued on page 36)*

PHOTO BY MATT VEITH



*Jonas Cornelsen is a student at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg.*

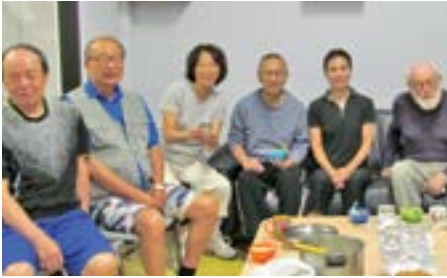
(Continued from page 35)

When the singing is over, the gathering is not. Every day someone brings a large pot of *congee* (Chinese rice porridge) and they eat breakfast after a prayer. The thick, grey liquid is ladled into multi-coloured plastic bowls, served with a white plastic spoon

Cornelsen has been living alone for almost 14 years, still in the same white house he and his family bought in 1957. Sharing warm smiles and food with friends every morning keeps him going.

After coming home, the first thing he does is sit down by the Bible on his dining

PHOTO COURTESY OF JONAS CORNELSEN



Retired pastor Erwin Cornelsen, right, meets daily with a group of Chinese Christians to sing and pray.

and brown paper towel. A typical bowl is coloured with leeks, broccoli or small bites of local fish.

The people who once invited him as a guest now call him “Pastor Erwin.” Most days, they package up the breakfast leftovers and insist he takes them home for lunch. He gratefully accepts the plastic grocery bag before going for his daily swim.

table, and then he lights a candle beside a framed picture of his beloved wife. He closes his eyes to pray once again. ✠

*Jonas Cornelsen, 21, is a student at Canadian Mennonite University. He attends Hope Mennonite Church, Winnipeg. Erwin Cornelsen is his grandfather.*

*The people who once invited him as a guest now call him ‘Pastor Erwin.’*

PHOTO COURTESY OF EMMAUS HOUSE



Emmaus House is an intentional community for university students in Winnipeg made up of 13 people.

## ‘We’re not strangers anymore’

*University students form meaningful relationships and learn about themselves at Emmaus House*

BY AARON EPP

Young Voices Co-editor  
WINNIPEG

When Davis Plett was considering moving out of his parents’ home, he wasn’t sure he was ready to be on his own. Moving into a 103-year-old house with 12 other people seemed like a good option.

“The danger of meeting new people and then having the additional risk of living with them excited me,” says Plett, 21, who studies English literature at the University of Winnipeg.

He is one of 13 people currently living in Emmaus House, an intentional community started by Rod and Susan Reynar. Inspired by their Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, the Reynars created Emmaus House with the vision of creating a place where university students can find support academically and spiritually, in lives of service, healthy

living and relationship.

The Reynars began accepting applications a year ago and the first residents moved in late last August, just in time for the start of the school year. In addition to Rod, Susan and their 18-year-old daughter, Joya, a Grade 12 student at nearby Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, 10 university students live in the community. (Anika, the Reynars’ eldest daughter, is one of them.) Some are UofW students, some are Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) students and a few study at the University of Manitoba.

Over the past six-and-a-half months, the residents have learned a lot about what it means to be a community, and they have had a lot of fun along the way.

Joey Braun had lived in a few different

PHOTO BY AARON EPP



Kelsey Wiebe, left, and Davis Plett clean up after supper one evening. Members of the Emmaus House community eat supper together daily.

community settings before moving into Emmaus House. A student at CMU, the 21-year-old had participated in the school's Outatown discipleship program and then spent a year living in CMU's residence, both experiences that required him to live in close proximity to a variety of different people.

When he applied to live in Emmaus House, he was hoping living in the community would continue to stretch him. There are a number of benefits to living in Emmaus House, he says. The first that comes to mind is eating: Members of the community have committed to eating supper together every evening. Community members work in pairs and are each responsible for preparing one meal each week and then cleaning up after it.

"It's a pretty cool experience sitting and eating with 12 other people," Braun says. "It's like a Lord's Supper every day."

After just a few minutes in the dining room at Emmaus House at supper time, one quickly sees the bond the residents have formed as they talk and laugh after a day of school and work. When asked about the best part of living in community together, they tell stories of the support they get from one another. In addition to eating together daily, the 13 spend an evening each week in worship. They have also gone on weekend retreats together, so by now they know each other well.

