

CANADIAN MENNONITE

October 12, 2015
Volume 19 Number 20



Let the
children come!

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EDITORIAL

The downside of digital

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

Some days I would like to just unplug my computer, walk out into the sunshine and warmth of an autumn day, breathe in the clear air and pretend I was living in a time before the Internet. Find a close friend and chat face to face, rather than “like” his thoughts on Facebook.

Wouldn't it be a pleasant change to once again feel the warmth and light of human interaction—the smile, the spontaneous laughter, the furrowed brow indicating a question or disapproval, the handclasp or tap on the shoulder—rather than living day by day staring at a screen that, yes, opens you up to a whole new world, but that brings you a lot of information you really didn't need to know for your well-being?

Would it be so bad if my world would be more confined to the community I know and love, rather than to know the intricacies of Vladimir Putin's over-reach for world power or all the reasons Bashar al-Assad must go as Syria's head of state? Or of all the pundits' analysis of who will win the federal election and why?

But some might ask, how could you be so parochial as to bury your head in the sand when the world is now a global village where events in one faraway place certainly affect your own world? How could you be so provincial as to think

your tiny community is unhooked from the rest of the world?



Of course, it isn't. But for a brief moment, allow me to enjoy the fantasy that I could get off this fast-moving train and take a walk into the dense woods somewhere and hear only the sounds of nature—the wind in the trees, the

birdsong, the caw-caw of the crow, the low bellowing of a cow in the distance, the chirping of a squirrel, the stealthy crackling step of a deer.

I am not alone with my yearnings. In her recent column in the *Washington Post*, Brigid Schulte, overwhelmed by technology, has discovered “forest bathing” as a way for stressed-out, plugged-in, tech-addicted people to find calm. The executive director of a program called Wilderness School likens our modern addiction to technology to being caught in a spider's web.

“A spider injects its prey with poison, which doesn't kill, but merely immobilizes. The heart still beats as the spider feeds. Just like a plugged-in lifestyle lulls you into a kind of waking sleep,” says Warren Moon.

In the past few years, Schulte says her relationship with technology has changed utterly, and not for the better, as journalism has gone digital. “The worth of our stories is judged more and more by

the digital traffic we drive, and the pressure to become a ‘brand’ with a big and social media following has intensified.”

She readily admits that “sharing our stories widely helps us understand our world, makes apparent what binds us together as humans when it's so easy to forget, and has the power to change things for the better.” But she also says she comes from an era when the story, not the storyteller, was paramount.

That got me thinking about our own conversation in the Mennonite faith community, the one we compare to coming together in the “village square”—the stories that continually shape our values, our core beliefs, our identity as followers of Jesus in a rapidly changing culture. And yes, we are not only a member of our local church and community, but a part of a worldwide communion—as we celebrated this summer in Harrisburg, Pa.

And yes, a Facebook group page can help a congregation communicate better, as Doreen Martens pointed out in a guest editorial. But we should not forget that person-to-person communication is the best way to bind us together in our faith, and at the local level. We are our most authentic selves in this venue. The rules of engagement are most effective when we can look each other in the eye, convey our true feelings accompanied by facial expressions, tone of voice, a handclasp, a tap of affection on the shoulder, even a hug of affirmation.

These are not the tools of Facebook and Twitter. That communication is distant, impersonal and many times superficial. The digital venue may broaden our world, but it also allows for inappropriate animosity, cynicism and vitriol, none of which contribute to binding us together.

ABOUT THE COVER:

Max Reinhardt has to stretch to cut one of many ribbons at the opening of the new playground at Bergthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury, Alta. The playground is open to the whole community and is maintained by the church. See story and more photos on page 15. Even more photos online at canadianmennonite.org/let-children-come.



PHOTO: FRANK DABBS, DIDSBURY REVIEW

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Hebrews 10:23-25 • Accuracy, fairness, balance • Editorial freedom •
Seeking and speaking the truth in love • Open hearts and minds in discerning God's will
• Covenantal relationships and mutual accountability

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Award-winning
member of the
Canadian Church Press



GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD FEATURE

A tale of two ethnic groups

Why Mennonite descendants of immigrants to Canada a century ago have no right to oppose the arrival of Syrian refugees today

BY KIRA OLFERT

It hums in me when I hear people of Mennonite origin scoff at the idea of Syrian refugees coming to Canada, because when I look at those huddled masses I think to myself, 'that was us 100 years ago.'

To start, a little bit of history.

The Mennonites evolved out of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. As Anabaptist pacifists who practised adult baptism, they often held themselves apart from the surrounding communities, and in turn often had trouble finding safe havens. They were persecuted by Catholics and Protestants alike, but in this persecution they found strength of conviction.

By the mid-1700s, a large group of Mennonites had settled in Prussia, where they were granted a military exemption by Frederick the Great. His son, Frederick II, intended to end that exemption. Thankfully, at around the same time, Tsarina Catherine the Great of Russia invited the Mennonites to come and settle the large swaths of agricultural land in the area around what is now Ukraine. According to historian Frank Epp, 10,000 Prussian Mennonites moved to Russia in a 60-year period. Both sides of my father's family were among those numbers.

For almost the next 100 years, Mennonites farmed and prospered. But in 1870, the Tsar began to rescind the Mennonites' military exemption, and a small group left for the New World. Most stayed behind. During the First World War, most Russian Mennonite men chose alternative service, rather than take up arms. During the Russian Revolution, Mennonites supported the White armies, and as such were made targets by the Red armies and anarchist troops. In particular, Nestor Makhno and his bandits terrorized the Mennonites, raping, robbing and murdering people and destroying villages.

Mennonites found themselves dispossessed. During the ensuing Soviet years of collectivization, Mennonites were marginalized and starved. Those who spoke too loudly of opposition were arrested and disappeared in the Siberian Gulag, never to be heard from again.

My great-grandfather, Peter Warkentin, was a Mennonite minister in the village of Karpowka, in the Memrik settlement in what is now Ukraine. He watched his peers and family members being tortured, killed and taken away.

At around the same time in Canada, David Toews was working



Arrival of the first group of Russian Mennonite immigrants in Rosthern, Sask., on July 23, 1923.

to get the federal government, under Tory Prime Minister Arthur Meighen, to lift restrictions concerning Mennonite immigration. Canadians did not trust the pacifist Mennonites. The fact that they were German and Canada had just come through the First World War did not help. When Meighen was replaced by William Lyon Mackenzie King's Liberal government in 1921, the restrictions were lifted. Eventually, 21,000 German Mennonites from the former Soviet colonies would emigrate to Canada.

My great-grandfather and his family were among the lucky ones. After being questioned in his home about his feelings toward the Soviet government in 1927, Peter, his wife Helena, who was six months pregnant, and the first five of their 10 children fled in the middle of the night. They left with what they could carry. My own grandma, who was four at the time, remembers that her job was to carry the chamber pot. It was a horrible journey.

For years after they got here, the Mennonites and "the English" did not mix. The Canadians did not trust the strange, German group and the Mennonites did not trust their worldly neighbours.

Assimilation did not come easily, especially for the immigrants from the 1870s. In his study called "Group settlements: Ethnic communities in Western Canada," as quoted in Frank Epp's *Mennonites in Canada*, Carl Addington Dawson found that those Mennonites who wanted better farming opportunities went to the United States. Those who wanted "religious lib-

If you, as an ethnic Mennonite, one who is alive and prosperous in a free country, do not support the Syrian refugees, I don't understand you.

erty at any price" went to Canada.

So the Mennonite communities insisted on keeping their own language and their own religions. They insisted on their own schools and kept to themselves. They refused to swear on the Bible, instead affirming that what they told was the truth. They would not baptize their children. Both Canadian Catholics and Protestants were wary of them.

During the Second World War, the vast majority of Canadian Mennonite

men declared themselves conscientious objectors, although some did serve their new country. Still, the community was viewed with mistrust. During the war, my great-grandmother received a photo of her younger brother, Daniel, in the uniform of the German forces he fought and ultimately died for. She hid the picture behind the stove pipe, so afraid some-

one would see it and report her, and the family would be arrested . . . or worse.

My dad has 61 first cousins. When he and my Anglican mom married in 1972, he was one of the first of those 61 to marry outside the faith. It was "a big thing."

Today, those "weird German Mennonites" are just another part of Canadian society. Through all of the mistrust, pain and confusion, Mennonites are now proud Canadians. They learned to trust the society around them. They

are Cabinet ministers. They are farmers. They are doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers and social workers. They contribute to the society they are now part of. They melded their history with their present and their future.

