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EDITORIAL

MWC: a respite in a troubled world

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

The Anabaptist/Mennonite worldwide communion has come a long way since the first Mennonite World Conference some 90 years ago.

Organized by Christian Neff, a German Mennonite pastor, only 100 persons attended that first gathering in 1925 in Basel, Switzerland. Estimates of the worldwide communion numbered 516,300, according to *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Most of the participants were from Europe.

This year, at the 15th gathering in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, some 6,000 to 8,000 are expected to attend from 83 different countries representing 1.7 million baptized believers, including those from Brethren in Christ churches. That communion has a majority of non-white persons with some 66 percent being African, Asian or Latin American. The general secretary is César García, from Colombia, after a long line of white North American/European leaders.

The world scene in 1925 was vastly different from 2015, too. Sandwiched between two world wars, the cultural landscape stands in sharp contrast to that of today's, albeit no less troubled. The primary concern in those early days was to "determine whether anything could be done for suffering brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union," according to an historical account written by John A. Lapp, on the

occasion of the 75th anniversary of MWC.

Today, the actors might have changed but the stage set is pretty much the same.



Political unrest, except in North America, still persists in much of the world, with extreme violence still the tool of oppression by revolutionaries wanting to conquer hearts, minds and territory.

Hence, many wanting to attend MWC from these war-torn countries are having difficulties getting visa clearance.

Still conscious of our place in a troubled world, the planners for this year's event thought it best, however, to focus on something that will rise above the travails of our time, with the theme "Walking with God," an emphasis on the "Christian walk as a journey; we have not reached our goal." This seems in the best tradition of the event, especially since a turning point in 1972, according to Lapp, which he describes as the "most controversial conference held in Curitiba, Brazil."

Not only was that the first MWC Assembly held outside of Europe and North America, it also, again, recalled Lapp, found itself in political struggles in America, especially with the civil rights movement, Vietnam war protests and heightened concerns over authoritarian and repressive governments in eastern Europe and Latin America, especially in Brazil where they were meeting.

"Times have changed," C.J. Dyck said

then. "One-third of the Mennonites in the world today are nonwhite. . . . If MWC is to continue as a useful instrument in the world brotherhood it must be more than an ethnic gathering to celebrate a great past. It must be a part of the mission we are being called to in the world, not just white western Mennonites. . . . Unless MWC can become an integral part of what we want to be and do in the world, it cannot have a real future."

That set MWC on a different path, focusing more on how we express and practice our faith together, in all national/cultural settings. It has come to symbolize the lofty words of John in Rev. 5:9 describing the final gathering of "persons of every tribe and language and people and nation."

To that end, *Canadian Mennonite* has asked five different writers if they would lead up to the July event with their thoughts on different aspects of the the New Testament call to faithfulness in a new order. **Palmer Becker**, a Mennonite Church Canada Witness worker taking the Anabaptist story to churches in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, is the first writer of the series in this issue (page 4). Also see Will Braun's Viewpoint on p. 11.

Andrew Suderman, another MC Canada Witness worker, will focus on reconciliation in South Africa; **Mary Schertz**, professor of New Testament at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, will address the value of educating our leadership in the Anabaptist faith tenets; **Arli Klassen**, chief development officer for MWC with worldwide service experience, writes on "It Takes a (Global) Village," and **Brian Quan**, a new Canadian pastor from Toronto, Ontario, approaches the subject from the "ask and it will be given" promise of Jesus in Matt 7:7.

ABOUT THE COVER:

Siaka Coulibaly was able to increase his harvest of sweet potatoes, thanks to the generosity of a Canadian donor and micro-credit from Mennonite Church Canada. See story on page 19.

PHOTO: SIAKA TRAORÉ

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ARNIE FRIESEN



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Mennonite
Christians
are

unique

This is the first in a five-part series leading up to the Mennonite World Conference assembly in Harrisburg, Pa.

BY PALMER BECKER

Just as there are Lutheran, Baptist and Anglican Christians, so there are Mennonite Christians. The name “Mennonite” is most appropriately used as an adjective rather than a noun. We are first of all Christians and secondarily a certain kind of Christian. Mennonite Christians hold many beliefs in common with other believers. For instance we believe in a personal three-in-one God, who is both holy and gracious, in salvation by grace through repentance and faith, in the humanity and divinity of Jesus, in the inspiration and authority of Scripture, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the church as the body of Christ. But we often hold these convictions somewhat differently from other Christians.

In our quest for unity with other believers, we often downplay our unique differences and highlight our similarities. This is as it should be, but it can also muffle the unique contributions and strengths we have to offer. For this reason, as we gather together at the end of July as a global Anabaptist community of faith, I want to focus on three core values that I believe can help us find unity. These values are rooted in the Sermon on the Mount and have been central since the beginning of the Christian era. They became prominent during the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century, and, in more recent times, have been rediscovered as the basic fundamentals of our movement.

Core Value # 1: Jesus Is the centre of our faith

Of course, all Christians would claim this as a core value, but Mennonite Christians have applied this conviction in three

PHOTO COURTESY OF PALMER BECKER



Palmer Becker and J.T. Masih (centre) in a teaching mission in India.

specific ways. First, rather than seeing Jesus primarily as a miracle worker, a supreme teacher, one who prompts special spiritual experiences, or one who forgives our sins, we have traditionally viewed Jesus as one to be followed in daily life. We believe Christianity is discipleship made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Second, while some Christians take Scripture literally and give equal authority to both the Old and New Testaments, and while others interpret Scripture according to dispensations of time or the future of Israel, we have traditionally seen Jesus as the fullest revelation of God and God's will. We therefore interpret Scripture from an ethical Christo-centric point of view. Jesus, rather than a particular passage of Scripture, is our final authority.

Third, while many Christians place the emphasis on Jesus as their Savior from sins and eternal punishment, we have traditionally placed the emphasis on Jesus being Lord of our lives and

livelihood. We follow this value even to the point of obeying Jesus instead of government authorities when there is a conflict, and we give special attention to the six statements of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount that begin with, "You have heard it said, but I say unto you."

Core Value # 2: Community Is the Center of Our Lives

Again, all Christians would agree this is a core value of their lives—that a sense of community is central to their family life and their understanding of the church. However, Mennonite Christians have three unique perspectives to contribute to the discussion.

First, while all Christians believe forgiveness is a key aspect of the Christian faith, most have focused on vertical forgiveness between God and human beings. While vertical forgiveness is essential for salvation, Mennonite Christians have emphasized the need for horizontal forgiveness between human beings as being essential for community. In the Sermon

on the Mount, Jesus says, "If when you are offering your gift at the altar, you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:25). Communion services become a time to celebrate community—community that has come about as a result of its members being forgiven by God and those who are participating in the service.

Second, while all Christians want to know and do the will of God, they differ in how that is best accomplished. Some Christians rely on a person of authority or a pastor to tell them what to think or do, while others believe individual, private Bible study and prayer will allow them to mystically receive guidance from God. As Mennonite Christians, we have traditionally committed ourselves, both individually and collectively, to searching for truth and guidance in community. To emphasize this, when newcomers become members, we ask them, "Are you willing to

give and receive counsel?"

Third, while all Christians look to the church and its programs for fellowship and social interaction, they differ on how or where this can best happen. Out of necessity, due to persecution, the early church and early Mennonite Christians met in homes, caves, and secret places in small groups. Some still see small groups of twelve or less to be the primary unit of the church. While worship in large groups is important, many Mennonite Christians continue to find that mutual care, Bible study, and joyful fellowship can be best realized in small groups where members interact with each other face to face. A Spirit-filled group may be the closest we will come to the kingdom of God of which Jesus speaks in the Sermon on the Mount.

Core Value # 3: Reconciliation Is the Center of our Work

While some Christians believe evangelism is central to what Christians and the church should be doing, others give emphasis to various kinds of peacemaking efforts. Mennonite Christians have increasingly merged these two aspects of ministry by emphasizing reconciliation as the centre of our work. We take seriously the apostle Paul's understanding that new and harmonious life has come to us "from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). This ministry of reconciliation is threefold.

First, it involves reconciling individuals who are estranged from God. Some Christians adhere to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament as their means of reconciliation with God, while others emphasize being justified by faith. In a somewhat different way, Mennonite Christians have emphasized the transformation of thought and life that occurs when people turn from ungodly ways and loyalties, when they open themselves to the Holy Spirit, and when they commit themselves to following Jesus in everyday life. Menno Simons, from whom we get our name, spoke often of salvation as a "new birth" or new start in life.

A second dimension of our reconciling

work includes bringing conflicted people into harmonious relationship with each other. Some Christians, including too many Mennonite Christians, do little to reconcile tensions caused by offensive attitudes, words, or actions. They hope that time and acts of kindness will heal the hurts. Discipline of erring members is almost non-existent. While we as Mennonite Christians have had more than our share of conflicts and division, we have a long-term commitment to following "the Rule of Christ," in which conflicts are to be resolved according to the guidelines given by Jesus in Matthew 18. Individuals who have offended, or who have been offended, are to go directly to each other to resolve the conflicts. They are to ask for assistance from others and the church when reconciliation does not readily take place.

Finally, the work of reconciliation also includes helping conflicted groups and even nations to live with each other in just and supportive ways. While many in secular society seem to believe that conflicts can be settled through redemptive violence, Mennonite Christians take quite literally the instructions of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount that we are to "love our enemies and pray for those who

persecute us" (Matthew 5:44). We are coming to understand restorative justice as the means of resolving the conflicts that confront and surround us.

As we approach our coming together as a global Anabaptist community of faith, what is it that will hold us together? I believe that at least in part, it will be our core values of Jesus, community, and reconciliation, which are central to our faith, our lives, and our work. ❧

Palmer Becker of Kitchener, Ont., has spent a lifetime serving the church as a pastor; church planter; missionary; conference executive, author and educator. Becker has travelled extensively on teaching assignments to various international locations.



Article commissioned by Canadian Mennonite
in preparation for the July 21-26
Mennonite World Conference Assembly
To register: mwc-cmm.org/pa2015

/// For discussion

1. Do we tend to use the word "Mennonite" more as a noun or as an adjective? What are the implications of using "Mennonite" as an adjective to describe nouns other than "Christian," such as "Mennonite furniture" or "Mennonite writing"? Does "Mennonite" mean the same thing in other parts of the world as it does in North America?
2. Palmer Becker suggests that sometimes we downplay the differences between Mennonites and other Christians. Do you agree? How much will the gathering of Mennonite World Conference in Pennsylvania in July help to strengthen a sense of Mennonite identity?
3. How thoroughly does your congregation teach Becker's three core values? Do you agree that these are the basic fundamentals for all Mennonites? What aspects of these core values would you like to see enhanced in your congregation?
4. Becker says that small groups of believers are important for "mutual care, Bible study and joyful fellowship." What has been your experience of small groups? Is a strong sense of community possible without close interaction? What does it mean to "give and receive counsel"?

—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 300 words or less and address issues rather than individuals. We do not countenance rancour or animosity. Personal attacks are inappropriate and will not see the light of print. Please send letters to be considered for publication to letters@canadianmennonite.org or by postal mail or fax, marked “Attn: Readers Write” (our address is on page 3). Letters should include the author’s contact information and mailing address. Letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Preference will be given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

✉ History of Niagara Township Credit Union clarified by a founder’s son

RE: “‘MENNONITE’ NAME should stay” letter, March 30, page 10.

Albert Isaac’s comments about the Niagara Township Credit Union may confuse readers.

In 1943, my father A. P. Regier convened a group in Niagara Township to explore the creation of a local credit union after attending a workshop about credit unions at what is now the University of Guelph, where he connected with leaders of the Ontario Credit Union League.