Anika recalls coming home during a particularly stressful week of school. Sensing her stress, one of her housemates had taped a large picture of a smiley face onto her bedroom door with the words "I found your smile" written underneath it.

Plett has a similar story. A lover of puns, he came home one day to find someone had left a sheet of paper taped to the calendar in his room. The bottom quarter of the page was divided into a dozen small strips that could be torn off, each with a different pun written on it. "These are tear-able puns" was written on the paper. "To me, that's the familial aspect of this," he says. "We're not strangers anymore."

Louisa Hofer, a 20-year-old CMU student, agrees. "When my friends come to visit and then leave, they say, 'Wow, your relationship with your roommates is so vastly different than mine,'" Hofer says. "'This looks like a home.'"

As with any home, there are challenges. The majority of them are the small things that arise when living in a house with 12 other people: sharing common spaces, making sure you clean up after yourself so as not to inconvenience anyone, and navigating the conversation if a conflict does arise.

Confronting people directly can be difficult, but is ultimately worth it, according to Anika. "I'm learning to actually talk to the person, instead of talking about it with other people," she says.

For Plett, conflicts have led to self-reflection. "You end up finding out things about yourself that you need to process," he says.

Rod adds that, for him, that sort of self-reflection is one of the key benefits of a living situation like Emmaus House. "I like living in community because it doesn't allow me to get set in my ways," he says.

One thing that has affected the community is Rod's health. Rod has arachnoiditis, a neuropathic disease caused by inflammation of membranes around the spinal cord. He lives with excruciating pain daily. That pain worsens if he pushes himself too hard at work—he holds a Ph.D. and teaches on a volunteer basis at CMU—and means that he misses time with the community because he needs to rest in bed.

"I find how he goes through his day incredibly inspiring," says Kelsey Wiebe, a 20-year-old CMU student who moved into the house from his hometown of Brooks, Alta.

Braun agrees, saying, "I found that Rod is tougher than I expected. He never complains."

Indeed, when Rod is asked what the challenges of living in the house are, he has a positive response. "The challenges haven't seemed that great," he says. "That's not what I think of right away."

Instead, he thinks about the relationships that have been formed. "Everyone in the house, I think, has connected in meaningful ways," Rod says. "For me, that's been really important."

Susan agrees. "With 13 people, it's enough that if someone's looking for something to do, there's always someone there to do it with," she says. "We're all looking out for each other." ❧

PHOTO BY AARON EPP



*Emmaus House community member Louisa Hofer, with Remy, one of two dogs that also live in the house.*

PHOTO BY MATT VEITH



*Rod and Susan Reynar are glad they have opened their home for Emmaus House.*

PHOTO BY MATT VEITH



*Emmaus House is located in Winnipeg's West Broadway neighbourhood.*

## Calendar

### British Columbia

**April 18:** Indian Residential Schools panel discussion: "Conversations about reconciliation," at Langley Mennonite Fellowship, from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**April 18-19:** Camp Squeah paddle-athon. Leaving from Hope.

**April 24-26:** Junior Youth Impact Retreat, at Camp Squeah, Hope.

**May 9:** Sto:Lo Nation Cultural Learning Day bus tour, Sto:Lo Nation, Chilliwack, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

**May 2:** MC B.C. Women's Inspirational Day, at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford.

### Saskatchewan

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

**May 8:** RJC spring choir concert, at 7 p.m.

**May 30:** RJC fundraising golf

tournament, at Valley Regional Park.

**May 31:** 70th-anniversary celebrations at Superb Mennonite Church, Kerrobert; from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, visit [www.superbmennonite.com](http://www.superbmennonite.com); to RSVP, e-mail [superb70anniversary@gmail.com](mailto:superb70anniversary@gmail.com)

### Manitoba

**April 12:** Mennonite Community Orchestra presents its spring concert at CMU's South Campus chapel, at 3 p.m. Program includes Stravinsky's "Pulcinella Suite," Mozart's "Exultate Jubilate," and Dvorak's "Symphony No. 6."

**April 18:** Rescheduled MCC Manitoba 50th-anniversary benefit concert, at Knox United Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m. Keynote speaker: former prime minister Joe Clark. Music by Faith and Life Men's and Women's choirs, the University of Manitoba Women's Chorus and the Buffalo Gals Drum Group. For more information or to reserve tickets, visit [mccmanitoba.ca/50](http://mccmanitoba.ca/50) or call 204-261-6381.