Mennonites must do the 'right thing'

This is part of my origin story. It has been resonating strongly with me lately.

It hums in me when I hear people of Mennonite origin scoff at the idea of Syrian refugees coming to Canada, because when I look at those huddled masses I think to myself, "that was us 100 years ago."

They, too, are dispossessed.

Like the Mennonites, the Syrians are different. Different religion, different way of doing things, different language. They are also fleeing from people who destroyed their homes and marginalized them, a group whose ideology does not allow for dissent or opposition. They were starved and terrorized. They are desperate. They are afraid.

Like the Mennonites, the Syrians are from a region that Canada has recently been at war with. Like the Mennonites, the Syrians just want a chance to live a safe and free life.

They are us 100 years ago.

"But," you are saying, "how do we know there aren't Islamic State members hiding among the refugees? We need to screen them!" And absolutely, we need to do that. But let's do it here. Let's bring them over here and then screen them, and anyone who is proven to have a dodgy history, ship them back.

But how can we in good conscience make children wait for safety while we screen the adults in inhumane conditions? My grandma's family was stopped at Halifax and had to wait there until a sister's illness got better. But even during the uncertainty of waiting in a strange place, they knew they were safe. Similarly, I know that Mennonites were viewed as Nazi sympathizers during the Second World War. And I'm sure some of them were. It must have been a confusing time for many of them. But they were still given the chance to prove themselves.

"But we're at war with the Syrians," you

might say. Well, no, we're not. We were at war in Afghanistan against Muslim extremists. At the moment, we are at war with Islamic State, not Syria. And in case you missed it, most Syrians didn't exactly roll out the carpet for Islamic State. And if the number of dead Syrians is any indication, the feeling was mutual. As Canadians, we don't like Islamic State. Neither do the Syrians. Hint: That's why they're fleeing. That and the bloody civil war.

For those who have lost friends, as we have, and family at the hands of Islamic extremists, I think you'd be hard pressed to find someone who would be better than the Syrians at commiserating with you. As a Mennonite, I am grateful the Canadian government let those German Mennonites into the country so soon after the war. If they hadn't, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't exist. Likely, neither would you, fellow Mennonite.

For these reasons, and because this was us 100 years ago, Mennonites need to lobby everyone we can lobby in support of these Syrians. We need to tell our origin stories to all who will listen so that people know that being different is nothing to fear. And while the transition will be difficult, different can become part of our normal. We need to do this, not just because many Mennonites call themselves Christians and this is the Christian thing

to do, but because it is the right thing to do. Because we owe our own good fortune, and our existence as Canadians and as humans, to a country that welcomed us in our time of need, even when it wasn't the popular thing to do.

If you, as an ethnic Mennonite, one who is alive and prosperous in a free country, do not support the Syrian refugees, I don't understand you. If you don't think that Syrians don't deserve the exact same chance as we do, I don't understand you, and I think you need to take a long, hard look at why you believe this. Ask yourself if you would have let your grandparents or great-grandparents into Canada 100 years ago. If the answer for that is yes but still no for the Syrians, I hope that someday you are forced to answer for that to the ghosts of those who died waiting. ❧



Originally published on Kira Olfert's Facebook page (on.b.me/1KBsHYR) on Sept. 18.

❧ For discussion

1. When and how did your forebears arrive in Canada? What were their challenges of language, housing and employment? What assistance did they receive in getting settled? How well have these stories of migration been retold and passed on through the generations?
2. Kira Olfert points out similarities between Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s and Syrian refugees today. Do you agree with her analysis? Do these similarities put people of Mennonite origin under an obligation to help other refugees?
3. How do you think Jesus would have responded to refugees? What are some things Jesus said to his followers to encourage them to help others in need? How would you respond if asked why you help others?
4. Has your congregation assisted refugees in the past? What were the joys and the challenges of sponsoring refugees? What should be Canada's policy toward refugees? What action could your congregation take to help a refugee family today?

—BY BARB DRAPER

VIEWPOINTS

/// Readers write

We welcome your comments and publish most letters from subscribers. Letters, to be kept to 300 words or less, are the opinion of the writer only and are not to be taken as endorsed by this magazine or the church. Please address issues rather than individuals; personal attacks will not appear in print or online. In light of the many recent letters on the topic of sexuality, we will edit any letter on this topic to a paragraph and post the rest online at www.canadian-mennonite.org. All letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Send them to letters@canadianmennonite.org and include the author's contact information and mailing address. Preference is given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

✉ Relationships in an age of 'impacts and outcomes'

RE: "THE FUTURE of MCC," Aug. 31, page 11.

Certainly relationship has been at the core of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) for many years. But is that still really the case?

I began my first MCC assignment in 1990 when we used to talk about the importance of drinking tea with the people and when village orientations were seen as critical to a successful cross-cultural experience. Great worth was placed on mutually transformed relationships as values and worldviews were challenged. At the same time, we did solid work: building dams, teaching students and planting measurable numbers of trees.

In 2012, I was invited to an administrative assignment with MCC in Africa, where I quickly discovered that not only were village orientations not part of the

(Continued on page 8)

FROM OUR LEADERS

Recapturing the momentum of reconciliation

BRANDER RAVEN McDONALD

Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission events, there has been limited movement and engagement for local churches with regard to first nation relationship development. Many have been asking, "What can we do next?" The better question is, "How can we be better in walking out this talk of reconciliation with our indigenous neighbours?" There are three levels of engagement we should pursue.

The first level is "talking about" first nation issues, history, culture, spirituality, language and the like. This level does not demand much in the area of relational development with our host indigenous peoples. We can watch videos, listen to music or informational CDs, and read books. This is where you pique interest in a future discussion with indigenous people.



The second level of engagement is "talking with" indigenous people. As local congregations, invite indigenous people to share their story. This may pique some interest in future relationship-building, but it is not real relationship development yet. It might be considered tokenism if that is where your engagement ends. This means moving past fear and stereotypes that need to be shed, in preparation for the hopes and plans of walking with indigenous neighbours.

The last level of engagement is "walking with" our indigenous neighbours. There needs to be self-examination individually as a congregant and as a church body on whether to venture forward in committing to the process of being a good neighbour. This is where real healing is done. It might simply be visitations to soccer games, a gym night of volleyball, a fishing trip or hiking, longhouse

gatherings, pow wows, someone needing a ride or meeting for tea. It's about being together, building trust and long-lasting relationships. This is the vital stage where you will be watched more closely as to how you are a representative of the Jesus Way. Indigenous people want to see Jesus in you, not the old negative stereotype that comes with a hierarchical paternalistic evangelical colonialism. This is the stage to be genuine about your heart with people as you walk together.

You need to be process-people without an agenda. Remaining flexible and teachable will help you to make better strides as you move toward walking with indigenous people and representing the Jesus Way more effectively. II Timothy 1:7 encourages us: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

By understanding that you are a learner and listener, it will give you the power to move forward in relationship without fear and will give you keen insight into the cultural protocols and distinctives, to be better relatives to indigenous people, and show that you are a person of the Jesus Way, maybe without even having to open your mouth. Blessings on your journey.

Brander Raven McDonald is MC B.C.'s indigenous relations coordinator.

(Continued from page 7)

current vocabulary, but the focus was now on impact and outcomes. All partner projects were measured using “indicators” that can be counted in order to assess whether a difference has been made.

Currently, one of the more common service-worker assignments is designed to help partners understand MCC’s proposal and report writing requirements,

whether for a \$3,000 or a \$300,000 project. This kind of accountability can often guide a project to greater impact, but, at the same time, its demands and time-consuming nature is sometimes won at the expense of relationships.

One long-term North American service worker, with decades of MCC experience, made the analogy to the pendulum and how MCC is trying to catch up

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Jesus in a world in upheaval

PHIL WAGLER

A number of weeks ago I boarded a plane in Toronto for Istanbul. It’s a long flight—more than nine hours—and I secretly hoped that the seat beside me would remain empty so I could stretch out and sleep. It wasn’t to be. A young man in his late 20s plopped down beside me. I did the polite thing and introduced myself. “I’m Armi,” he replied.

Armi was a very warm and fascinating travel companion. He is Iranian, doing Ph.D. studies in the Maritimes, and was on his way to meet his fiancé. We spent the next hour-and-a-half in rich, lively and humorous dialogue about the differences of life in our two countries. Sports, politics, family and religion came up. He is Muslim, of course, but freely admitted to eating pork and drinking alcohol, both taboos within Islam. He must have noticed that I was a little surprised by his consumption confessions.