A number of men who came to that meeting convened by Dad decided to organize a community-oriented credit union unrelated to any particular church denomination, labour union or large corporation. There was a Canadian Jew, a Canadian Englishman, two Russian Mennonite businessmen and several Russian Mennonite farmers who comprised the first official committee. Dad was secretary, bookkeeper,

FROM OUR LEADERS

We’re in this together

HILDA HILDEBRAND

When I was called to serve on the Mennonite Church Canada General Board in 2006, church participation and financial giving were in slow decline. The looming threat of cutbacks further drained life from the overall system. In addition, signs of theological challenge were surfacing around matters of sexuality. These and other factors led to the General Board’s desire for our national church family to become more richly engaged in biblically grounded, communal discernment on matters important to the church.



At the same time, area and national church leaders began meeting to share mutual concerns about the long-term viability of existing ministries. Within a short time span, two task forces were formed: Being a Faithful Church (BFC), 2009-16, and Future Directions, 2012-16.

In a society where faster is better, pressing the pause button to tune into

God’s presence isn’t easy. Navigating the path of discernment can be both vulnerable and exhilarating. For some, change threatens to tear down dearly held traditions. For others, it offers the possibility for renewal. Either way, we are uncomfortable sitting with uncertainty for a prolonged period.

But in the midst of that uncertainty, we have the clear navigational markers of our biblically based vision statement to guide us. It responds to God’s intentions for the church to be a sign, instrument, promise and foretaste of the coming kingdom of God. Through it, we affirm that we are led by “God, who calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.”

Scanning the 21st-century Canadian landscape, we are blessed by ethnically and culturally diverse congregational cells. Although language, history, worship styles, music, politics and even

theology may reveal differing expressions among us, we are held together by the oneness of Christ. Empowered by a diversity of spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit—received for the common good (1 Corinthians 12)—we can be attentive to areas where God is at work. When our context or understanding shifts, when programs and structures lose their vitality, we humbly seek courage to unclench our fingers and release them. This is an exciting transitional season in the life of the church, one that longs to engage everyone’s spiritual gifts.

The BFC6 document begins: “The calling of the church is to seek to understand the desires of God for our times and share this good news.” Both the Future Directions and BFC task forces have sought to engage our collective energy in this calling. As we anticipate the work of these task forces drawing to a close in 2016, it is deeply gratifying to see area church gatherings, congregations, small groups and individuals prayerfully wrestle with the challenging questions of our day. Trusting in the Holy Spirit’s guidance, we continue the journey together, seeking to be a faithful people.

Hilda Hildebrand is moderator of MC Canada’s General Board.

manager and teller of that Niagara Township Credit Union in the first few years.

This credit union was successful and other small credit unions began asking to join with it. Eventually the Ontario Hydro Workers Credit Union and the Niagara Credit Union joined together to create Meridian Savings and Credit Union.

HENRY REGIER, ELMIRA, ONT.

✉ Bible helps Christians focus 'in our new age'

WHAT IS OUR focus as we continue along the Anabaptist Way in our new age? (Galatians 6:14)

Is Jesus still the only way to the Father, to the kingdom of God, to eternal life in heaven? (John 14:6)

Is there any other way, any other name by which we

FAMILY TIES

Heaven on earth, wonders without end

MELISSA MILLER

“There’s a gift for you in my office,” my husband announced cheerily. “What?!?” I exclaimed, puzzled at such a development. He repeated the news and added, “It’s a dress to wear to the wedding.” “What?” I asked again. Now I was even more surprised, though a little, curious pleasure stirred inside me.

I had been looking forward to his student’s wedding since we received the invitation. She and her fiancé are Nigerian-Canadian, and I imagined the event would be atypical. The invitation itself promised such novelty. Included with the standard information, there was a sketch of a couple in traditional African dress. There was a colour of the day: gold. And a wedding theme, “heaven on earth, wonders without end,” which I considered. It’s true, after nearly forty years of marriage, I could say that sometimes marriage affords glimpses of heaven on earth and wonders without end. Sometimes. Other days, not so much. Yet, I smiled at their young and hopeful ideals.

Back to the dress; my husband offered an explanation. He had received a fancy Nigerian robe from a colleague at the university. When he showed it to the bride and asked if it was appropriate

wedding wear, she excitedly said yes, and then insisted that I need clothing to match, which she would provide. She asked about my size. “Medium,” my husband answered. “I told her you were medium.” That’s probably a safe bet for lots of husbands, I thought, amused.

Later that day, I received the gift. The dress was sewn from two pieces of dazzling black net fabric, embroidered with large gold and white flowers. Subtle multi-colored sequins shimmered in the light. The bottom (*iro*) was a versatile rectangular wrap; the top (*buba*) had generous proportions. Given its transparency, a significant under-layer was required. Fortunately, I had exactly the sort of long sleeveless black dress to complete the outfit. The dress was infused with the most pleasing scent, perhaps that of the

The service was held outdoors (information not included on the invitation), under a hot prairie sun with a blustery wind. The service began 45 minutes after scheduled. The pastor instructed the young couple to build a marriage of faithfulness, commitment and joy. Sacred promises were made. Many, many prayers were raised. We sang and some of us ululated. Often the congregation was invited into lively and enthusiastic response.

The reception included an extended bridal processional. The bridal couple, accompanied by a dozen women with gold and blue head wraps, slowly and exuberantly made their way into the hall. The bride herself, the central dancer, attended her new husband with joy and strength. (One move that she repeated many times involved lowering her straight-backed body while swiveling her hips, then gracefully rising again, all the more impressive because she was in 4” heels.) All in all, it was a delightful experience.

Such are the gifts of cross-cultural interactions. One never knows what the surprises might be, or the learning. When Jesus sent out the disciples to share his good news (Luke 10), he twice instructed them to eat and drink the



One never knows the surprises or learning that come with cross-cultural interactions.

seamstress’ perfume? I felt honoured to receive such a gift.

The wedding day arrived and we robed ourselves in our striking black and gold garments. I carried my curiosity with me: what would be the same as other weddings; what would be different? All in all, the event was a lovely merging of African and North American traditions.

provisions offered by those they met. In short, we are to be gracious in receiving the gifts of others. Maybe that includes the occasional dress for a wedding!

Melissa Miller (familyties@mymts.net) has a passion for helping people develop healthy, vibrant relationships with God, self and others.

must be saved? (Acts 4:12)

Is our central theme still Jesus's blood which cleanses us from all sin? Is all of scripture still true, inspired by our one and only all-powerful God? (II Timothy 3:16)

What is "the way" through our present sexual revolution? (Acts 15:20)

What does Jesus mean in the Great Commission when he commands us to make disciples, baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and to teach obedience to all that He has commanded

us? (Matthew 28:18-20)

In response, let's refer to what Menno Simons says in his writings, as edited by J.C. Wenger in his book *A Lay Guide to Romans*: "All who believe on [Jesus] have through him received grace, mercy, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life . . . But the abominable, shameful sins and offences, such as adultery, fornication, hatred, envy, drunkenness, pomp, splendour, cursing, swearing, gambling, desire of filthy lucre, abuse of the ordinances of Christ, and lying and fraud, I verily

GOD, MONEY AND ME

A severe case of 'generosi-phobia'

BY ARNIE FRIESEN

On a sunny lunch break while attending high school, I went for my customary walk into town. A classmate drove up in his shiny two-door coupe and offered a ride. Because he had already offered rides to other students, I soon found myself in the back seat beneath a pile of humanity. I panicked. I was overcome with a massive case of claustrophobia. I pinched the unlucky guy sprawled on my lap and demanded to be released from my torment. I still remember the sense of relief when the car came to a halt and I escaped to freedom.

The car and its driver seemed quite reliable. I was not in any real danger. But in that moment and overtaken with fear, my mind disconnected from what I knew to be true.



Many of us experience the same detachment from reality when it comes to practicing generosity. We know we are invited to give proportionately of what God has entrusted to us, but we are completely paralyzed by fear in acting on our belief. We have a severe case of "generosi-phobia."

Authors Smith and Davidson, in *The Paradox of Generosity*, conclude: "Living with a perspective of scarcity rather than abundance—that is, from a place of

fear—is stressful and inevitably diminishes people's well-being."

What fears keep us from being generous with our money? Let's label them.

- We are afraid to give sacrificially thinking we will run short for our own needs.
- We have set the bar high for our lifestyle and generosity does not support this notion.
- We are afraid that what we do give will be misused and therefore no gift is better.
- We are led to believe that we never have enough for retirement.
- We may lose our job tomorrow and be left in hopeless poverty.
- We cannot part with our hard-earned money because it gives us a sense of security.
- We won't be able to keep up with the lifestyle expectations of our friends and neighbours.
- We must provide for our children even well into their adulthood.
- When given the option to part with our money we think we will lose our source of happiness.
- We are afraid that God is not really trustworthy, that we have to help God out by storing more.

Are our fears realistic? Perhaps not. Just like my claustrophobic episode in the back of a hot car, our fear that we won't have enough may be completely

out of touch with reality. According to recent UN research, if we have \$500,000 in assets we are in the top one percentile of wealthy adults in the world. Maybe we need a reality check.

We believe the Apostle Paul's admonition to the Philippians (4:19) that "*my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus (NIV)*," but our response often contradicts this belief. We worry, which leads us to save and stash away.

Jesus mentions "worry" six times in Matthew 6:25-34 when he talks about God feeding the birds and clothing the flowers. He anticipates our struggle to really trust God with the most basic needs of life.

Giving is an expression of our fearlessness. By being generous, we are acknowledging that God is the provider. If we cannot rely on God to look after our needs, the idea of giving is completely irrational. As a result, our mind conjures up the worst-case scenarios so we continue in our tight-fisted ways. What we should really fear is our inability to trust God.

"By giving we receive and by grasping we lose" (Smith and Davidson). Begin by thinking about how much you possess, rather than how much you don't have. Start small and see how good it feels to give. Let us help you discover that generosity doesn't have to be scary.

Arnie Friesen is a stewardship consultant at Mennonite Foundation of Canada, serving generous people in British Columbia. For more information on generosity, stewardship education, and estate and charitable gift planning, contact your nearest MFC office or visit MennoFoundation.ca.

detest from the bottom of my heart. . . . If you are not converted to a better and a Christian mind . . . if you do not repent and become like innocent, simple children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . [Those who are in Christ] fight daily with their weak flesh in the Spirit and in faith.”

Help us, Holy Spirit, to honour your Word.
KEN DOELL, ALTONA, MAN.

✉ ‘Healing the wounded city’ speaks to experience

Thank you very much for the article “Healing the wounded city,” March 30 issue, page 4. Having been on welfare in this country, I know exactly what Derek Cook is talking about when he says the real problem is broken relationships.

In a way, I was fortunate that I had no debts. As I was growing up as a Tamil in Sri Lanka, my parents lived within their means, which was a good formation. When I hit hard times, thankfully I had good friends both in the church and, I must say, even in my local pub.

All this begs many questions, as in my present situation as a senior citizen I am arguably affluent compared to many in the city of Montreal.

BIMAL THAMBYAH, MONTREAL, QUE.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Bergen—Madelyn Lilly (b. April 20, 2015), to Mark and Julie Bergen, Bethany Mennonite, Virgil, Ont.

Dueck Manicom—Erik David (b. April 26, 2015), to Adam and Kristina Dueck Manicom, Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Mugosa—Gabriella (b. April 9, 2015), to Sylvie Mukabaha and Giscard Mugosa, Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Overton—Cecilia May Malone, (b. May 5, 2015), to Christopher and Sarah Overton, Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Marriages

Albrecht/Jantzi—Melissa Albrecht and Aaron Jantzi at Maple View Mennonite, Wellesley, Ont., May 9, 2015.

Fehr/Griffin—Jake Fehr and Karla Griffin at Faith Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont., May 9, 2015.

Deaths

Ashley—Cecil, 84 (b. Dec. 30, 1930; d. April 24, 2015), Erb Street Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Dyck—John, 92 (b. April 17, 1923; d. April 22, 2015), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Ens—Anni (nee Niebuhr), 92 (Feb. 8, 1923; d. April 24, 2015),

✉ Cutting did happen with government CoSA funding

A further clarification is necessary to the one from the office of Stephen Blaney, minister responsible for Correctional Services of Canada, that said the government has not cut funds to Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) (“Clarification” April 27 issue, page 11).