**April 19:** 50th anniversary celebration

of Springfield Heights Nursery School, at Springfield Heights Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 3 p.m. The celebration includes a program followed by refreshments and a time to reminisce.

**April 25:** CMU's spring concert, at the Loewen Athletic Centre, at 7:30 p.m.

**April 30-May 2:** Westgate Mennonite Collegiate senior-high students perform their annual musical. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

**May 2,3:** Faith and Life Male Choir and Women's Chorus spring concerts; (2) at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m.; (3) at Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, at 3 p.m.

**May 5:** Westgate Mennonite Collegiate bursary banquet. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

**May 13:** Westgate Mennonite Collegiate work day. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

**May 22-24:** SpringFest, MCC Manitoba's annual quilt show, plant sale, walkathon and barbecue, in Winnipeg. For more information, visit [mccmanitoba.ca/events](http://mccmanitoba.ca/events).

**May 24:** MCC Manitoba's fundraising

lunch at Fort Garry Mennonite Brethren Church, Winnipeg, from noon to 2:30 p.m. Come-and-go faspastyle meal.

**May 27:** Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Grade 7 to 9 spring concert at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

**May 28:** Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Grade 10 to 12 spring concert at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

**June 9:** CMU President's Golf Classic at Kingswood Golf and Country Club, La Salle.

### Ontario

**Until April 30:** David L. Hunsberger photo exhibit, "Taking community from the farm to the world," at the Grebel Gallery and MAO Gallery at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo.

**April 10-11:** The Engaged Workshop, a marriage preparation course focussing on communication, is

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being held at Maple View Mennonite Church in Wellesley for engaged or newly married couples. For more information, e-mail [denise\\_bender@yahoo.com](mailto:denise_bender@yahoo.com).

**April 10-11:** Oct. 24-25: "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. 4: "Luke: All that the prophets have declared." For more information, e-mail [miriam@willowgrove.ca](mailto:miriam@willowgrove.ca).

**April 10-12:** Mentor and mentee retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp, Sauble Beach. For more information, call 519-422-3200 or visit [www.slmcc.ca/retreats](http://www.slmcc.ca/retreats).

**April 14:** Mennonite Savings and Credit Union's 51st annual general meeting, at Creekside Church, Waterloo; registration at 6:30 p.m., followed by meeting at 7.

**April 17:** Menno Youth Singers coffee house fundraiser, at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Waterloo, at 7 p.m.

**April 18:** Toronto Mennonite Festival/MCC Relief Sale at Black Creek volunteer appreciation breakfast and annual general meeting, at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Markham, at 9:30 a.m.

**April 20:** New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale annual promotion dinner, at Bingemans in Kitchener, at 6:30 p.m. Guest Speaker: Issa Sadi Embombolo, founder of MCC's Peace Clubs in Zambia. Tickets available from the MCC Ontario office by phone at 519-745-8458.

**April 22-23:** MCC Ontario comforter knotting event at Elmira Produce Auction. Comforters made will be shipped to the Middle East in June to respond to the ongoing crisis in Syria. To volunteer, call Keith and Diane Snyder at 519-669-4084. To donate completed tops, call Wendy Cotter at 519-745-8458 x248.

**April 26:** Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, hosts a "Gospel Echoes" concert featuring the Gospel Echoes Cross Connection Team, at 7:30 p.m. Besides the music, there will be a multimedia presentation of the group's prison ministry and inmate testimonies. For more information, call 519-634-8311.

**April 27,28:** Spring seniors retreat at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. Speaker and song leader: Mark Diller Harder. Theme: "Singing our faith: Heart songs and hymnals." Same program each day. For more information and registration forms, e-mail [info@hiddenacres.ca](mailto:info@hiddenacres.ca) or visit [www.hiddenacres.ca](http://www.hiddenacres.ca).

**May 2:** Theatre of the Beat performs "Bicycle Built for Two," at Valleyview Mennonite Church, London, at 7 p.m. For more information, visit [www.valleyviewmc.ca](http://www.valleyviewmc.ca)

**May 2,3:** Soli Deo Gloria Singers present their spring concert, "Foretaste of Glory: (2) UMEI, at 7:30 p.m.; (3) Leamington United Mennonite Church, at 3 p.m. For more information, call 519-326-7448.