“I’m a Muslim because I’m Iranian,” he clarified, “but I don’t believe and neither do any of my friends. I follow some practices to keep my mom happy. As long as I’m a good boy, that’s all that matters.”

If this sounds like the echo of a conversation you have with many twenty-somethings who grew up in the church in

North America, you would be right. Still, given what’s on the news and the stereotypes we assume, Armi’s Muslim agnosticism caught me off guard. We chatted further and I talked about the hope of Jesus in my life, and he was engaged and even curious, but I could sense that Armi represented a new challenge and opportunity in our times.

We live in an age of astounding and confounding people movements. The world is in upheaval, thousands upon thousands of displaced people—our brothers and sisters in Christ, Muslims and others—are running for their lives, seeking a safe place to live and make a living. That tragic image of an innocent tod-



But others—like the thousands of Muslims turning to follow Jesus in Germany, for instance—are hungry for grace, love and peace.

day child lifeless on a beach continues to both chill our bones and warm our hearts, and we must absolutely consider what we can do to welcome and show hospitality to the displaced.

And as those who confess hope in Jesus Christ, there is something else that cannot be ignored: In this moment

of time people who previously could not be introduced to the truth of Jesus Christ are not only open to conversation, but openly questioning what they have been raised to believe. Some, like Armi, are open about it and are as secularized and indifferent as any shrugging North American. But, others—like the thousands of Muslims turning to follow Jesus in Germany, for instance (bit.ly/1QKYHNR)—are hungry for grace, love and peace.

Church of Jesus Christ, embrace the stranger and love them unconditionally. But do not compromise on the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. Crucified, buried and alive, he is the hope of the nations who rage, and people are ready for him. He is both Saviour from sin and the Living Word who calls us to compassionate response. “Open your eyes and look at the fields,” said Jesus, “they are ripe for harvest” (John 4:35).

We Mennonites sometimes cringe at this kind of language. We like other things Jesus said a bit better. But we can’t take some words he said more seriously

than others. This is an unprecedented time. Look at the fields. And then get busy in, and for, Jesus’ name.

Phil Wagler lives in Surrey, B.C., where his church is enriched by multicultural diversity and always learning to love the stranger in, and for, the glory of Jesus.

to current “development practice” when actually the pendulum may already be swinging back to the area of MCC’s traditional strength: relationship.

DAVE KLASSEN, KITCHENER, ONT.

✉ Militarization of Canada concerns reader

RE: “MENNONITES SHOULD denounce Canadian arms sale” letter, Aug. 31, page 7.

I’m on the same page as David Shantz when it comes to wondering if Mennonite leaders and teachers have gone

(Continued on page 10)

NEW CANADIAN VOICE

Adopted and given my wings

NOAH ISHAKA

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

I was born in Bukavu in Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaïre).

My parents were polygamous so I didn’t have a great family structure. I grew up Roman Catholic and then, at age 17, I was baptized in the Pentecostal church. As a child, life in Congo was extremely difficult. I lived under the dictatorship of president Mobutu Sese Seko, who ruled for 32 years, and I witnessed the fall of his regime in 1997 to rebels led by Laurent Kabila with the support of Rwanda and Uganda.

We hoped that things could get better after Mobutu fled. Unfortunately, things went from bad to worse, as the second war broke out in 1998 between the government and the rebels who brought Kabila to power a year earlier. As a result, other African countries such as Zimbabwe, Angola, Chad and Namibia sent soldiers to Congo to help Kabila’s regime and the Congolese civil war became an “African World War.”

In 2001, Kabila was assassinated by his bodyguard and, strangely enough, his son Joseph Kabila, the current president, became leader of the country at the age of 29. Those chaotic political circumstances

led me to escape Congo and flee to South Africa.

Unfortunately, South Africa has its own problems caused by historical injustices and racial divisions. I never felt safe in South Africa because of xenophobia and the high rate of crime. I always wanted to leave Africa and go somewhere I could live in peace or complete my university studies. Finally, in 2008, I ended up in Canada as a refugee in the village of Floradale in southern Ontario.

Soon after I arrived in Canada, I joined



I am very grateful for all the opportunities that Canada has given me since I arrived

Floradale Mennonite Church and I can still remember the amazing welcoming spirit that I received there: people made me feel at home. One year later, I transferred my membership from the Pentecostal church and became a full member of this Mennonite community.

In my journey of faith the Mennonite church has helped me understand the concept of loving your neighbour and serving the community as a way of sharing God’s love. The Pentecostal church focussed more on building a personal

relationship with God and a strong emphasis was put on fasting, praying and worshipping God. Although I cherish and treasure those faith values, I admire the simplicity of Mennonites and their commitment to social justice issues.

I am very grateful for all the opportunities that Canada has given me since I arrived: my citizenship and education. I do not think that Canada is a destination of choice for many immigrants because of employment opportunities or prosperity, as many people assume. Rather, it is values such as democracy, the rule of law and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that make Canada unique and special.

When I ran away from Congo, I was not running away from poverty or unemployment, but I was running away from violence, corruption, dictatorship and human rights abuses. There is no price for peace.

It has been an amazing journey since I left Congo and for the eight years I have been in Canada. Through the church I met my wife Angela, and together we

are raising our three children. I graduated with degrees from the University of Waterloo and Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ont., and I now work for the Waterloo Region District School Board as an elementary teacher in Elmira, Ont. This spring I became a Canadian citizen.

There is no way I could have achieved all this by myself. I am very indebted to the wonderful people at Floradale Mennonite Church who adopted me as their own and have given me wings. Now I feel like I can fly.

(Continued from page 9)

into hiding on the issue of Canada's growing militarism. Our government's condemnation of American war resisters as criminally inadmissible within our borders and its multi-billion-dollar arms agreement with Saudi Arabia are just two examples of Canada's reputation as a peace-loving nation gone rogue. There is very little that the present government won't do to militarize Canada.

I would be far more interested in articles encouraging our young people to consider Christlike conscientious objection over militarism than I am in another article on disagreements within our denomination about biblical interpretations on matters of sexual orientation.

ERIC UNGER, WINNIPEG

✉ Mennonite foster parents weren't part of 'assimilation' strategy

RE: "MENNONITES HAVE yet to reckon with their role in 'sixties scoop,'" Sept. 14, page 20.

It was disappointing to read this article because the history of indigenous children in foster care in Manitoba is varied and complex. Blaming foster parents who provide much-needed care and nurture is short-sighted.

It is unfortunate that the article quoted Judge Kimmelman from the 1980s, but ignored current articles by Brian Giesbrecht, a now-retired provincial court judge in Manitoba from 1976 to 2007.

Writing in the Manitoba press earlier this year, Giesbrecht stated: "In the 1970s and '80s I was a judge hearing child welfare cases on a daily basis. . . . The agonizing choice facing a child welfare worker, then as now, was whether to leave a child in a substandard and possibly dangerous situation—and risk a tragedy—or remove the child from the home."

He continues: "The workers I worked with during that time period were some of the finest people I ever had the good fortunate work with. The workers were generally well-informed about cultural issues. . . . The child care workers, some of whom were aboriginal, went to extraordinary lengths to try to keep families together."

Working in Manitoba child welfare during those years, I'm well aware of the many caring and nurturing Mennonite foster parents who parented foster children. To suggest, as the article does, that placing indigenous children in non-indigenous families was part of the "Canadian government's strategy of assimilation" is nonsensical paranoid thinking.

A September 2015 Manitoba news item reports that first nation social workers are seizing an average of one newborn indigenous baby a day. This usually means a judge has decided that there are good reasons for removing the infant. Not much has changed over the past 40 years, and foster homes are still needed.

HENRY NEUFELD, DELTA, B.C.

✉ Editorial unfairly targets older Mennonites

EVERY ONCE IN a while I get quite exasperated with *Canadian Mennonite*. I take issue with the Aug. 31 editorial, "Young people—our national treasure," on page 2. While I agree with Dick Benner that our young people are very dear to us, as he says, they are a "national treasure," why could he not have written this without taking a swipe at our forefathers and elders?

He says our young people have a better education, have travelled more and are more tolerant and active than our older generation. This is possibly true, but who built our Bible schools, colleges and Canadian Mennonite University? Who pays for the travel, the tuition at these schools, not to mention the students' cars and computers? Is it not our parents and leaders like Bishop Toews, J.J. Thiessen and many others in their time?