There were two streams of funding from the Correctional Services of Canada to the various CoSA sites across Canada. The one referred to by Blaney’s office from the National Crime Prevention Centre was a five-year project and all sites knew that would end September 2015. His office is correct on this point.

There was another stream of funding for CoSA sites across Canada provided through the Chaplaincy Division of CSC, which was in place long before the five-year project and continued during the project period. CSC through the Chaplaincy Division provided approximately \$600,000 annually. This funding to all sites except Toronto/Kitchener was ended March 31, 2015. This is the funding that actually is a cut.

What this means is that no funding is received from the Canadian Government for any CoSA services anywhere in Canada (except Kitchener/Toronto).

OTTO DRIEDGER, CHAIR, CoSA SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN BOARD, REGINA SASK.

/// Correction

Catherine Gitzel, a pastor at The Gathering Church in Kitchener, also shared her faith story at the MCEC annual church gathering on April 24 (May 11, page 16). Chris and Rachel Brnjas attend The Gathering Church in Kitchener. *Canadian Mennonite* regrets these omissions.

Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Friesen—Wilmer, 83 (b. Jan. 17, 1932; d. April 17, 2015), Tiefengrund Rosenort Mennonite, Laird, Sask.

Gimbel—Ken, 87 (b. July 24, 1927; d. April 28, 2015), Tavistock Mennonite, Ont.

Huebert—Rudolf Henry (Rudy), 84 (b. March 28, 1931; d. April 22, 2015), Toronto United Mennonite.

Jantzi—Laverne, 84 (b. June 27, 1930; d. May 1, 2015), Maple View Mennonite, Wellesley, Ont.

Martin—Nelson, 81 (b. July 30, 1933; d. May 5, 2015) St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont.

Patkau—Robyn Jacob, 30 (b. May 8, 1984; d. March 27, 2015), Hanley Mennonite, Sask.

Peters—Jacob Bernhard, 82 (b. May 1, 1933; d. May 6, 2015), Morden Mennonite, Man.

VIEWPOINT

Interdependency at the heart of MWC vision

WILL BRAUN
SENIOR WRITER

One minute César García is talking with awe about a postmodern work of art in a thriving Amsterdam Mennonite church, and the next he's speaking with similar awe about a Mennonite service in rural Malawi where the congregation has little more than a tree to meet under, a make-shift drum and the joy of the Lord.

García, 43, is into his fourth year as general secretary of Mennonite World Conference (MWC). He has a unique and deeply thoughtful grasp of the unfathomably diverse groups that make up the global Anabaptist family.

Speaking by Skype from MWC headquarters in Bogotá, Colombia—his home city—García says he spends about 60 percent of his time travelling. He has visited 26 countries in this and previous roles. Clearly, he has a good feel for the global Anabaptist reality.

Most of us don't.

We may have nuggets of international Mennonite experience, and conceptually value being part of a global faith family, but to us, Mennonites abroad are not unlike cousins we met briefly a long time ago—we know we're connected but we don't really feel it.

A few among us will go to the MWC Assembly in Pennsylvania this summer—and will undoubtedly be enthused—but the reality is that most of us won't be there. Any enthusiasm we experience will be vicarious or perhaps mediated by an electronic device.

How do we as a world-wide community foster connectedness, across 103 national conferences of churches, from persecuted Mennonites in Vietnam, Eritrea and India to Amish farmers in Ohio?



García says he sees a gradual increase in the value Mennonites place in being part of a global family. Those who are suffering, he says, have a greater sensed need for global community than those who are self-sufficient.

That touches two key themes for MWC: interdependency and the north-south dynamic. Roughly speaking, 80 percent of MWC membership is in the global south and 80 percent of the financial wealth is in the north, says Arli Klassen who serves as Chief Development Officer for MWC. The disparity is an inescapable and awkward fact.

Klassen says the small increase in MWC budget for 2015 over the year before—from \$877,000 to \$880,000 (not including costs of the Assembly)—can be attributed to increased giving from the south, though the bulk of financial contributions still come from the north.

The move of MWC headquarters from France to Bogotá when García took over as General Secretary helped balance the north-south relationship. Now, nearly half of the paid staff positions are based in Colombia, not counting the 10 volunteer part-time staff in different parts of the world. As for participation in the upcoming global Assembly, of the 4,575 registrants (as of April 29), 63 percent are from the north and 37 percent from the south.

The MWC vision is one of interdependency among churches. García uses the term liberally, applying it to the three elements of church mission he also returns to regularly: church planting, social development and peacemaking. Interdependency can look like missionaries from the south, linkages among

the more than 100 Mennonite-related healthcare institutions, student exchanges and the like. Part of the idea is to move beyond paternalistic and imbalanced relations.

In terms of theology and thought, García notes a number of southern thinkers worthy of attention in the north: Nzuzi Mukawa (Congo), Arthur Dück (Brazil), Alfred Neufeld (Paraguay), Willi Hugo Perez (Guatemala), Rebecca Osiro (Kenya), Shant Kunjam (India), Yukari Kaga (Japan), and Paulus Widjaja (Indonesia).

By necessity, the focus of MWC is broader than the financial woes and single-issue shadow that tends to hang over conference matters in Canada. That broader perspective is refreshing.

When asked about experiences he has had with MWC that he would like northern Anabaptists to share, García talks about the unique worship experience in South Korea, the service under the tree in Malawi and a service in Congo following which the church lunch consisted of him and the pastors and sharing a plate of peanuts and then him being offered a plate of sardines and a Coke, with no food for the rest of the gathered members.

For him, these experiences have been transformative. "They challenge your life," he says. The implicit challenge for us is to find the opportunities for interdependency and authentic exchange with our cousins around the world. ❧

PHOTO BY MERLE GOOD



Mennonite World Conference brings together Mennonites from all over the world.

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Thin Places (Part 4)

TROY WATSON

One of my atheist friends told me about a unique encounter with a “holy” man that ignited her spiritual awakening. She met a Buddhist monk visiting the city she lived in, and her friend offered to tour him around for the day. They were amazed at the monk’s sense of wonder and child-like excitement, he never seemed to stop smiling. At one point she held his hand as they walked down a busy street and she was overwhelmed by a sense of inexplicable peace flowing through her. In that moment something shifted inside of her. The only word she could use to describe the experience was “sacred.”

She had been to church and had many Christian friends including a few pastors (like myself) but she had never experienced a sense of the sacred until then. Her afternoon of sightseeing with the Buddhist monk became a kind of “thin place” for her.

Her experience reminded me of another story. A Japanese CEO was talking with Christian author Os Guinness and commented, “Whenever I meet a Buddhist monk, I meet a holy man in touch with another world. Whenever I meet a Christian leader, I meet a manager at home only in this world like I am.”

I certainly don’t believe this generalization is true across the board, but it certainly echoes my friend’s experience. Many Christian leaders are good managers, team builders, counsellors, visionaries, evangelists, coordinators, teachers and preachers, but how many of us are “holy people in touch with another world”? Many of us actually shy away from being too other-worldly for fear of being perceived as delusional flakes who are “too heavenly minded to be any earthly good.”

It’s interesting that my atheist friend routinely criticized the church for not being practical, modern and active enough in social justice issues. Yet it turned out



what she was really looking for was a “thin place”—or “thin person”—that manifested the sacred in an inexplicable way.

A Samaritan woman asked Jesus an interesting question about thin places in John chapter

4. She asked Jesus if she needed to go to Mount Gerizim (the primary thin place for Samaritans) or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (the primary thin place for Jews) to encounter God. Jesus’ response to her in verses 21-24 teaches me two things. The primary place of Divine manifestation is in and through human beings, not mountains, religious sites or buildings. We don’t need to travel to the right spot to encounter God; we have to tune in with the right spirit.

Jesus’ primary message was “*Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand*,” which I think is best translated, “Change the way you think, go beyond the mind you have, and perceive the reigning Presence of God right here, right now.” Essentially Jesus teaches us that we develop “*eyes to see and ears to hear*” the sacred when our state of mind or inner consciousness becomes “thin.”

Jesus’ promise from the beginning of his ministry was Spirit baptism. This was fulfilled at Pentecost when his disciples became conduits of God’s Presence. Jesus’ mission was to create “thin people,” meaning people of all shapes and sizes who embody a presence that is divine—in every sense of the word. This is who and what Jesus was—the ultimate thin place—where God and humanity existed in the same time and place. To be Christ-like is to be “thin” in that we are mobile “places” where the Divine permeates physical reality.

I wonder how many of us Christians are “thin places” to the people around us?

I realize all this “thin” talk is probably wearing thin by now. However, I wrote this series in response to an increasing number of Christians and non-Christians

/// Briefly noted

Homeland Security approves Canadian distance students

ELKHART, IND.—In early March, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) received long-awaited approval for students from Canada to study in the seminary’s distance program, Master of Divinity Connect. In the Connect program, students do most of their study in their home contexts and come to the Elkhart campus only for week-long classes two or three times a year. “This low-residency format needed approval from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security,” AMBS registrar Scott Janzen explained. Now with approval for these brief study periods in the US, students can earn a Master of Divinity without moving to campus for a year or more of study. AMBS has had long-standing approval for Canadians to study full-time on the campus. However, “a part of our Anabaptist family was unable to fully participate in all that our learning community has to offer. The removal of those travel restrictions will now allow Canadians to freely cross the border and take their place at the table. For this we are truly grateful,” said Daniel Grimes, director of enrollment and financial aid.

—Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

alike seeking a sense of the sacred at thin places. This is a noteworthy shift. People used to seek out “holy” men and women or churches to encounter God, but the masses have lost trust in spiritual leaders and religious institutions. Perhaps thin places will acquire a more important role in the spiritual awakening of people in our time and culture.

As I was alone, prayerfully reflecting in the middle of an ancient stone circle in Scotland two years ago, I was reminded of another striking statement by Jesus. “If these humans don’t resonate with God’s presence, then the stones will” (my paraphrase of Luke 19:40).

Troy Watson is pastor of Avon Mennonite Church in Stratford (troydw@gmail.com). //

GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

Canadian Mennonite honoured with five CCP awards of merit

Young Voices leads the charge

By ROSS W. MUIR
Canadian Mennonite

Following two days of keynote addresses, seminars, workshops and a closing banquet at the Canadian Church Press Convention, held in Toronto from April 30 to May 1, 2015, member publications anxiously awaited the presentation of 49 Awards of Merit for work published in 2014.

Canadian Mennonite's first award of the evening—and only first-place award—came early, in the open Department category, defined as “space set aside within a publication to address a specific subset of readers.” *Young Voices* is edited by Aaron Epp and Rachel Bergen, and written by a wide variety of young adult writers. The judge declared *Young Voices* “works because it matches up entirely with the intent of recognition inherent in this category. Youth is specifically addressed and appropriately by other youth . . . There is a good variety of reporting and opinion and event listings relevant to the readership are included. There is visual appeal with numerous photos, and contemporary and relevant topics are addressed.” The award was for the Sept. 1 and 15 and Nov. 24 issues.

“I was in prison: The story of a farmer, a sex offender and the choice of friendship over fear” by the pseudonymous author John Penner and edited by Dick Benner, editor/publisher, and Ross W. Muir, managing editor, claimed second place in the Personal Experience/First Person Account, Circulation above 10,000, category. “It’s a good story with loads of detail and an authentic sense of realism about possibilities,” the judge stated. “The author has a way with words. I’d like to read more.” It was published in the March 31 issue.