**May 3:** Inter-Mennonite Children's Choir presents "Songs of the Psalms" at Breslau Mennonite Church, at 3 p.m. Tickets available at the door.

**May 3:** Pax Christi Chorale presents Sir Hubert Parry's oratorio "Judith" with orchestra and soloists, at Koerner Hall, Toronto, at 3 p.m. Pre-concert chat with Parry scholar Jeremy Dibble of Durham University, England. For more information or tickets, visit [www.paxchristichorale.org/judith](http://www.paxchristichorale.org/judith).

**May 7,20:** 18th annual Low German Networking Conference; (7) at Bradley Street Church of God, Aylmer; (20) at Meadow Brook Church, Leamington. For more information, e-mail Lily Hiebert Rempel at [lilyhr@mennonitecon.ca](mailto:lilyhr@mennonitecon.ca).

**May 9:** Menno Singers present "Songs for Spring" at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m.

**June 3:** Retired ministers and spouses retreat at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Palmer Becker will share about his recent ministry in Israel and South America. Pre-registration required. Participants are to bring their own lunch.

**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](mailto:calendar@canadianmennonite.org). For more Calendar listings online, visit [canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar](http://canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar).**



## Classifieds

### Travel

**Visit Europe the Mennonite Way!** Multiple Hotel Tours focussing on Mennonite-Anabaptist history in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Poland and Ukraine. Organized by Mennonite Heritage Tours, [www.mennoniteheritagetours.eu](http://www.mennoniteheritagetours.eu)

### Employment Opportunities

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) is seeking a Financial Manager to oversee the financial operations of the Church. The position begins in June 2015 and will be a .5 FTE.

#### Responsibilities:

The person will be responsible for the overall management of the financial affairs of MCEC including the following:

- Supervise the bookkeeping function – ensuring that all accounting transactions are properly recorded, and balances are reconciled.
- Supporting the Leadership Team in development of operational and capital budgets.
- Management of investments.
- Ensuring adherence to accounting standards and requirements – including those specific to not-for-profit / charitable organizations and Canada Revenue Agency.
- Preparation and presentation of Financial Statements for Management and Council reporting.
- Liaison with the auditors.
- Analysis as required to support the MCEC Leadership Team and Councils.
- Manage and optimize the computerized accounting system.

#### Qualifications:

- A university degree, with training in accounting. A professional designation is preferred.
- Several years of accounting experience, ideally with some of it in the not-for-profit sector.
- Experience in Canada Revenue Agency reporting for payroll and charitable returns.
- High degree of competency in accounting software and Microsoft Office (Excel, Word).
- A passion and commitment to faith, the Church and its ministry.

Resumes are due by April 15th, 2015. Please forward to:

Brent Charette, Church Engagement Minister  
Phone: 226-476-2500 or 855-476-2500 Ext. 709  
[bcharette@mcec.ca](mailto:bcharette@mcec.ca), [www.mcec.ca](http://www.mcec.ca)

### Ad Information

Contact

D. Michael Hostetler  
1-800-378-2524 x.224  
[advert@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:advert@canadianmennonite.org)

PHOTO BY ELO WIDEMAN



*PHOTO LEFT: At the end of January, Hawkesville Mennonite Church, Ont., celebrated with member Leah Freeman as she completed knotting her 1,000th comforter for Mennonite Central Committee. Freeman began knotting comforters in her home after she retired from Red Cross Homemaking. In addition to knotting two comforters a week, she cut many fabric blocks and designed comforter top kits for women at church to sew together. She will be celebrating her 89th birthday this year.*

## God at work with paint and fabric Snapshots

*PHOTO BOTTOM: 'Along the road to freedom: Mennonite women of courage and faith,' an exhibition of 23 paintings by Winnipeg artist Ray Dirks, was featured at St. Catharines United Mennonite Church, Ont., from May 1 to 8. Pictured are members of the Neufeld family from the Niagara Region with the painting featuring Maria Friesen Neufeld. The exhibit closed with a local book launch of *In Search of Promised Lands: A Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario* by Sam Steiner.*

PHOTO BY RANDY KLAASSEN / TEXT BY MARIA H. KLASSEN