The editor writes that the older generation was more preoccupied with "finely tuned theological statements" and "pietistic pontifications about personal salvation and discipleship," while the young generation of today are "shoe-leather" Christians who are more concerned with "being and doing."

I believe personal salvation is the most important thing for every person and then the work and serving will automatically follow. My father was born in Ukraine in 1900. He experienced all the horrors, death, disease and starvation of that time. He was ordained as a minister at 25. Here in Canada, even during extreme poverty and isolation, he fulfilled his voluntary ministry for more than 40 years. He often rode horseback on cold mornings for 20 kilometres to preach a sermon.

One summer our aunt wrote in her diary: "This morning Abram Martens walked to church (again 20 kilometres) because he was resting the horses." That was literal "shoe-leather" dedication!

CORNIE MARTENS, RABBIT LAKE, SASK.

/// Announcement

David "Doc" Schroeder passes away

David "Doc" Schroeder passed away on Sept. 27, 2015, at the age of 91. He was a well-respected church leader and professor of New Testament and ethics at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University) where he taught for 30 years. A full obituary will appear in the Oct. 26 issue.

VIEWPOINT

Finding my prophetic voice

VIC THIESSEN

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

When I was hired for the position of Mennonite Church Canada's chief administrative officer in April 2010, I was told that I didn't need to personally agree with everything in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, but I wasn't allowed to say anything in public that contradicted it. I disagreed with this policy, but wasn't surprised by it. Since graduating from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., I have spent 30 years working for Mennonite organizations and never felt free to speak openly about my views on contentious biblical or theological issues.

My personal views aside, does it make sense that those in our national church who have received the most training in Bible and theology—primarily pastors—are the least able to openly share the fruits of their learning? Clearly we are not, and do not want to be, a church where the leaders state the official position of the church and impose it on church members, but does that require leaders to stay silent about where their years of study have led them?

During my last four years at MC Canada, I discussed this question with Willard Metzger, MC Canada's executive director. He understood my frustration, but he agreed with the policy that prevents him and other church leaders from sharing their thoughts with the constituency if those thoughts contradict the national church's official documents. He believes that leaders should help create the space for people to hear each other's voices, including prophetic voices, rather than play a prophetic role themselves.

I respect his position, but disagree with it. In the end, my ongoing need

to honestly express my thoughts on theological issues led Metzger and me to conclude that it was time to end my employment at MC Canada; my last day was Nov. 30, 2014. He viewed this parting as an opportunity for me to freely express myself after an appropriate period of time outside of the strictures of denominational employment, and he even suggested that one way to do this might be to get more involved with the ecumenical festival that became Skylight.

That is precisely what happened, as early this spring I was asked to coordinate the first Skylight Festival, which was held in Paris, Ont., from July 31 to Aug. 2. A faith-based festival of talks, art and music, Skylight was intentionally patterned after U.K.'s Greenbelt Festival, which I have often described as the most exciting thing happening to Christianity in the United Kingdom.

My dream is that Skylight, with its distinctive safe space for asking questions and hearing diverse voices, might one day play a similar role in Canada. Every voice at Skylight is respected and all people are valued and fully affirmed, although the festival intentionally privileges historically marginalized voices: women, people of colour and sexual minorities. Like Greenbelt, Skylight is about the intersection of justice, peace, community and the arts. In other words, it feels thoroughly Anabaptist; five of the speakers/performers at Skylight this year were Mennonites.

MC Canada has been involved with Skylight from the start. The seeds of the festival were planted at a meeting of United Church of Canada and MC Canada leaders, which took place at Greenbelt in the summer of 2013 during an MC Canada learning tour to the U.K.,

and I'm thrilled that MC Canada and MC Eastern Canada remain involved and supportive.

Skylight 2015, which was viewed as a pilot, exceeded expectations. More than 250 people of all ages were on site and the feedback was unanimously enthusiastic. Attendees rated their overall impression of the festival between four and five out of five, and their comments included: "Skylight was heart-opening, generative and transformative!" and, "I left awe-struck, eager to come again."

This year's festival focussed on indigenous issues, peace issues and new ways of being church in the 21st century. Adrian Jacobs, a member of the local Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation, whose participation at Skylight was sponsored by MC Canada, was the festival's most popular speaker. His talks, along with the talk given by local Six Nations elder Rene Thomas Hill, left many people in tears and were frequently listed as highlights of the festival.

Matt Epp, a Toronto singer-songwriter also sponsored by MC Canada, was likewise listed as a highlight among the eight musicians/bands that performed. Epp has a great stage presence and the audience was captivated by his humble, down-to-earth and heartfelt comments, not to mention his great songs.

Plans are underway for Skylight 2016, which will be held in Paris from July 29 to Aug. 1. The ecumenical visioning team behind Skylight expects attendance will triple in 2016, and perhaps reach four figures, with the help of enthusiastic word-of-mouth, headliners like Martyn Joseph and a year to promote the festival.

My hope is that Canadian Mennonites will come to embrace and support the Skylight Festival in various ways in spite of perceptions of theological dissonance. It is an opportunity for us to lend our voices to the cutting-edge and prophetic discussion of what makes a church of integrity relevant to people—especially young people—in today's world. ❧

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Bailey—Ryan Daniel (b. Sept. 17, 2015), to Jeff and Ashley Bailey, North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Coppola—Matteo Asher (b. Sept. 13, 2015), to Vince and Anna Coppola, North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Dutta—Avery Kiran (b. July 3, 2015), to Tilak Dutta and Tonya Martin, St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont., in Toronto.

Dyck—Adley Paige (b. Sept. 13, 2015), to Matthew and Kersti-Jade Dyck, Morden Mennonite, Man.

Iera—Elora Maria (b. Aug. 28, 2015), to Candace Kroeker and Tony Iera, Faith Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Baptisms

Annika Dyck, Theophilus Wiederkehr, Lydia Dyck, Andre Wiederkehr—Hanover Mennonite, Ont., July 12, 2015.

Tyler Martens, Brett Martens, Gwendolyn Martens, Marijane Martens, Janelle Martens—Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite, Rabbit Lake, Sask., Sept. 6, 2015.

Marriages

Chapman/Schlueter—Scott Chapman and Michele Schlueter, at Poole Mennonite, Milverton, Ont., July 18, 2015.

Enns/Haase—Lisa Enns and Kent Haase, at Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg, Aug. 29, 2015.

Deaths

Baergen—Helen (nee Wiens), 91 (b. Nov. 5, 1923; d. Aug. 31, 2015), Tofield Mennonite, Alta.

Berg—Peter, 80, (b. Feb. 15, 1935; d. Sept. 18, 2015), Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Derksen—Frank, 97 (b. June 11, 1918; d. Sept. 12, 2015), Rosthern Mennonite, Sask.

Enns—Nellie, 86 (b. Sept. 6, 1929; d. Sept. 6, 2015), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Gingrich—Mervin, 88 (b. June 23, 1927; d. Sept. 18, 2015), Erb Street Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Klassen—Ida (Judith), 90 (b. June 27, 1925; d. Sept. 7, 2015), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Kuepfer—Levi, 72 (b. Feb. 17, 1943; d. Sept. 12, 2015), Riverdale Mennonite, Millbank, Ont.

Neufeldt—Eleanor (nee Weaver), 92 (b. Feb. 26, 1923; d. June 9, 2015), Coaldale Mennonite, Alta.

Penner—Rudy, 79 (Sept. 28, 1935; d. July 19, 2015), Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Petkau—Maria (nee Nickel), 96 (b. May 14, 1919; d. Sept. 4, 2015), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Taves—Selma (nee Neufeld), 89 (b. Sept. 2, 1925; d. Aug. 25, 2015), North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

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

A moment from yesterday



Students Miriam Schiedel, Douglas Snider, Bruce Jutzi, Elaine Cressman and Helen Shantz gather outside Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ont., in 1959. Students were aware that they were entering a new era, as the yearbook was infused with references to the Soviet spacecraft Sputnik and jokes about sending off the seniors with “one-way tickets to the moon.” Meanwhile, the Rockway administration was planning a four-classroom expansion to accommodate increased enrolment, and a group of local Mennonite leaders was proposing a new post-secondary school: Conrad Grebel College.

Photo: David L. Hunsberger/Mennonite Archives of Ontario

Text: Lauren Harder-Gissing, Mennonite Archives of Ontario



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GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD



A children's choir sings as part of the Abbotsford celebration of 40 years since refugees fled Vietnam for a new life in Canada.