“Good work: Tales of disability,

interruption and revolution” received two Graphics awards: a second place in the Feature Layout and Design, Magazine, Circulation Above 10,000 category, for designers Muir and Dan Johnson, and a third place in the Feature Photo, Magazine category, for photographer Michael Swan. Of the layout, the judge remarked, “[T]he opener is a marvellous example of the harmonious integration of words and pictures. As well, this layout has paced its additional elements well . . . and because of this pacing, and the use of colour, everything has been wrapped in a nice bow.” Regarding the photography, the judge praised the “very impressive control of light in a very difficult setting. With all the back lighting coming in to the image, the way all faces, expressions and details were rescued is

remarkable.” It was published in the Sept. 1 issue

Canadian Mennonite's final award came from the pen of senior writer Will Braun for his “MCC Manitoba stands with Buffalo Gals” in the Opinion Piece, Circulation Above 10,000 category. “The piece is clear, detailed, fair and opinionated,” stated the judge. “It is a nice combination of fact, perspective and opinion.” With Braun known for his strong opinions in the pages of this magazine, it was interesting that the judge noted that, “while the fairness is admirable, the key point of the piece—that Christians too often view issues from a white Eurocentric perspective—loses a bit of its potential impact through excessive balance.” It was published in the Dec. 15 issue.

Canadian Mennonite's new Manitoba correspondent, J. Neufeld, received an Honourable Mention in the A.C. Forrest Memorial Award for Socially Conscious Religious Journalism for “Preparing for a beautiful end,” a piece published by *Geez*.

This year’s CCP convention and awards ceremony were shared with members of the American-based Associated Church Press, whose Mennonite members—*Mennonite World Review* and *The Mennonite*—each received a number of awards. ☿



The September 1, 2014 feature story, “Good work: Tales of disability, interruption and revolution,” received two Graphics awards from Canadian Church Press.

Why Mennonites love their gardens

Researcher unearths tales of seeds transported from Russia

BY J. NEUFELD

Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG, MAN.

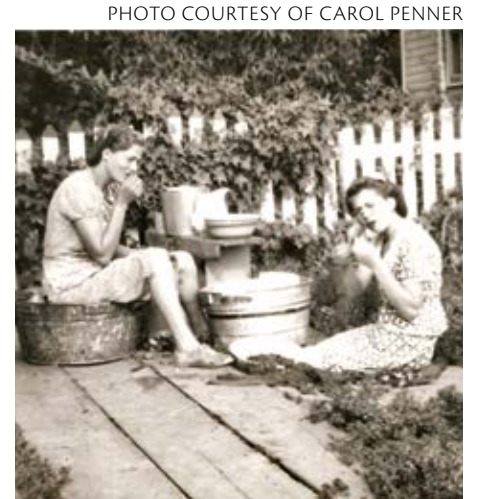
In the village of Neuberghthal in southern Manitoba, gnarled cottonwoods with deeply grooved trunks line the village streets and cluster along the edge of farmyards. Cottonwoods here and in nearby towns bear nostalgic meaning for many Mennonites. According to local mythology, the cottonwoods are descended from Russian trees brought to Canada as saplings or seeds by Mennonite immigrants in the 1870s. Some of them were planted on the graves of loved ones.

These emotional connections between people and plants fascinate Susie Fisher, a 31-year-old historian writing her doctoral dissertation on Mennonites and their gardens. Fisher isn't a botanist. She completed an M.A. in religious studies at McMaster University and is working on a PhD in history at the University of Manitoba. She set out to write her dissertation on the

emotional history of Mennonites who settled in the West Reserve—an area of 17 townships west of the Red River granted to Mennonites by the Canadian government in 1876. But when she started conducting interviews, she ran into trouble.

"I started realizing Mennonites don't talk easily about their emotions," Fisher says. Conversations drifted towards earthly things: trees, plants, gardens, tools, summer kitchens. Fisher discovered these very items of material culture contained the stories she was looking for. "A lot of them had to do with the land. So I thought, why not write my whole dissertation on the garden?"

A year ago Fisher bought an old house in the town of Gretna and moved into the heart of the West Reserve to better focus on her research. Since then she's spent many an hour sitting in sunny kitchens,



Women shelling beans in their garden in the 1930s near Horndean.

drinking coffee and talking to people about their gardens.

That's when the stories come pouring out—stories of cuttings from a yellow rosebush brought over from Russia and confiscated by immigration officials, of seeds sewn into the hems of dresses and hidden in corsets, of dolls stuffed with beans or wheat. People have shown her acorns believed to be descended from an 800-year-old oak in Ukraine known as the Chortitza Oak, as well as the seeds of melons, plums, marigolds, zinnias and many other plants that once grew in Russian gardens.

Mennonites who emigrated from Russia in the late 1800s left behind elaborately cultivated flower gardens and orchards that were central to community life. Russian Mennonites sometimes celebrated weddings and funerals in their gardens. Often family members were buried there. When the Mennonites came to Canada, they sought to recreate some of that culture here on the prairies.

Fisher has yet to find an official archival record of seeds or plants brought over from Russia. In fact, botanical records from Neuberghthal suggest the storied cottonwoods were likely transplanted from nearby riverbanks. But for Fisher's purposes, the stories themselves matter more than the facts. "These stories speak to the efforts of trying to transplant a life and peoplehood into a new place," she says.

An agricultural people understandably has deep emotional ties to seeds. One

PHOTO BY SUSIE FISHER



Bean seeds from the 1930s found in an attic near Mitchell, Manitoba.

Mennonite gardener Fisher spoke to believes the Mennonites never really got over the trauma of their migration from Russia. “He thinks the reason people have so much energy and care for the seeds is that they represent life—that the seeds are life manifest,” says Fisher.

Fisher isn’t Mennonite. She grew up in Winnipeg in a secular family with English, Irish and Italian roots. But when her parents split up, Fisher’s mother sent her and her sister to Westgate Mennonite Collegiate. “I wonder if she wanted to give us a spiritual community that she didn’t feel she could do on her own,” says Fisher. Growing up among Mennonites turned out to be a “wonderful thing” for Fisher. “It changed my life to be close to a people with a religion and ethnicity that are so intertwined and a life that’s so rooted in Manitoba,” she says.

Fisher’s current research project doesn’t extend beyond the 1950s, but she sees an interesting link between her work and the new wave of young urban Mennonites working on organic farms or moving back to the country to start their own market gardens. She speculates that the impulse is coloured by nostalgia. “The root of the word is *nostos*—meaning a longing to return home. It’s there for these people too—just not for their home, but the home of their ancestors.” ❧

PHOTO BY J. NEUFELD



Susie Fisher holds a handful of heritage cucumber seeds given to her by a Mennonite couple in Winkler, Manitoba.



At the MC B.C. women’s Inspirational Day, Mackenzie Lee (left), Geneva Jeske, Naomi Cheny and Alayne Cheny present “Feet First,” an original drama imagining women of Bible times. While Jesus washes his disciples’ feet upstairs, the women downstairs discuss Jesus’ ministry to and compassion for women.

Women made in God’s image

B.C. women hear how God relates maternally at Inspirational Day

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

When Trudy Beyak was a successful investigative journalist working for the local newspaper in Abbotsford, she would pray, “Help me, Lord, to write the stories you want me to write.”

Beyak, the author of *The Mother Heart of God*, addressed Mennonite B.C. women at their annual inspirational day on May 2 to share how she came to write her book on feminine spirituality. There were 131 women who attended.

One day Beyak was reading Genesis 1:26 which says that God created male and female in his image. She stopped short. “In what way did you create me in your image? How as a woman can I relate to you?” she asked God. In response, she says, “I felt God’s voice distinctively tell me, ‘Interview faith leaders all over the world and ask, how are women made in God’s image?’”

Thus began the five-year journey that that took Beyak around the globe to interview more than 50 biblical scholars and celebrities, as well as study the Bible intently herself. The result was the book *The Mother Heart of God*, subtitled *Unveiling*

the Mystery of the Father’s Maternal Love.

Beyak said that traditionally Christian theology has focused on God as loving father, so God relating maternally is a new concept for many. Learning that the word for “mercy” in the Old Testament is *racham*, the Hebrew term for “womblike,” was a profound revelation for her. “This mercy of God is like a mother comforting a child,” she said. “Let’s grasp it: we [women] are made in God’s image. We are blessed with gifts of comforting and counselling.”

Furthering the theme of comfort, four women and girls presented “Feet First,” an original drama written by Alayne Cheny. A lunch together concluded the morning. The day’s offering totaled \$3,821.25 with half designated for Camp Squeah. The other half will be divided between Mennonite Women Canada international ministries and Youth Unlimited, which has a local ministry to youths in the Punjabi community.

This year’s Inspirational Day was held at Emmanuel Mennonite Church. Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church of Abbotsford will host the April 30, 2016 event. ❧

/// Briefly noted

New Area Church Co-Minister for Saskatchewan

Prince Albert, Sask.—Mennonite Church Saskatchewan has hired Ryan Siemens as Area Church Co-Minister to begin Aug. 1, 2015. He succeeds Jerry Buhler, whose term ended March 31. Siemens has pastored Grace Mennonite Church in Prince Albert for eight years. During that time he served on MC Saskatchewan council as a member-at-large and as vice-moderator. Since



Siemens

Jan. 2014, Siemens has also been part-time director of Parkland Restorative Justice, a ministry supported by MC Saskatchewan. Prior to his employment with Parkland, he also volunteered with the organization's Person-to-Person prison visitation program. Originally from Winnipeg, Siemens earned a bachelor of theology degree with a major in peace studies from Canadian Mennonite Bible College in 2001, a bachelor of arts degree in conflict transformation studies and restorative justice from Canadian Mennonite University in 2002, and a masters of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 2007. Volunteer assignments include a year teaching refugees at Jubilee Partners, an intentional Christian community in rural Georgia. He and his wife Sandra were house leaders for a year with Service Adventure in Lethbridge, Alta. Ryan and Sandra have been married 12 years and have two sons, Isaiah (3) and Elliott (1). "I love Christ's Church," says

Siemens, "and more specifically, the Mennonite Church . . . if I can use my gifts and experiences to serve in this capacity, I am grateful and delighted to do so." He knows the area church faces challenges. "We live in times of change, and while this change can be fearful, I am not afraid of what the future holds," he says. "Where there is the Spirit, there is a way, and I believe the Spirit is active within Mennonite Church Saskatchewan."

—DONNA SCHULZ



While on a short-term leadership training assignment in Ethiopia with Mennonite Church Canada, Norm Dyck and Fanosie Legesse presented Bibles to 65 first-year students at Meserete Kristos College. The young woman on the far right thanked them for providing the most important book in their lives. The Bibles were contributed by the Listowel (Ont.) Mennonite congregation. Dyck is pastor of Listowel Mennonite; Legesse is a member of Bethel Mennonite Church, Elora, Ont., and previously served in Ethiopia as a Witness Worker with his wife, Dianne. Read more about the short-term assignment on Dyck's blog, www.revnd.blogspot.ca.

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GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Students learn about indigenous land issues

RJC benefitted from injustices to Young Chippewyan First Nation

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent

ROSTHERN AND STONEY KNOLL, SASK.

“I feel like a refugee in my own country,” said George Kingfisher. The hereditary chief of the Young Chippewyan First Nation was at Rosthern Junior College (RJC) to tell students how his people lost their land. RJC, partnering with Mennonite Church Saskatchewan’s Walking the Path Committee and Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan, invited Kingfisher and others to share their stories during the school’s Alternative Learning

and Service Opportunities week.

Teacher Ryan Wood told students at the April 24 event that RJC sits on Treaty 6 land and the school has benefitted from the injustices of the past. The Young Chippewyan First Nation was the third-largest group to sign Treaty 6 in 1876. In 1879, the government of Canada established Reserve #107 for the Young Chippewyans at Stoney Knoll, about 75 kilometres north of what is now Saskatoon, and just east of the North Saskatchewan River. Whether rightly or wrongly, the government viewed most First Nations as complicit in the Riel Resistance of 1885 and, as punishment for the part they were perceived to have played, denied them food rations and permission to leave their reserves.