Keeping alive stories of hope

Vietnamese 'boat people' and those who welcomed them express 'gratitude for 40 years in exile to Canada'

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

Forty years after refugees fled Vietnam and communist oppression for Canada's shores, the Vietnamese community in B.C. expressed gratitude to God at a celebratory evening on Aug. 30.

The event was co-sponsored by Vancouver Mennonite Church and Abbotsford's Emmanuel Mennonite and Vietnamese Christian churches, and was hosted by Emmanuel.

In welcoming the guests, April Yamasaki, Emmanuel's pastor, posed the question, "Is 'celebration' really the right word? This is a story of loss, a story of exile, painful in many, many ways."

Testimonies and tributes followed a buffet dinner of Asian food. Reg Reimer, who had

been a missionary to Vietnam and the first president of World Relief Canada, reminded the audience of the history of the "boat people" who had come from Southeast Asia in the 1970s. He showed a ship's compass that had been given to him by refugees, the only valuable thing they had. "The compass is symbolic," said Reimer, "as we were able to point thousands of refugees to the way, the truth and the life."

Later, Reimer gave a dual English and Vietnamese message entitled "What's mine is yours if you need it," based on the story of the Good Samaritan. "There are both victims and Samaritans here tonight," he observed.

Abbotsford Mayor Henry Braun

'The compass is symbolic, as we were able to point thousands of refugees to the way, the truth and the life.'
(Reg Reimer)

acknowledged the tremendous sacrifice of those Vietnamese people who travelled more than 10,000 kilometres, leaving behind family and way of life, to settle in a new land. He praised their "determination, strength and courage," and added, "We need to keep alive these stories of hope."

Ed Fast, Canada's minister for international trade and MP for Abbotsford, talked of God's faithfulness over 40 years following a "painful exile," and said, referring to the history of Mennonite migration, "We, as Mennonites, have so much in common with the Vietnamese."

Also on the program were a testimony by Dong Van Tran about his experience escaping on a boat with 65 refugees, a skit and several musical numbers by members of the Vietnamese community. An offering was taken for special needs in Vietnam. ❧

Leon Kehl campaigns for Syrian refugees

BY BARB DRAPER

Editorial Assistant
FLORADALE, ONT.

For years, Leon Kehl of Floradale (Ont.) Mennonite Church, has been working to build understanding and friendship between Christians and Muslims in Waterloo Region.

Long before the media carried stories about the flood of Syrian refugees trying to reach Europe, he was concerned about Syrians forced from their homes due to violence. He spearheaded the organization of a refugee sponsorship fund at Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario, and recently began a social media campaign to encourage Canadians to ask for a change in policy so that Syrian-Canadians can sponsor their family members to escape the war in Syria.

After Floradale Mennonite paid off its mortgage early in 2014, the rural congregation used subsequent estate gifts to establish a Generosity Fund. The first disbursement went to help Mennonite women from Asia travel to Mennonite World Conference assembly. In March, Kehl took on the position of chair of the missions commission at Floradale, and he soon had a new proposal for the Generosity Fund.

Floradale Mennonite last sponsored a refugee family about five years ago. It was challenging, partly because it is better for the family to be settled in a city, closer to others of their language and culture, but also because it made for long drives for the supporting volunteers. Kehl was aware that there are groups within Waterloo Region willing to do the resettlement work, but who need financial help. When he proposed that Floradale give \$20,000 per year for three years to MCC Ontario to kick-start a refugee sponsorship fund, the congregation agreed.

Kehl then worked with a team from MCC Ontario to establish this refugee fund that would give financial help to groups willing to do the resettlement work. MCC Ontario has added \$10,000 to the

fund and other individual donations have increased the amount available to support refugee sponsorships.

A local church has been approved to receive the first funds, but it has waited in vain for the refugee family to arrive. The family was expected in July and an apartment was rented, but at the end of September the family still hadn't arrived. Kehl said he finds the slow pace at which refugees are arriving in Canada discouraging.

Because Kehl has so many Muslim friends and acquaintances, he has been attending some of their fundraising efforts and religious celebrations. One event that touched him deeply was the tearful request of a young girl whose grandmother is trapped in Syria. Her home was destroyed by the war and her family fled, but she is too old to attempt the dangerous journey to Europe. Like other Syrian-Canadians, this girl's family is desperate to help their family member, but the present policy of Canada does not make family reunification possible.

Not knowing what to do, Kehl finally began a social media campaign to bring attention to people like this grandmother who have family in Canada more than willing to sponsor them. Using a take-off on the publicity for *The Martian* movie, Kehl made a poster that says, "Bring her to our home," and is asking people far and wide to spread the word on social media that they support Syrian refugees.

Kehl took his own mother to visit the Syrian-Canadian family whose daughter had asked him for help. Because there was a risk that the grandmother would be killed if the family was publicly identified, Kehl's mother agreed to be the face on the poster. He hopes his mother's face will be seen far and wide so more people will agree to support Syrian refugees. ❧



Staff change

Foodgrains Bank appoints new senior program officer

WINNIPEG — Miriam Harder has been appointed senior program officer in the international programs department at Canadian Foodgrains Bank, replacing Theresa



Miriam Harder

Rempel Mulaire, who is assuming the role of program manager for a new conservation agriculture grant and program. Harder brings several years of experience working with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Mexico and Central America, where she coordinated MCC's conservation agriculture projects in the region. She holds a master's degree in human geography from McGill University, a B.Sc. in land use and environmental studies from the University of Saskatchewan, and a bachelor's degree in international development from Canadian Mennonite University. Originally from Clavet, Sask., and a member of Pleasant Point Mennonite Church there, Harder began her new position in mid-September.

—Canadian Foodgrains Bank

GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

Let the children come!

Abandoned school playground equipment gets new life at Bergthal Mennonite Church

BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alberta Correspondent

Why would a church of predominantly greying members build a playground for children?

Betty Brown was thinking about children as she drove past the abandoned playground at Midway School in the summer of 2014, so she stopped in to ask a few questions. A year later, at a dedication celebration on Aug. 28, 46 children under the age of 12 were at Bergthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury, Alta., to enthusiastically cut the ribbons tied all over the equipment that had been relocated to the church grounds.

Built in 1953, Midway School served the farming community as an education and gathering place for 60 years, until dwindling student numbers and repair needs made it unfeasible to continue operations.

In 2014, oil pipeline welders Darcy MacKinnon, Steve Nowosad and Jeff McNall purchased the building to convert it into a manufacturing shop. Brown said that MacKinnon “wanted the community to have access to this [because] it had been part of the community. And we have a lot of young kids in our church.”

The company donated the playground equipment and approximately \$3,000 worth of pea gravel on which to place it on the church grounds. Volunteers from the church gave of their time, equipment and expertise to prepare the grounds and move the playground. Dwayne Derksen, Dave Loewen and Rob Loewen did the heavy work.

“It was in good shape, and came out of the ground quite easily, Dave Loewen said.

Denise Derksen said the playground is a “beginning of a way to reach more people. [We were] shocked to find out how many families [in the community] have young children that we didn’t even know about.”

The vision to serve the surrounding community is a key motivator behind the playground construction. Said Brown, “We wanted the community to know this is for everyone. We went around to every family [in the area] with kids and gave them an invitation.”

Loewen’s grandchildren are the fifth generation of his family to attend Bergthal Mennonite. “The church has been around a hundred and some years, and I’d like it to be there another hundred,” he said. “We need growth in the church and I think you have to start with young people.”

Tracy Brown Ewert, who attended Midway School as a child, led a song called “For This Special Playground We Give Thanks,” and Bergthal’s new pastor, Anna Lisa Salo, led out in prayer as community

DIDSBURY REVIEW PHOTOS BY FRANK DABBS



Isabelle Rion enjoys the new slide at the Bergthal Church community playground on Aug. 28.

and church members held hands around the playground. A hotdog roast rounded out the evening. ☘

Visit canadianmennonite.org/let-children-come for more photos.



On Aug. 28, Bergthal Mennonite Church celebrated the opening of a community playground on its rural property. The equipment was donated by the new owners of the local Midway School property. The school closed in 2013.

'A way of life' celebrated on Cow Sunday

Osler Mennonite Church marks the end of an agricultural era

By DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent
OSLER, SASK.

"Dairy farming is not just a job," said Lloyd Sawatzky, "It is a way of life." For members of Osler Mennonite Church, dairy farming is a way of life that has come to an end. In August, Harry and

Eva Martens sold their 150-cow herd to join the ranks of the retired. They were the last remaining dairy farmers in a congregation that once boasted up to 30 of them.