Facing starvation on the reserve, the Young Chippewyans went south to Cypress Hills in search of game, said Kingfisher. While they were gone, Mennonites and German Lutherans arrived in the area. Because the reserve was uninhabited, the government allowed the immigrants to take possession of the land. When the Young Chippewyans returned several years later, the land was occupied and they were forced to find homes on other reserves.

For Ray Funk, this story is a personal one. The farm where he grew up, north of Laird, Sask., was once part of Reserve #107. “Nobody thought about the Young Chippewyan people until they came and reminded us one hundred years later,” said Funk. Since 1976 and what he calls “the great awakening,” Funk has worked to redress the wrongs done to the Young

Chippewyan people.

It’s a personal story for the people of St. John’s Lutheran Church as well. Their forebears built a church on the summit of Stoney Knoll in 1901. The church was eventually moved to the village of Laird, but the churchyard and cemetery remain. St. John’s pastor Jason Johnson told students about the challenges his congregation has faced in tackling past injustices. “As we [have confronted] our history,” said Johnson, “we have been transformed, and understand a little deeper what redemption means.”

In 2006, the Young Chippewyans, Mennonites and Lutherans met at Stoney Knoll to get acquainted, to share a meal, and to sign a memorandum of understanding, indicating that they would continue to work together to right past wrongs. *Canadian Mennonite* covered that historic event in its October 30 issue that year (Oct. 30, 2006, page 9).

Leonard Doell, coordinator of MCC Saskatchewan’s Indigenous Neighbours Program, told students that, in response to the memorandum of understanding, MCCS is tracing the genealogy of the Young Chippewyan people to further their claim against the government. Funds for the genealogy project were raised through the Spruce River Folk Festival, held annually at Funk’s farm north of Prince Albert. With enough money in place to complete the genealogy project, MCCS is currently “pursuing the possibility of purchasing land” for the Young Chippewyan people, said Doell.

In addition, Funk told students, a petition has been drafted encouraging the Rural Municipality of Laird to add the Cree name, *Opwashemo Chakatinaw*, to the road sign leading up to Stoney Knoll. Walking the Path Committee member Cheryl Woelk told students they would be given opportunity to respond to the stories they heard by signing the petition. “Now you are part of the story,” said Woelk. “How you respond is important.”

Later, students and staff went to Stoney Knoll for the signing ceremony. On the windy hilltop where St. John’s Lutheran Church once stood, Ray Funk read the petition. Harry Lafond, Executive Director, Office of the Treaty Commissioner,



Rosthern Junior College student Madi Davis (in the red hooded sweatshirt) awaits her turn as her fellow student, Matthias Thiessen adds his name to the petition urging the Rural Municipality of Laird to add the Cree name, Opwashemo Chakatinaw, to road signs leading up to Stoney Knoll.

Saskatoon, briefly addressed the students. “You get a whole new chapter in the history of a place when you attach the original name to it,” said Lafond. “It’s so much more powerful for us if we can merge our history and make it one story.” Four RM of Laird ratepayers, all members of MC Saskatchewan churches, signed the petition. Finally the students themselves were

invited to sign.

For some, it was a deeply moving experience. Alex Keller, a Grade 11 student from Bruno, Sask., found the day’s events to be “really beautiful.” She said that “showing recognition” to the land’s original inhabitants is “really important” and that she felt inspired “to see how passionate people are” about it. ☘

Walking toward reconciliation with First Nations

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent
ROSTHERN, SASK.

Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is coming to a close at the beginning of June 2015, but the work of churches in response to the TRC is just beginning. Mennonite Church Saskatchewan’s Walking the Path Committee recently hosted “Truth and Reconciliation: What are the next steps?” At the event, held May 1 and 2, at Eigenheim Mennonite Church, near Rosthern, Sask., participants sat in a large circle in the church foyer to hear stories from both First Nations and settler speakers.

Mennonite Church Canada’s Indigenous Relations Director Steve Heinrichs called the event “a tremendously hopeful gathering.” Heinrichs recounted the devastating impact residential schools had on aboriginal people. He cited TRC commissioner Justice Murray Sinclair, who said, “Apologies from the church are very important, but they’re not enough. We’re really looking for atonement, changed attitudes, changed behaviour. We must repair what has been broken.”

Reconciliation is about “creating a new redeeming narrative, reshaping the story, changing the way we think about and relate to each other,” said Harry Lafond, Executive Director of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. The oppressed must forgive the oppressor, but “forgiveness has to travel both ways,” he added.

Roger Bird, a residential school survivor



Cheryl Woelk presented Eugene Arcand with a token of appreciation on behalf of MC Saskatchewan. Arcand requested that Woelk’s infant son, Rohan, be included in the photo, because he is a member of the next generation and has “borne witness” to the events of the day.

from Prince Albert, told about his sister, Flossie, who suffered sexual abuse at a residential school operated by the Mennonite church near Timber Bay, Sask. Flossie attempted suicide because of the abuse she suffered. As an adult, she had children of her own, but could never stay in one place for long. Eventually, she died of alcohol poisoning. Today Bird sees the cycle of suffering repeating itself in Flossie’s children and grandchildren. “Thanks for

coming and listening,” said Bird. “We need to sit down together.”

Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan (MCCS) program director Eileen Klassen Hamm told participants how attending the TRC event in Saskatoon in 2012 changed her life. After hearing intimate stories of pain and loss, Klassen Hamm concluded, “I need healing from my imperialist mindset. I need healing from denial that colonialism has shaped my church.” Indigenous people, she said, are still waiting for Stephen Harper’s apology to come to life. “The apology is only words on the page until we act it out,” she said.

Eugene Arcand of the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation near Marcelin, Sask., shared his experiences as a residential school survivor. Arcand was taken to St. Michael’s school in Duck Lake, Sask., where he lost his language, culture, self-esteem and dignity. He and his classmates were reduced to “animal instinct tendencies” in order to survive the daily threat of sexual, physical and psychological abuse. Through the TRC, Arcand said, “We’ve been forced to remember in a few years what we spent a lifetime trying to forget.”

Arcand encouraged participants to get acquainted with their aboriginal neighbours. “We’re not as mysterious as people think we are,” he said. “We have a world view and we want to share it.”

George Epp of Eigenheim Mennonite Church told Arcand, “You and I were in residential school at the same time. While you were at St. Michael’s, I was at Rosthern Junior College and I think about the privilege [I enjoyed]. I’m sorry for your loss.”

Barb Froese, whose husband Wilmer coordinates the Rosthern and District Food Bank, asked Arcand, “How do we build bridges with the people who come there so that we’re not just the givers and they’re not just recipients?” Arcand’s reply was a challenge for all participants. Go and see where the people live. Visit nearby reserves. Be prepared to make an effort. “Nothing is for nothing,” he said.

Joe Heikman, pastor of Wildwood Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, reiterated Arcand’s view that building relationships takes effort. “If I’m going to connect with First Nations people,” he said, “I’m going to have to go somewhere.”

Cheryl Woelk, a member of the MC Saskatchewan Ministries Commission, suggested that “each situation is unique” and that Christians should “pray over what reconciliation means in our context.”

Finally, participants gathered in small groups to brainstorm possible next steps along the path to truth and reconciliation. Their ideas included:

- Attending powwows or Treat Days celebrations.
- Inviting first nations groups to participate

in the MCC relief sale.

- Learning a first nations language.
- Pairing first nations families with settler counterparts.
- Creating opportunities to visit over coffee.
- Doing business with or employing aboriginal people.

In implementing these or any ideas, Woelk suggested the need to “sit lightly on our world view and be willing to let go and try something different, to re-imagine what our society could look like.” ❧

COVER STORY

Credit helps Mennonite farmer in Burkina Faso

BY DEBORAH FROESE
Mennonite Church Canada

“I love everything about farming,” Abram says. That passion—and his generosity—led him to empower the self-sufficiency of a farmer on the other side of the world.

Abram (a pseudonym) recently sold his house. Before he put it up for sale, he promised God 20 percent of the proceeds and prayed that God would show him where to direct his donation. He thought long and hard before making a decision. He says he has always made an effort to donate 10 percent or more of his income to God’s work, even when times were tight.

But he’s cautious about where he gives. He wants to ensure that his donations go toward something meaningful without a lot of administration fees. “There are so many organizations that ask for money,” Abram says, “but do they do anything with it to help people support themselves?”

When he learned about Mennonite Church Canada’s micro-credit project, Abram had his answer. His donation gave Burkina Faso farmer Siaka Coulibaly, a member of the Mennonite Church of Kangala, the resources he needed to expand his business and run his small farm more efficiently. The loan enabled Coulibaly to buy cashew nuts and cereal grains to resell at a profit. Those profits

allowed him to expand his business and grow sweet potatoes, using the shoots from those plants to prepare for another crop cycle. With the added profits from selling sweet potatoes, his business continued to grow. He was also able to invest in a fence to protect his sweet potato field, increasing returns.

“I give thanks to God for the loan I received because it helped me a lot,” Coulibaly wrote in a letter of gratitude. “This [micro-loan project] will really help the people in our churches to meet their needs. I even donated to some people.”

When Coulibaly’s loan is repaid, the money will be “paid forward” to help another Mennonite create an income stream to support family and the local church.

Abram is now in his late 80s, but he understands the challenges farmers face no matter where they live. “We were dirt poor,” he says of growing up on a small acreage with 10 siblings and dropping out of school at about age 14 to help support the family. They planted crops and raised cattle, horses and several varieties of poultry. There was no machinery, just a horse-drawn binder. Grain and straw were stooked by hand.

He recalls going shoeless in summer to save money for clothing in the winter. He says his feet grew calluses thick enough to “ward off even the most ornery thistles.” Still, farming took root in his heart. “There’s more freedom in the country,” he says. “In the city you live on smaller lots and it’s more confined.”

Circumstance eventually led Abram to work in the city, first as a plaster craftsman creating ornamental ceilings and then as a certified stationary engineer. Instead of raising crops, he and his wife raised five children plus a houseful of foster kids, 23 of them over the years. Each of them has secured a place in his heart, the same place where fond memories of his earlier years on the farm reside.

Abram is happy to help others raise their crops, whatever those crops may be. “The money is not mine anyway,” he says, smiling. “I’m only a caretaker for what God has blessed me with.” ❧

PHOTO BY SIAKA TRAORÉ



Mennonite Church Canada is working to develop entrepreneurship in Burkina Faso so that young Mennonite Christians can support their families and churches.

Residential farm for young offenders remembered

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta hears about Youth Orientation Unit

BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alberta Correspondent
EDMONTON, ALTA.

“One had to be careful crossing the property in the evenings,” recalled Jake Baergen when asked what it was like to work with young offenders in a farm setting. The long-time board member and Youth Orientation Unit director then continued, “There were few yard lights and a Kick the Can game could be happening anyplace. You had to be alert.”

On April 25 the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA) met at Lendrum Mennonite Brethren church in Edmonton to hear the story of the Youth Orientation Unit (YOU), a residential farm-work program operating near Warburg, Alta. between 1970 and 1990. Through farm work and a family atmosphere of care, young men on probation came to learn life skills and eventually reintegrate into society. It came into being as a dream of Lendrum’s first pastor, Peter Rempel.

“Peter and I would often spend time walking and talking about using work as therapy for troubled young people,” said his friend, George Loewen. When it became clear to Loewen that the issue holding Rempel back was financial, he offered to help.

“How much are you willing to lose?” Rempel asked.

“Everything I put in,” replied Loewen, and the dream began to shape itself into reality.

In 1967, Rempel and his wife Mary purchased 160 acres of land with a few buildings near Warburg, Alberta. In 1969, Rempel and Loewen formed a partnership to own and operate the farm and by 1970 the first “client” was onsite. While the idea had been for the farm to be self-sustaining, it quickly became clear this would not be

the case. The troubled young men lacked the skills necessary to keep the farm viable. They were hard on equipment, ruining several vehicles, and needed significant supervision at all times.

The difficulties and resulting criticism did not stop the Rempels or Loewens. Rempel resigned his pastorate, got a degree in psychology, and took on janitorial duties at the church to support his family. When an accountant told Loewen he had to stop or go bankrupt, Loewen went to court to argue that the program not be taxed as a hobby farm but should receive government aid to help young offenders become good citizens.

“The lawyer representing the crown was the first to shake my hand. . . In retrospect, we see it was a great venture; multiple times it seemed doomed to failure, except that God was in it,” Loewen recalled.

In 1972, the Mennonite Central Committee of Alberta began to support YOU, providing \$90 per month. Within a year, that support increased to \$2,400 per month and voluntary service workers began to help. Social services provided some funding for each young offender, but even with this help, Rempel and Loewen informed MCC in 1974 that the program would close without greater support. In 1975, MCC took on the program, with Rempel remaining as director. In 1976, MCC purchased the farm from Rempel and Loewen and government funding began to cover a greater percentage of the costs.

Through 20 years of operation, YOU proved remarkably successful. “Sixty-six to sixty-eight percent did not have further charges for a period of two years after leaving YOU,” Baergen said in his report. Mary Rempel and Irene Baergen (Peter and Jake’s

wives) were given special mention for their cooking, caring, and “mom” skills.

“I soon fell in love with most of the guys and was never uncomfortable around them,” said Irene. “I was always confident that they would protect me and take care of me in any situation.”

The Young Offenders Act in 1984 proved to be problematic. Whereas 16 to 20-year-olds had been involved in the program for at least 6 to 9 months, the act limited it to 16 to 17-year-olds for short terms of two weeks to four months.

“The number of fellows that were able to make the changes necessary dropped dramatically,” Baergen said. The Young Offenders Act also restricted access to records, so YOU staff were unable to follow the progress of clients after they left the farm. The final blow came in 1990, when the Solicitor General’s Department ceased to fund YOU.

Herman Neufeld joined the YOU board in 1990 to assist with the closure. After several programs were considered and deemed unsuitable, the property was sold to the Lucy Baker school for girls in 1994. In his report to the MHSA gathering, Neufeld said, “I would like to suggest that we view the demise of the YOU program not as a failure, but as an opportunity to celebrate. The program experienced 20 years of success. That is a long time in the life of a program today.”

The highlight of the presentations to the MHSA crowd came when Peter Rempel answered a few questions and told stories. Asked if he was ever afraid for his life, Rempel answered, “I have had many threats.” He told the story of four young men who threatened him.

“They became my friends,” he said. “My concern was to be a faithful servant of my Lord Jesus Christ. . . . It was important to have the opportunity to tell many, many people about Jesus Christ, and they loved me for it.” He said.

George and Helga Loewen, Jake and Irene Baergen, and Peter Rempel were all presented with certificates of appreciation from the MHSA for their years of dedicated service. Records of MCC Alberta’s involvement in the YOU program are now available at the archives of the MHSA in Calgary. ❧

/// Briefly Noted

Biking across Canada to support women

Two young Canadian women, Mary Fehr and Sarah French plan to spend the summer riding their bikes across the country to raise funds for the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) Greater Rural Opportunities for Women (GROW) program in Ghana. The two spent more than six months as MEDA interns, Fehr in Tanzania, and French in Nicaragua. After a year of planning, the 8,710-kilometre ride from Victoria, B.C., to St. John's, Nfld., begins this month. "Neither of us are bikers," Fehr says with a smile, "so we are learning some things about it this year." They hope to average about a hundred kilometres per day and without a support vehicle. Their budget of \$8,000 each—which they worked to save this past year—includes ferry fees, the occasional night in a motel and plane tickets from St. John's to Waterloo, Ont., at the conclusion of the summer. They plan to stop at every MEDA chapter along the way, challenging each chapter to raise \$10,000. They also hope to share stories about the GROW program and personal reflections on their time as interns. They hope to inspire a new generation of young adults to become involved in development issues. MEDA's GROW program helps rural women in Ghana to grow soybeans. Through the formation of co-operatives, rural women negotiate a better price in the market. When Fehr and French finish their summer ride for GROW, they both hope to find work in the field of international development.

—BARRY BERGEN

MEDA PHOTO



Sarah French, left, and Mary Fehr

/// Briefly noted

Mennonites invited to sign anti-poverty petition

A country as wealthy as Canada has no excuse for poverty, says Joe Gunn, executive director of Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ), a faith-based organization that works for justice in Canadian public policy. Yet 4.8 million people in Canada have trouble paying rent and buying the food they need. More than a million children experience food insecurity. In 2012 UN right-to-food envoy Olivier De Schutter described Canada's system as one that "presents barriers for the poor to access nutritious diets and that tolerates increased inequalities between rich and poor, and aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples." Twice the UN has asked Canada to create a national plan to tackle poverty. Mennonite Church Canada's executive director Willard Metzger, who is touring Canada with CPJ to talk about poverty and climate change, (see May 11, page 19) is inviting people to sign a petition initiated by CPJ asking the Canadian government to establish and implement an anti-poverty plan that would focus on income security, food security, housing, health, employment and early childhood education and care. Citizens for Public Justice published its own model anti-poverty strategy for Canada earlier this year. The full document can be found at www.dignityforall.ca. "It should really be the faith communities that bring forward these issues in an electoral campaign," says Gunn. "There's not a congregation anywhere that doesn't do the charity side. . . Charity is good, but justice is better."

—J. NEUFELD



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GOD AT WORK IN US

Pianist dedicated her hands to God

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alta. Correspondent
DIDSBURY, ALTA.

“When I was 17 years old I dedicated my hands to the Lord. I was going to play his music in the church,” said Lydia Derksen, whose hands have been a blessing at Bergthal Mennonite for 65 years and counting. She plays the piano for the congregation, the choir and a variety of musical groups.

Derksen remembers being excited that her elementary school had a piano, but greatly disappointed when the teacher said, “at recess you go outside, you don’t play the piano!”

She fondly remembers getting a piano at home. “That day I came home from school and the piano bus was backed up to our house was one of the happiest days of my life!” She started lessons the same day.

Derksen began playing for the congregation well before most pianists would have considered themselves able to do manage the task; she was only 13. “I didn’t feel I could play for the church either, but my dad was the minister and if he said you are playing—you played,” she laughed.

When she was 14, Henry Hamm



Lydia Derksen plays the piano in the sanctuary of Bergthal Mennonite Church near Didsbury, Alberta. She has played for the choir and congregation for 65 years.

organized a choir and Derksen was the pianist. Hamm would bring his guitar to the Derksen home and together they picked out simple songs such as, “I have decided to follow Jesus.” She also took lessons focussing on playing for church. “My piano teacher helped me learn the songs. Each lesson I got two songs from the hymnal or for the choir.”

Another important part of her education on the piano was tied to the annual Songfest event that brought Mennonite churches from across the province together for a weekend of music and fellowship. K.H. Neufeld was a choir conductor and a big part of Derksen’s musical development.

“[He] used to come to all the churches and do a cantata. Three days at each church [to practice] then at Songfest we would sing it. . . . K.H. stayed at our place. After school we’d work on it. Then, we’d come home from choir and practice till midnight. Then up at 6 a.m. to practice before going to school. It was learning by fire!” Derksen said. “Playing for church, the congregation, the choir, is not being a pianist. It’s being an accompanist. . . it is a learned skill.”

Asked what has changed in 65 years, Derksen said; “We had just gospel songs back then. Songs of praise. Now we sing faster and with more emphasis. . . . Four parts was always very important, now more is focused on the lead voice. I like the new songs, I just have some trouble with them. . . syncopated rhythm is not what I learned.”

As of Sunday, May 26, Derksen has stepped down from playing for the choir, wanting to stop while she is still playing well. An experience with lung cancer pushed her decision. In Feb. 2014, Derksen underwent surgery followed by 16 weeks

Obituary

Millard Lind remembered for gentleness and passion

Elkhart, Ind.—Millard Lind pastor, writer and professor emeritus of Old Testament at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary died on April 25 at his home in Goshen, Ind., at the



age of 96. He began teaching at Goshen Biblical Seminary in 1959 and taught for the last time at AMBS in 1998. He had a long career that started with congregational ministry and included writing and editing as well as teaching. At the age of 45, and with seven children, he earned a Doctor of Theology degree from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1964. His ministry including serving as a pastor in Pennsylvania and Indiana as well as writing curriculum and editing *Christian Living* for Herald Press before he joined the AMBS faculty. Several significant books by Lind include *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Herald Press, 1980), *The Sound of Sheer Silence and the Killing State: The Death Penalty and the Bible* (Cascadia, 2004); *Monotheism, Power, Justice* (IMS, 1990) and *Ezekiel* in the Believers Church Bible Commentary series (Herald Press, 1996). Lind was born in Bakersfield, California, on Oct. 10, 1918 and married Miriam Sieber Lind in 1943.

—Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

of chemotherapy.

“Since I’ve had my cancer, piano playing has been different,” she said. The cancer is now in remission, and even though she will not play regularly for the choir, Derksen will still take her turn as accompanist for congregational singing.

The Lord has certainly blessed Lydia Derksen’s hands, and blessed many people through her 65 years of dedicated music ministry. ❧

OBITUARY

Humour and insight—the legacy of a gifted communicator

Joel Kauffmann

Aug. 7, 1950 – May 8, 2015

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER

Web editor

The church lost a voice for humour and faith with the passing of Joel Kauffmann, of Goshen, Ind., who died May 8, 2015.

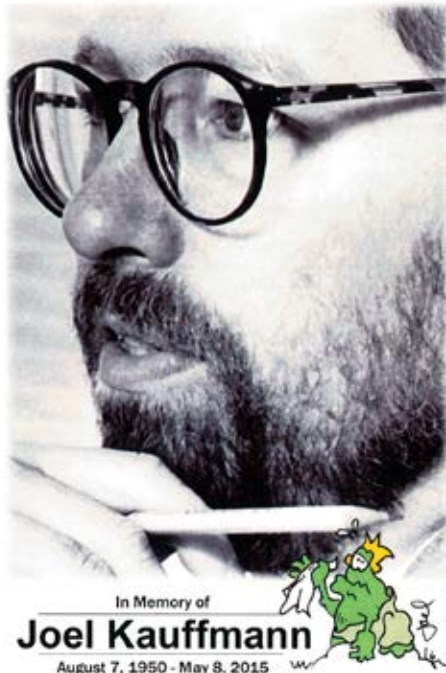
“Joel had an uncanny ability and gift to communicate simply and clearly deep theological truths and social realities,” said J. Ron Byler, executive director of Mennonite Central Committee U.S., and a friend and colleague of Kauffmann.

Kauffmann was best known in Mennonite circles for his cartoon strip, “Pontius’ Puddle.” The star character of the strip was Pontius, a crowned frog who pontificated about life and faith, questioned and challenged God, from his back-water pond.

In 1983 Kauffmann launched “Pontius’ Puddle,” which has been published in over 200 in religious publications around the world. The cartoons began appearing in *Mennonite Reporter*, the predecessor of *Canadian Mennonite*, in February 1984, and continued delighting readers for the next 29 years. Over 500 of the cartoon strips were published in the two publications. In December 2014 Kauffmann announced that there would be no new cartoons in the “Pontius’ Puddle” series.

About humour and faith, Kauffmann posited that, as a Mennonite cartoonist who identifies with neither the Catholic nor the Protestant faith streams, he feels connected with the Anabaptists of the past. “The Anabaptists were early critics of the church,” he explained in a 1988 interview with Don Fitzkee of the Church of the Brethren *Messenger*. “I think at certain levels there was even humour.”

In the same interview, Kauffmann described the frog Pontius as “a very human amphibian who, on the one hand, wants to be faithful, but on the other hand



succumbs quite frequently to temptation. . . . Pontius’ understanding of God, the world, and his fellow creatures is, like the pond he inhabits, shallow.”