Recognizing the impact dairy

farming has had on the congregation, Osler Mennonite designated Sept. 27 as Cow Sunday. Congregants were encouraged to wear cow-related clothing. At coffee time between the Sunday school hour and worship, they savoured yogurt and ice cream. They browsed memorabilia displays, which included butter churns, glass milk bottles, cattle show trophies and photos of prize-winning cows.

During worship, Dick Braun shared a history of dairy farming and former dairy farmers told what their livelihood meant to them. Sawatzky and his wife Loretta were among them. "After Bible school I framed houses for a time and it was then that I realized that dairy farming was what I wanted to do," he said. "I was happiest working with cows."

Although Loretta did not grow up on a farm, as her husband did, she was game to try. "It was a steep learning curve for me," she said, "but I was up for the challenge and gave it my all. I have always been grateful that the cows gave me the opportunity to work at home and raise a family on the farm."

The family aspect was significant for Sawatzky as well. Dairy farming "allowed us to work together as a family," he said. Raising and showing calves through the local 4-H Club taught his children to work and helped them acquire valuable skills.

The dairy lifestyle impacted church programming. Events had to be scheduled so as not to conflict with milking times. "The church schedule was set up so that those people could go home and milk or that they could be there on time after milking," Braun recalled. Milking times were not flexible because, as Braun noted, "cows have a very good internal clock" and prefer punctuality.

The day-in-and-day-out nature of dairy farming could be challenging. Rising early to milk cows often meant farmers were sleepy during worship. "It was not uncommon to see a few heads nodding off during services," said Braun, "and you could be assured it was not just because they were agreeing with what was being said!"

To help them cope with the challenges of their lifestyle, farmers turned to each other. "We were part of a close-knit group of dairy farmers who all struggled with

PHOTOS BY ADELINE COX



Butter churns and cream separators decorate the sanctuary of Osler (Sask.) Mennonite Church as the congregation celebrates Cow Sunday on Sept. 27. Pastor Patty Friesen, wearing black and white in honour of the Holstein cow, is behind the pulpit. Seated behind Friesen are Dick Braun, who shared a history of dairy farming during the service, and song leader Kevin Boldt, who grew up on a dairy farm.

a seven-day work week,” said Sawatzky. Although no longer milking cows, he said, “We still value those friendships and our common connection is the dairy cow.”

At the intersection of farming and faith there was commitment. It took commitment to milk a herd of cows day after day, year after year. That same commitment applied to church involvement. “You had to be there,” said Martens.

Getting up early to milk cows was not an excuse to miss church on Sunday mornings. “We have always made time for church, no matter how crazy busy things were,” said Sawatzky. “This community of believers has always been important to us. Worshipping God together and supporting our many programs and committees has strengthened our faith.”

Dairy farming also fostered an appreciation for God’s creation and the need to care for it. “Dairy farmers are known to treat their animals very well,” said Braun. “If a cow is mistreated, the first thing [she] does is cut back on milk production, and there goes the profit.”

Harry Martens agreed, saying that dairy farming taught him to be kind to animals. “If there’s a heaven for cows,” he said, “I

think our cows would be there because they fed a lot of hungry children.”

Adding a sense of wonder to these observations, Sawatzky cited Job 12:10 when he said, “Watching a calf being born is a reminder that ‘in God’s hand is the life of

every creature and the breath of all mankind.””

Visit canadianmennonite.org/cow-sunday for more photos.



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Osler Mennonite Church pastor Patty Friesen enjoys a visit to the Martens farm in August, before the couple sold their herd.

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'We are in a heap of trouble'

Same-sex event grapples with key passages, deep divisions

BY WILL BRAUN
Senior Writer

Two hundred people spent a sunny Saturday at Morden Mennonite Church in southern Manitoba to look squarely at how the church can deal with its same-sex crisis.

"Biblical marriage texts clearly envision marriage as a relationship between man and woman. Some of us believe . . . we must embrace such texts in a straightforward way," read the booklet prepared for the Sept. 26 event.

"Some of us believe these convictions reflect the culture of ancient times," the booklet continued, "and that therefore we need not be bound by them."

Unlike the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process, which has not directly addressed the primary passages about same-sex matters, Michael Pahl, Morden Mennonite's pastor, went through them in detail, digging into the original languages and contexts. Dan Epp-Tiessen, professor at Canadian Mennonite University, and John H. Neufeld, former pastor and former president of Canadian Mennonite Bible College, also made presentations.

The event was organized by Mennonite Church Manitoba at the suggestion of Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church, which has put its funding to MC Manitoba and MC Canada "on hold." The Plum Coulee Bergthaler Mennonite Church withdrew from area and national churches last November based on its traditional view of marriage.

The format of the day was not debate, but rather examination of biblical teachings on marriage, the role of the Bible and how to deal with division.

"We are in a heap of trouble," Neufeld said of the current tensions in the church, "so what are we going to do about it?" He said the trouble has roots that go back to Jesus' decision to include an almost

impossibly diverse group of people among his disciples. For instance, one was a Roman tax collector and another a Zealot committed to battling the Romans. Later, Peter and Paul threw the doors open to the Gentiles, introducing a whole other layer of messy, beautiful diversity.

Epp-Tiessen looked at how the Bible is interpreted, exploring ways that human reason and experience sometimes take people beyond where biblical writers left off. For example, from Old Testament to New, slavery is considered a legitimate institution, yet the church chose to contradict that position. Epp-Tiessen also pointed out that the biblical understanding of marriage evolved from Old Testament times, when polygamy and "concubinage" were considered appropriate. Should current understandings of marriage now expand to include committed same-sex relationships or would that be a rebellion against God? he asked.

Pahl—who has a Ph.D. in theology from the University of Birmingham in the U.K. and has published three books of theology—looked at the primary passages that address same-sex activity, spelling out traditional views, affirming views and some of the ambiguities that exist in the original languages.

The day also included worship, discussion around tables and reporting back to the larger group. Both publicly and privately, some participants expressed a concern that not enough emphasis was given to the traditional biblical view. One person noted and lamented the absence of gay voices.

About 20 people from Winkler Bergthaler attended, although church leaders declined to offer any public comment.

In the final presentation, Neufeld highlighted the Apostle Paul's words to the Corinthians about the divisions within them. Paul said these showed that the church was still "of the flesh." Neufeld looked at three images Paul uses as a corrective: the garden (a range of plants all doing their thing), the body (different parts that need each other), and the table (a place of welcome for a wide range of people).

"These images show us the way beyond agreement and disagreement," Neufeld said, adding that people on all sides are called to repent in light of Paul's three metaphors. We need each other. We are interdependent. We need to stay at the table.

In an interview, Ken Warkentin, MC Manitoba's executive director, said the church's position, as discerned collectively through the BFC process, is captured in the latest BFC document, which affirms the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* with its traditional view of marriage, while also appealing for space to test alternative understandings.

In a later interview, a rural pastor said that his congregation includes people with a considerable range of views on same-sex relationships and that those views are respectively discussed among the group. While this creates a degree of tension, he said it simply isn't a "deal breaker" for anyone. They remain together in healthy fellowship. Perhaps that model best captures the wish of area church leaders. Unanimity is unrealistic, but can we all remain at the table?

When asked if he thinks that is possible, Warkentin said, "That is my prayer. . . . I love Winkler Bergthaler Church." ❧

For videos of the three presentations and concise written summaries of the Epp-Tiessen and Pahl presentations, visit <http://bit.ly/1O8jL3i>.



Dan Epp-Tiessen also pointed out that the biblical understanding of marriage evolved from Old Testament times, when polygamy and 'concubinage' were considered appropriate.

Global Anabaptist communion shares many beliefs, practices

BY ELIZABETH MILLER

Goshen College
GOSHEN, IND.

Sociological surveys may be uncommon evangelistic tools, but at a recent consultation celebrating the conclusion of the Global Anabaptist Profile (GAP), Damien Pelende testified that the GAP survey had indeed drawn new people into his church. GAP, a joint initiative of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism and Mennonite World Conference (MWC), is a two-year project profiling the demographics, beliefs and practices of 24 church conferences in MWC.

Pelende, a research associate who implemented the GAP survey in the Mennonite Brethren Church of the Congo, shared how the survey generated particular interest in one of the local congregations he visited. As news of the survey spread, curious bystanders showed up for the worship service. In one setting, more than 20 on-lookers committed themselves to Christ; another time a Catholic visitor, after reviewing the survey, decided to become a Mennonite.