While Kauffmann poked fun at attitudes and failings of Christians, the tone of the cartoon strip was never disrespectful of God or of faith tenets. Fitzkee compared the cartoon strip characters to people struggling with their faith. “Kauffmann’s frogs are very human. Their motivations (or lack of motivation), hesitations, rationalizations, and occasional flirtations with truth and right are all too similar to many members of the Christian church.”

Kauffmann grew up in a small Mennonite community in Illinois, where he had limited exposure to television and movies. But his interest in visual and

verbal communication led him to make significant contributions in some unique ventures. He was one of the founding members of Sisters & Brothers, Inc., a Mennonite non-profit filmmaking group which produced dramatic films including *The Radicals*, the feature film based on the life of early Anabaptists Michael and Margaretha Sattler. Kauffmann was co-writer of the screenplay for the movie, which was released in 1990 and continues to be viewed today in faith education settings.

With partner Donald C. Yost, Kauffmann wrote the award-winning Disney TV movie, *Miracle in Lane 2*, based on a true story. The two collaborated on several other screenplays.

Kauffmann worked in content development at two visitors centres—Menno-Hof in Shipshewana, Ind., which features the faith story of Mennonites and Amish, and Nazareth Village, a living museum focusing on the life and teachings of Jesus, in Nazareth, Israel. His most recent assignment was as content developer for Museum of the Bible in Washington, D. C.

Kauffmann leaves behind his wife, Nancy, two sons, a daughter-in-law and a granddaughter. His parents, Ivan and Lola Kauffmann survive, along with his five siblings, their spouses and children.

A memorial service was held on May 11 at College Mennonite Church, Kauffmann’s home church in Goshen, Ind. The tribute in the bulletin said in part, “Joel had a deep faith, a passion for communicating, a joy for living and a string of one liners to crack us up. He thought that we shouldn’t take ourselves too seriously to counter the pollution of conflicts in the church that harmed each other and our witness of God in the world. . . . He wasn’t afraid of differences of opinion on faith issues, but engaged conversations to learn and grow while always trusting God to sort it out. He believed it was better to err on the side of grace and give God space to work in and through us.” ❧

ARTBEAT

Pax Christi Chorale revives *Judith* Oratorio

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
TORONTO

The apocryphal book of *Judith* contains the story of a righteous Jewish widow who saves her people from the ravages of the Assyrian/Babylonian army led by Holofernes. While her city is besieged she leaves with her maid and is welcomed into the general's tent. He thinks he will seduce her, but when he is alone with her and drunk from partying, she beheads him. In the morning the Assyrian troops fall into disarray and are routed by the Jews.

The book itself has problems as the army is Assyrian but the emperor is Nebuchadnezzar, a Babylonian. The exact time of the story is also muddled. Jews do not include the book as scripture, nor do most Protestant groups, but it is included in the deuterocanonical books of the Catholic Bible.

In the late 1800s, C. Hubert Parry was asked to prepare an oratorio for the Birmingham (UK) choral festival. Not a religious man himself, he made several suggestions on the subject matter before he and the committee agreed on *Judith*. After several successful performances in the late 1880s the piece fell into disuse and has not been performed for years.

Fast forward to the early 2010s when a member of the Pax Christi Chorale who collects choral memorabilia handed artistic director Stephanie Martin a leather-bound gilt-edged copy of the work. She was amazed, never having seen the piece before. Six months later she began preparing to present it.

Soloists were invited but then problems began. Novello, the publishing house which owned the rights to *Judith* in North America, was loath to make the score and orchestral parts available. Then began a larger project of creating a digital version as two of Martin's grad students converted over 400 pages.

All this came together on May 3 in the Royal Conservatory of Music's Koerner Hall, with a Parry scholar from Durham University (UK) in attendance. Jeremy Dibble, who has been studying and writing about Parry since 1980, had never seen *Judith* performed. He gave a half-hour lecture about Parry and *Judith* before the performance.

And a glorious performance it was. Almost operatic in the drama of the story and the emotion of the four soloists, the sell-out crowd was treated to the "Toronto Mennonite choir" telling the morally ambiguous story of *Judith*.

Parry set the story during the time of Manasseh, a Jewish king who led his people to worship the gods of the people around them. In a powerful solo Meshullemeth the queen retells the story of the Jews' redemption from Egypt to her four sons. Soloist Jillian Yemen (mezzo-soprano) sang to four young singers from the St. Michael's Choir School playing the king's sons. Their trust in their father, who had just agreed to sacrifice them, tugged at the audience's heart strings. The sacrifice is thwarted by an Assyrian attack at the end of the first act.

As the second act opens, Manasseh,

sung by tenor David Menzies, is repentant. As Manasseh and the people return to Jehovah, the Assyrians read this as rebellion and besiege Jerusalem again.

Shannon Mercer, soprano, having changed from her dark "widow's gown" of the first act to a brightly coloured gown, emboldens the Jews not to listen to the Assyrian messenger (sung by baritone Michael York) who is disdainful of Jehovah and Manasseh. The seduction and murder happen off-stage, but *Judith* returns, entreating the Jews to hang Holofernes' head from the battlements and to prepare to rout the Assyrians. A long chorus of praise to Jehovah is almost anti-climactic at the end. In spite of that the Toronto crowd gave an enthusiastic ovation, calling Martin and the soloists back three times.

So why did the "Toronto Mennonite Choir" present a non-biblical oratorio which glorifies seduction and murder? Martin notes that the story poses powerful questions about the death of one to save many. She believes that artists have the role of framing difficult questions and do not necessarily answer those for the audience. The Bible, she notes, is full of "bad-ass people" and poses more questions than it answers.

Judith's story also ranks among the few female heroines in the Biblical-historical record, along with Jael and Deborah, who save their people. The story also encourages the listeners to think about what they are doing in the present which will effect their children and future generations.

This performance was videotaped and recorded with the hope of creating DVD and CD versions in the future. Fundraising is underway to support this project. ♫



Soloist Jillian Yemen (mezzo-soprano) sings to four young singers from the St. Michael's Choir School who played the king's sons in the Pax Christi Chorale's May 3 performance of Parry's *Judith*.

/// Briefly noted

Mennonite potluck photos solicited

KITCHENER, Ont.—MennoMedia is sponsoring a “Best Church Potlucks Ever” photo contest with prizes of Mennonite cookbooks. To participate, take a mouthwateringly good photo of a food dish, get permission to share the name of the person who made the dish and submit the photo by email (as a .jpg attachment), including the names of the photographer, cook, church, and church address. Additionally, in your email send a statement of 50 words or less stating why your church enjoys eating together. What happens at your potluck besides the food? By submitting a photo and statement, you give permission for your entry to possibly be used in a future blog post for Mennonite Community Cookbook blog (www.mennonitecommunitycookbook.com) and on the Third Way website (www.thirdway.com). Deadline is June 15, 2015, 11:59 p.m. Send to Third Way and Mennonite Community Cookbook blog editor Melodie Davis at MelodieD@MennoMedia.org. Persons or churches do not have to be Mennonite to enter or win, but the contest is especially seeking Mennonite entries. Photographs of dishes from a small group or Sunday school potluck or picnic are also acceptable.

—MennoMedia



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/// Briefly noted

New Foodgrains Bank coordinator appointed in Ontario

David Epp of Leamington, Ont., has been appointed regional coordinator for Ontario for Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Epp is a third-generation tomato farmer and has grown grain and oilseed crops as well as other vegetables and edible bean


crops. Epp has served for many years on the Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers board, the provincial crown agency Agricorp board, the Leamington chapter of Mennonite Economic Development associates, the UMEI

Christian High School board, and also on various committees in his church—Leamington United Mennonite. He and his wife Charlene, have four adult children. Epp will begin his new role on May 19. He replaces David and Kathryn Mayberry, who served in that capacity since 1998.

—Amanda Thorsteinsson

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CMU graduate from Kenya wants to make a difference at home

'Change is inevitable,' says Joseph Kiranto

BY DANIEL FRIESEN

Special to Young Voices

This article is the first in a series called Voice of the Marginalized. These articles were written by students in Canadian Mennonite University's Journalism: Principles and Practice course. Voice of the Marginalized connected writers with people on the margins of the community. Teacher Carl DeGurse is vice-chair of Canadian Mennonite's board of directors and an assignment editor at the Winnipeg Free Press.

Making lasting change in your community can seem like an overwhelming task. This hasn't stopped Joseph Kiranto from dreaming and working to improve the quality of life for people in his home country of Kenya.

Kiranto, 31, who recently graduated from Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) with a degree in peace and conflict transformation studies, has a passion for activism and development. He first came to Canada six years ago with Mennonite Central Committee's International Volunteer Exchange Program, and returned home inspired and optimistic to bring about positive change in his community. He returned to Canada with his wife, Elizabeth, and son, Joel, in 2012 to pursue peace and theology studies at CMU.

"When I first came to Canada, that's when I first started dreaming about what I could do," Kiranto says. "I only dream about those problems when I'm removed from them [in Canada]. I can think now about what to do in the future because the problem is removed from me."

Kiranto credits CMU with teaching him "how to humbly bring change." Studying peace and conflict transformation has taught him how to be patient in dialogue and how to talk to people so that ideas come from them instead of from outside



Daniel Friesen

their community.

Kiranto is a Maasai, an ethnic group that lives predominantly in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. This was not always the case. The Maasai were forced to move by the British in the early twentieth century from some of the most fertile land, near Nairobi, to a much drier climate in the south of

Kenya. The Maasai are feeling the negative effects of this forced relocation to this day.

The Maasai are traditionally cattle farmers. The drier climate forced them to adopt a nomadic lifestyle to have access to water by following the rain. This practice has become increasingly unsustainable due to the Maasai's territory being reduced and an unpredictable climate.

Kiranto says the most pressing need for people in his community is easy and reliable access to water.

"I've always heard people say water is life, but in Canada, other things can be life because we have water," Kiranto says. A large portion of Kenya has been experiencing a drought for nearly two-and-a-half years. The Kenyan government estimates it is affecting 1.6 million people.

There are currently two main sources of water for people in southern Kenya: infrequent rain and a pipeline from a stream in the highlands. These two sources are insufficient, though. Many people walk up

PHOTO COURTESY OF CMU



Joseph Kiranto (red t-shirt) stands with his family (from left: Elizabeth, Joy, Joel and Kaleb) at a CMU event last September. The Kirantos moved from Kenya so that Joseph could study at CMU.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CMU



Joseph Kiranto was the valedictorian for CMU's Class of 2015. He wants to use his training in peace and conflict transformation to make a difference in his home country.

to 40 kilometres daily to get water.

Kiranto sees two main ways to improve water security for these families. The first is to institute programs to organize efficient collection of rainwater. The second is to lobby the government to raise the pipeline to increase its supply range. He feels optimistic that this will be an achievable goal when he returns home.

Lack of water also affects food security. Farmers are being encouraged to practice mixed farming: growing crops that require little water in addition to raising cattle. Mixed farming provides a much more sustainable and reliable livelihood. Two potential sources of income mean that a family can still maintain a decent standard of living if either the cattle or crops have a bad year.

Another significant issue is a high rate of HIV among young people. A United Nations study from 2013 estimated that up to 6.6 percent of people ages 15-49 were living with the virus, compared to an estimated 0.4 percent in Canada in the same demographic.

The high prevalence of HIV means many are unable to work and that food production and community development suffer. Kiranto says food production and public health are essentially tied to one another.

He sees the need for what he calls a "holistic ministry": combining HIV prevention education and sustainable agriculture practices in order to most effectively help communities improve their quality of life.

"For this development to happen, someone with ideas can't develop them. The people need to think of ways to serve their own problems," Kiranto says. After he returned home the first time from Canada, people in his community were resistant to his ideas. They saw him as trying to bring in new traditions from outside that did not fit into their way of life.

Though the situation can seem hopeless at times, Kiranto sees a small but continuous rate of success. "Change is inevitable," he says, adding that the few people who find success and a better life with each program can inspire and educate others in their community towards a better life.

It is this small, yet continuous, movement towards improvement that gives Kiranto the drive and hope to continue working to improve the quality of life for people in Kenya.

Daniel Friesen, 22, is a music student at CMU. He worships at Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

'This will lead to dancing'

Theatre of the Beat to tackle sexuality in new play

BY RACHEL BERGEN

Young Voices Co-Editor

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHNNY WIDEMAN



Johnny Wideman

There's a running joke in the church that Mennonites don't dance because it could lead to sex. After many requests, Ontario's Theatre of the Beat is tackling one of the most debated aspects of the topic in an upcoming play.

The company says it's one of the most radical plays it's ever undertaken. *This Will Lead to Dancing* is an original play about LGBT inclusion in the church.

"We're trying to figure out why our sexuality and spirituality are supposedly sworn enemies of each other," explains Johnny Wideman, the creative director

of the theatre company and the playwright. Wideman, 27, attends Community Mennonite Church in Stouffville, Ont. He says the company has often been asked if they will broach the subject of homosexuality in the church.

Wideman is in the process of writing the play that centres around two youth who decide to go on a hunger strike at their church, camping out in their youth room to draw attention to the subject. The teenagers get significant media attention for their efforts, and before long the world is watching this small church to see how it

handles the situation.

Wideman says he interviewed a number of people from the Mennonite LGBT community and is using their stories to inform his writing.

“They’ve shared their stories and insights as well as struggles, insecurities, and hopes. Those stories have become the backbone of the play,” he says.

Rebecca Steiner, 25, attends Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg and is the general director of the theatre company. She says all of the company’s other plays have been sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Church Canada, or Mennonite post-secondary institutions. *This Will Lead to Dancing* is the first independent production that Theatre of the Beat has undertaken that the company plans to tour extensively.

Theatre of the Beat is seeking charitable status so it can apply for grants and subsidies to continue its unique kind of theatre. It’s also hoping to raise money to fund this particular play.

Peacebuilding through theatre

The Mennonite church has been at odds like this before. However, Wideman and Steiner say the conflict surrounding same-sex relationships, marriage, and inclusion is a hot topic lately. Wideman says Theatre of the Beat is no stranger to addressing contentious subjects like this. He says the company is ready to get its hands dirty, and theatre is a unique way to approach peacebuilding.

“We build walls with our emotions, or we build walls with our theology, and theatre brings those walls down,” he says. “Typically we don’t get to see real emotion. We’re very guarded people and we don’t always share our stories, but in theatre, because they’re characters and because

it’s dramatized, we’re allowed to engage in those stories more vulnerably and honestly,” he adds. The theatre company hopes the play will be a way to forge ahead in the debate and help people to budge from their entrenched views.

Steiner and Wideman say they’re a bit nervous to undertake such a play but feel compelled to enter into the dialogue because it’s a social justice issue.

“For us to turn a blind eye to injustice and to not use our skills for those things would be a big no-no for us,” Wideman says. “It’s part of our calling.”

Being gadflies in 2015

Theatre of the Beat’s first, and arguably most popular play, *Gadfly*, follows the story of Sam Steiner from marching with Martin Luther King Jr. to dodging the draft in World War Two. The story is based on actual events and follows the main character as he tries to make sense of his faith in the challenging political landscape of the day.

A gadfly is a person who upsets the status quo by posing upsetting or novel questions; that’s exactly what the members of Theatre of the Beat work to do.

“It inspired our aesthetic. It inspired us to be gadflies in today’s context,” says Steiner, who wrote and directed *Gadfly*.

The company did a read-through of the first draft of the new script recently and asked a small group of people for feedback.

“We don’t want it to alienate people, and hope this won’t be a cause for a loss of support. We want the play to build bridges and get people talking,” Steiner says.

Theatre of the Beat hopes to do a national tour of *This Will Lead to Dancing* this fall. For more information, or to host a performance at your church, visit the website at www.theatreofthebeat.ca. ☺



Rebecca Steiner

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHNNY WIDEMAN



Jen Pogue (left), Benjamin Wert, Kimberlee Walker, Sukhpreet Sangha, Meagan Tuck and Adam Proulx read through the first draft of This Will Lead to Dancing for a small audience to gain feedback.

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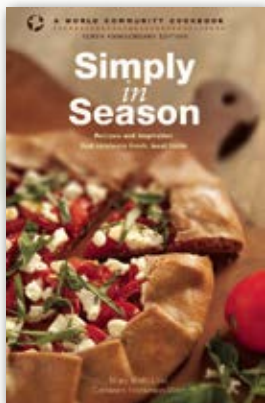
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Photo: Dominique Burgunder-Johnson, director of digital innovation at Sierra Club

Calendar

British Columbia

Oct. 16-18: MC B.C. ladies retreat at Camp Squeah, Hope.

Nov. 13-15: Senior Youth Impact Retreat, at Camp Squeah, Hope.

Alberta

June 3: All-day heritage retreat for people 50-plus, at Camp Valaqua, Water Valley, with MCC storyteller Abe Janzen and the Corpus Christi Male Chorus. To register, e-mail Hugo Neufeld at hdneufeld@shaw.ca or call 403-201-4358.

June 5-6: MCC Alberta charity auction and sale, at the Didsbury Sportsplex. For more information, visit mccreliefsale.com.

Saskatchewan

June 26,27: RJC year-end musical performances.

Manitoba

Until June 20: Mennonite Heritage Centre and Gallery exhibit “A Place in the Kingdom: Paintings and Heritage Stories Celebrating Farm Animals” by artist Lynda Toews.

June 7: Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, hosts the Lions Car Show. For more information, visit www.MHV.ca.

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

June 13: Fifth annual Mennonite Heritage Village/Eden Foundation Tractor Trek fundraising event. For more information, visit www.MHV.ca.

July 1: Celebrate Canada Day at Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach. For more information, visit www.MHV.ca.

July 4: “Cycle Clear Lake,” an MCC Manitoba fundraiser, at Riding Mountain National Park. Registration deadline is June 4. To sign up, visit mccmanitoba.ca/cycleclearlake.

July 8: 13th annual MCC Manitoba golf tournament at Bridges Golf Course, Starbuck. In support of MCC’s Global Family program. To register, visit mccmanitoba.ca/golf.

July 13-17: Pioneer Day Camp at Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach,

for children aged 5 to 8. Register early. For more information, visit www.MHV.ca.

Ontario

June 2: The Detweiler Meetinghouse near Roseville hosts the ninth annual “Shaped Note Singing from the Harmonia Sacra Singing School and Hymn Book” event, at 2:30 p.m. For more information, call Laurence Martin at 519-208-4591.

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. Participants are to bring their own lunch. Call 519-893-7726.

June 3 and 10: Auditions for 2015-2016 season of Inter-Mennonite Children’s Choir for ages 6-14. Visit mennosingers.com/imcc or email imcc.conductor@rogers.com for more information.

June 9: Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg, hosts its annual fundraising chicken barbecue and pie auction, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Advance tickets required; available by phone at 519-625-8602 or e-mail at info@hiddenacres.ca.

June 10: “Fairview’s got talent,” a talent showcase by seniors at Fairview Mennonite Home, Cambridge. Everyone welcome. For more information call 519-653-5719.

June 13: Mennonite Historical Society bus trip to Leamington to learn about “The Mennonite Experience in Essex County.” Bus leaves Kitchener at 8 a.m. For more information visit mhso.org or call 519-884-1040.

June 18: MCC Ontario annual general meeting at Sommerfeld Mennonite Church, Aylmer, at 6 p.m. For more information, or to register, call 519-745-8458 or visit mcccanada.ca/Ontario-agm.

June 20: Annual strawberry social at Nithview Community, New Hamburg, from 2 to 4 p.m. and from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

June 20: MennoHomes “Out-spok’n for Affordable Housing” bike-a-thon, at Elmira Mennonite Church. Options for hikers, cyclists and motorcyclists. For more information, contact Dan Driedger at 226-476-2535 or ddriedger@mennohomes.com.

June 21: Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite celebrates its 90th anniversary with a worship service at 9:30 a.m., a historical display of church history ("Journey through the decades"), a fellowship lunch and a time capsule. For more information, call 519-578-0660 or visit wkumchurch.ca/events.html.

June 24: Strawberry social at Fairview Mennonite Home, Cambridge, with vocal and hand bell choirs at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Strawberry pie served after

each program. Everyone welcome. For more information call 519-653-5719.

June 26-28: Family camping weekend at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. Pitch a tent, park a trailer or stay in a cabin. For more information, or to reserve a cabin, call 519-625-8602 or e-mail info@hiddenacres.ca.

U.S.

July 21-16: Mennonite World Conference Assembly at Harrisburg, Pa.

Aug. 20-23: 14th annual Bridgefolk (Mennonite-Catholic) conference, "Ecumenical healing and the mystery of the communion saints," at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind. Keynote speakers: Nozomu Yamada and Father Alfonso Fausone, both from the Nanzan University, Japan. For more information, visit www.bridgefolk.net.

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. For more Calendar listings online, visit canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.



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Menno Simons Christian School serves approximately 215 students from Grades K-9. The school is located in southwest Calgary, Alberta, and has a community committed to supporting student learning and teaches from the Anabaptist Mennonite faith perspective. To find out more about Menno Simons Christian School, visit mennosimonschristianschool.ca. For more information on the Vice-Principal position and for applying, go to pallisersd.ab.ca by May 29th, 2015.



Employment opportunity

Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church is seeking an experienced full-time lead pastor for our congregation. We are a church of approximately 300 regular attenders worshipping in a blended style with an outreach ministry to many elderly members at various offsite locations. We follow the traditional, Biblical understanding of marriage.

We are a church in the city of Winkler, Manitoba, located approximately 1.5 hours south of Winnipeg. We are looking for a pastor with the leadership qualities to lead us in living out our vision and mission statements.

Vision statement:

To align ourselves with God's intentions for our world, our community and our church.

Mission statement:

The Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church is part of the body of Christ, bonded together in love and fellowship, to worship and praise God, to nurture and train its members, to be a responsible and caring community of faith, to express its faith commitment in service to one another, and individually and corporately serve, witness and evangelize in our community and beyond.

Please contact Alvin Thiessen, Search Committee Chair, at: thiessenfam@yahoo.com, by June 1, 2015.

www.wbmc.ca

Employment Opportunity

Zion Mennonite Church, Swift Current, Saskatchewan, is seeking a full or part-time pastor or pastoral couple. We are a church of approximately 70 attenders, most over the age of 50 in a city of 17,000 in the southwest part of our province.



We are in need of leadership focused on outreach with a view to revitalize and build the church into the future. The current pastor will retire no later than April 1, 2016. We will consider all applications and options related to our mission within the next twelve months. Please contact search committee member Grace Funk at the church office: Mail address: 78 - 6 Ave. NE, Swift Current, SK S9H 2L7; email: zion@sasktel.net; telephone: 306-773-4770. Website: zionmennonite.ca.

Snapshots

PHOTO COURTESY OF MCC



Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is distributing aid to those affected by the earthquake in Nepal on April 25. Here Hari Ghimire and his wife Nirmala of eastern Nepal hold the tarp and sleeping mats they received from MCC through the local organization, Rural Institution of Community Development. MCC has committed an initial \$500,000 to the emergency response. Leah Reesor-Keller, an MCC co-representative in Nepal from Erb Street Mennonite Church in Waterloo, Ont., reported that up to 90 percent of homes in some rural areas are destroyed. MCC has had an active presence in Nepal since the 1950s.

Some members of First United Mennonite Church in Vancouver offered Easter breads to their neighbours at a Sikh festival on April 11. Assuming God is already at work in their neighbourhoods, 40 representatives from six congregations gathered at the church at a Forge Canada event to discuss how to more intentionally discover God at work in their communities and to open themselves to the hospitality of their neighbours. During the seminar, other members of FUMC served paska and hot cross buns at a local Visakhi festival, which is a Sikh harvest celebration where hospitality to neighbours is shown by serving free food.

PHOTO AND STORY BY AFTEN THIESSEN