At the consultation, hosted by the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College, from July 26 to 30, research associates like Pelende and church leaders from 21 MWC member churches, representing 18 different countries, analyzed the data collected from their respective conferences and shared stories that gave crucial context to the numbers.

The results from some conferences, for example, suggested strong opposition to political involvement, which many research associates explained as a reaction to the corruption present in their respective political systems. Consultation participants also noted interesting differences in practices and assumptions regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit, attitudes toward tithing, understandings of church agencies like Mennonite Central Committee, views on evangelism and the role of women in church leadership.

While some conferences do not recognize female pastors, 76 percent of churches surveyed affirmed women as preachers. Some research associates shared that this statistic reflects the reality that the majority of members in their conferences are women.

The consultation also provided a forum for research associates to share some of their challenges in implementing the survey. The written format of the survey proved challenging in contexts with higher rates of illiteracy. Some research associates attempted to verbally collect responses with illiterate church members, but the survey's structure was difficult to adapt. "By the time they hear all the options, they say they don't know," reported Jethro Dube of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe.

A number of research associates found that illiteracy led to a low response rate among women, since they were more likely than men to be illiterate. They cautioned that even though their churches are primarily female, the survey results were sometimes skewed toward a male perspective.

Although the data has not yet been thoroughly analyzed, conversation at the consultation suggested that the results will be significant for congregations, national conferences and global church bodies alike.

Many church leaders highlighted the teaching and discipleship possibilities they perceive emerging as a result of the profile. "We see much in the information

that is very valuable to us," said Reynaldo Vallecillo from Amor Viviente in Honduras. "This helps us see our needs, especially in areas of teaching."

"We need more teaching on Anabaptism," echoed Lawrence Coetzee of Grace Community Church in South Africa. Coetzee's and Vallecillo's comments were part of a recurring conversation regarding identity. Many at the consultation questioned how such diverse churches could share an identity across varying contexts. Others wondered how to cultivate a strong sense of theological identity within their national conferences.

Yet the data also seemed to suggest that the churches represented by the survey do indeed share beliefs and practices in common. Regina Mondez of the Integrated Mennonite Churches of the Philippines reflected, "I appreciate that, despite different languages and cultures, the numbers communicate [a unity] across culture in ways that words could not."

In general, greater commonalities were found among churches of the Global South (Latin America, Asia and Africa) and among the Global North (North America and Europe) than between those two groupings. This was a source of concern for some, but for others it highlighted the importance of context in analyzing the results and opened up new possibilities for mission engagements.

"I'm happy that we do indeed have shared convictions," said Marcos Orozco of the Evangelical Mennonite Church Conference of Nicaragua. "We note some differences in our cultures, but there are more things that unite us than divide us." ❧

For a longer version of this story, visit canadianmennonite.org/profile-MWC.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GOSHEN COLLEGE



César Montenegro, standing, presents survey results from the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Guatemala during a recent consultation celebrating the conclusion of the Global Anabaptist Profile.

GOD AT WORK IN US

Making space for God

DAVID MARTIN

In the words of David Martin, executive minister of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, at this year's annual church gathering, "Since our habit is to normally talk about God in the abstract or to reflect on how my intellectual beliefs impact my values or actions, I have chosen to share with you more concretely how I have experienced the presence of God in my life." We share his story as the first of an occasional series called "Faith Journeys."

I grew up in a small Mennonite church west of Sudbury, in a family that had moved to Northern Ontario to do church planting. I grew up in a context in which I was always immersed in faith and a sense of God's presence through bedtime prayers, Bible stories, Sunday school, Bible school and kids clubs.

But all of that shattered for me in my second year of university when John Rempel introduced me to the fascinating world of biblical studies at Conrad Grebel College. The intellectual and emotional conflict between what I was learning and the simple, naïve faith that I had inherited came to a breaking point. I collapsed into an acute clinical depression that pushed me to the brink of my coping abilities, including thoughts of suicide.

But over the next half-year, it felt like the unseen hand of God was at work, literally rebuilding my sense of self and my faith in a way that was stronger and more resilient.

Not many years later, in a book called *Space for God*, I was introduced to the image from Russian Orthodox spirituality of "descending with the mind into the heart." No matter how extensively my understanding of faith or my experience of God has grown, I have discovered that "divine presence" and intellectual honesty are never at odds, but are always two integrated companions to authentic spirituality. Two strong aversions have been deeply seared into my heart from that challenging experience as a young adult:



- **AN EXPERIENTIAL** faith that is unwilling or fearful to open itself to intellectual rigour.
- **A WELL-FORMED** intellectual faith that is unwilling or fearful to abandon itself in trust to the experience of the divine.

Over the years, I have nurtured that kind of spirituality, and the disciplines of prayer and meditation have been a central part of my life and my experience of God. Although I am energized by engaging with others, I discovered that I am also energized by forms of prayer and silent retreats that draw me into deep quiet and solitude. When I began my role as executive minister, I engaged in a year-long discipline of doing the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, which required an hour of prayer a day and a weekly check-in with a spiritual director. This also began an annual pattern for me of going on an eight-day silent, directed retreat.

This past summer, working with the text of Peter walking on the water, I imagined that I was Peter and suddenly I felt myself slipping beneath the waves. As I reached out and called to Jesus for help, I had an unexpected sensation of



David Martin offers his 'faith journey' at this spring's Mennonite Church Eastern Canada annual church gathering.

my arm being gripped strongly by Jesus. There was a moment of disbelief and awe in the realization that somehow I had been profoundly touched by the presence of Christ. I simply knew that "divine presence" was embracing me. That image has sustained me through some challenging times this past year.

While at times I have had a strong sense of inner spiritual experience, I have also had an equally strong sense of God's presence in my life that has been mediated through other people or through external circumstances: the right word of wisdom, the timely offer of support, the generous and willing response to a request for help or the unexpected financial support that comes through when it is needed the most.

My life revolves around the church, my work is within the context of the church. Even my recreation is in the church. On Monday mornings I curl in a church-based curling club!

I've wondered about whether I should take the time to join a community curling club. Would that mean that I give up the church-based one that connects me ecumenically with other pastors?

My experience is that it is not just an issue of becoming more comfortable with

PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

talking about my faith experience, and finding everyday language to speak about it, but it is also the issue of even having the time or context in which to relate to people who are not connected with a

faith community.

So how do I steward this gift of faith that I have received? I'm not always sure. Maybe it's time for more prayer. ❧

Alice Soeder connects MEDA with clientele

BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
ELMIRA, ONT.

Alice Soeder worked at Farmers Plus in Elmira until June of this year, when she quit in order to prepare to move into full-time work at the St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church parish office in Kitchener.



Alice Soeder



She had worked at both places when Kervin Frey nominated her for the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) inaugural 20 under 35 group. Frey, a Mennonite from Elmira, also Soeder's hometown, saw her connecting the clientele at the feed and supply store with MEDA at customer appreciation days. MEDA was invited to set up a booth to connect with the mostly Mennonite farmers who used the store

for supplies, connecting them with more conservative Mennonites than their general membership.

Soeder worked at the store in sales and advertising, setting up a new website to drive more web-based sales for it. She has done similar work at the parish, where she uses her administrative gifts to aid the ministry of the congregation.

Church life and work are very much in her blood. When in high school, the choir

at St. Teresa of Avila Roman Catholic Church in Elmira closed down, so she and a friend started one with mostly young people. "The congregation was very patient with us in the first months when we knew only five songs," she laughs.

She now prepares the weekly bulletin, working closely with the music director in the church. "I always wanted to be a church secretary and now I've made it," she reports.

Soeder finds that MEDA is very similar to the Roman Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, in that they both focus on teaching people to take care of themselves, work with what is there and help people thrive.

Soeder was part of a medical mission to Haiti that was cut short by the 2010 earthquake. Instead of heading out to the villages, as is the mission's usual pattern, they ended up in the capital for a few days caring for critically injured North Americans and then being airlifted out with the patients.

In her spare time she volunteers with the Elmira Theatre Company in administrative and musical roles. ❧

❧ Staff change

Pastoral transition in Alberta

• ANNA-LISA SALO, the new pastor of Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, Alta., is joyfully engaging in the culture of the rural west. "Everything from learning how to ride a horse to what does 'swathing' mean," she says. Salo has 12 years of pastoral experience and five years of teaching English in Korea. She has bachelor's degrees in theology and religious studies from Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University), Winnipeg, and the University of Waterloo, Ont.; a master of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.; and certifications in spiritual direction and teaching English as a second language. Salo began work on Sept. 1.

—BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD



Anna-Lisa Salo

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ARTBEAT

Indigenous artist unsettles Winnipeggers

Edgar Heap of Birds frequently draws attention to the indigenous victims of colonial history with his art installations

STORY AND PHOTO BY J. NEUFELD

Manitoba Correspondent

WINNIPEG

There's nothing comfortable in the artwork of Edgar Heap of Birds. Especially for people whose ancestors came to this continent as settlers.

Heap of Birds has described his art as sharp rocks or weapons that puncture First World worldviews. Some felt the prick of that message on Sept. 16 at Neechi Commons, an upstairs café in Winnipeg's North End, as they listened to the world-renowned Cheyenne Arapaho artist—who also goes by his indigenous name, Hock E Aye Vi—speak about art, violence, resistance and reconciliation.

Heap of Birds has exhibited his paintings, drawings and text-based conceptual art in galleries all over the world. But it is his public interventions that tend to raise people's hackles. In 1996, he designed an eight-metre billboard to advertise an exhibit of indigenous art in Cleveland, Ohio. He drew a grinning caricature of the mascot of the Cleveland Indians baseball team next to the words: "Smile for racism." The private college funding the exhibit was offended by the design and initially refused to allow the billboards to go up. After the controversy made the local news, the school relented.

On another occasion, Heap of Birds installed a series of signs on California transit busses that read, "Syphilis/ Smallpox/ Forced Baptisms/ Mission Gifts/ Ending Native Lives." He had researched the demise of indigenous people in the area and found they were wiped out by diseases brought by missionaries. Those signs were also censored.

"There's much violence historically in

North America," Heap of Birds told his Winnipeg audience. "My work has been called political or provocative, but it starts out certainly from the reality of the violence."

Heap of Birds frequently draws attention

to the indigenous victims of colonial history. In one of his text-based pieces he juxtaposed the words "Sand Creek" and "Washita River"—locations where U.S. troops massacred indigenous women and children—with "Sandy Hook," a reference to the 2012 school shooting. "We have more empathy for the kindergartners than any children who died at Sand Creek or Washita River," Heap of Birds said. "We should find empathy in all massacres, whether they are white massacres or native massacres."

The violence of colonialism isn't just a thing of the past, though. Heap of Birds uses his art to confront the violence of colonialism against indigenous people that he says continues to this day. "Imperial Canada give back stolen lands," declared a bus shelter sign Heap of Birds created as part of a series labelled "Insurgent messages for Canada." Another one asked:



Indigenous artist Edgar Heap of Birds speaks at Neechi Commons in Winnipeg. 'We should find empathy in all massacres, whether they are white massacres or native massacres,' he says.

“Imperial Canada where is your status card?”

“It was certainly a difficult message for some people to hear, particularly for those for whom this was their first foray into any settler-indigenous relations activity,” said Jeff Friesen, associate pastor of Winnipeg’s Charleswood Mennonite, the congregation that organized the event. “Heap of Birds didn’t hold back at all in his message. . . . I think a lot of people came to this event thinking, ‘Oh neat, an indigenous artist,’ and then it was a lot more than that.”

*‘There’s much violence historically in North America. My work has been called political or provocative, but it starts out certainly from the reality of the violence.’
(Edgar Heap of Birds)*

Friesen said people came up to him afterwards with questions: “Everything from wondering why they needed to be feeling guilty about this, to why does the message have to be so strong?”

But being unsettled is a healthy part of the process, Friesen said. “The language of puncture he kept coming back to was fitting. I think he created good and healthy punctures in people’s lives.”

Maya Janzen, who also attends Charleswood Mennonite and helped organize the event, said her church is looking for ways to respond to the recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. “I really appreciated Edgar’s art,” she said. “It was inspiring, but also challenging and upsetting, and made me feel uncomfortable at times because I recognize how our city and our country and the things that I participate in are part of the colonial structure.” ❧

Go well

Ronald Mathies reflects on his ‘global pilgrimage’

STORY AND PHOTO

BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

Ron and Gudrun are comfortable in their “retirement” in Waterloo. Waterloo Region has been a frequent stopping place in their many years of service around the world.

Ron’s life began in nearby New Hamburg, the child of refugees from Russia who had made a home among the Swiss and Amish Mennonite communities. Gudrun was a post-war refugee landing in Kitchener. They met at Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church. Both became school teachers and, in 1964, shortly after their marriage, they joined the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Teachers Abroad program in newly independent Malawi.

He writes about that experience in his recently self-published memoir, *Go Well: A Global Pilgrimage*: “We had no idea how fundamentally the Africa experience, perhaps especially as it happened in the first and formative years of our marriage, would shape who we would become, what interests [academic and otherwise] would be generated, and what we would do in future years.”

Thus began their many stints overseas, bridged with years of teaching and study in Ontario. Such a summary says nothing about the details Ron has included in his memoir. It was in that first placement that he learned the African farewell, “Go well,” one he used often when he later sent out workers from North America to various places, safe and unsafe, around the world.

He decided first of all to tell the story of his life, including the years shared with Gudrun, to their children and grandchildren. But he says he also wanted to express his “immense gratitude for the people who taught them through the years.” He lists many of his co-workers, both overseas and in North America, inside and outside the church, within or outside of MCC. Besides



Ron and Gudrun Mathies in their ‘retirement’ home in Waterloo.

stints overseas, Ron served nine years as the executive director of MCC Binational before it became MCC U.S. and MCC Canada. He also notes that “telling one’s story, psychologists say, is good for mental health as one grows older.”

But the memoir is not only full of names, locations, work done, surveys completed and contracts fulfilled; it also tells the story of their supportive families, his love of sports, the dangerous situations they found themselves in, and their love of people who became friends through the years.

Mathies ends the dash through his history with a chapter entitled “The meaning of it all.” He sees several themes: “the importance of family”; “the centrality of faith with a focus on mission”; “education through formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities [which] opened doors and expanded horizons”; education which “lead[s] to a lifelong vocation—more than job or career—that included teaching and administration”; and “a multinational and multicultural pilgrimage . . . birthed through the journeys of our forebears from the Netherlands.”

While Mathies prepared the book mostly for friends and family, copies can be purchased by contacting him personally at mathies.rg@gmail.com. ❧



Mennonite
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A Call to Prayer from the Executive Council

We are writing to you on behalf of the Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) Executive Council to acknowledge that the response to the disclosure of the finding of ministerial misconduct against Vernon Leis has evoked a wide range of emotions from surprise to disbelief, and from affirmation and relief to disappointment and anger. That circle of grief and hurt includes the victim, the families that have been impacted, former colleagues, as well as the congregations which Vernon served. In the midst of these responses, we pray for God's healing light and peace to be at work restoring those broken places in the lives of individuals and the Church that have been injured by misconduct.

Although the finding against a much loved and respected pastor comes as a shock to the church community, MCEC stands behind its determination of misconduct. Executive Council carefully weighed the evidence, as well as the merits of disclosing this finding to MCEC congregations.

The decision to disclose the finding of misconduct was based on the conviction that MCEC is called to pursue healing and restoration not only for the victim but also for the church as a whole. Bringing the failures of the church into the light of God's healing love and grace allows for the possibility of restorative justice, healing, and truth telling to emerge in a way that can promote the overall health of the Church. Disclosure also presents an opportunity for others who may have been injured by misconduct to seek support.

MCEC is committed to investigating and disclosing ministerial misconduct with confidentiality, care and compassion for all concerned.

The Executive Council issues this call to prayer to all MCEC congregations for restoration, healing and peace for individuals, families and congregations that have been directly impacted by ministerial misconduct. May God's mercy and grace restore those broken places in our personal lives and the life of the Church so that we may be communities reflecting God's justice and peace.

*Paul Wideman, MCEC Moderator & Executive Council Chair
David Martin, MCEC Executive Minister*

/// Briefly noted

Updated Amish cookbook released

"It's one of the blessings of life to share ourselves with each other," writes Old Order Mennonite compiler Lucy Leid in her introduction to *Gather Around the Amish Table*, a cookbook released by Herald Press in August. *Gather Around the Amish Table* is an updated and retitled edition of Leid's previous compilation, *Countryside Cooking & Chatting*, released by Herald Press in 2006. Editors have added new full-colour photography and retested and revised recipes. Originally, Leid gathered recipe submissions and stories for the book project via *Die Botschaft*, a weekly periodical popular in Old Order Mennonite and Amish communities. In the book's introduction, she describes her goal in the creation of the book: "There are so many cookbooks around, but I wanted a cookbook with stories in it, too, with the kinds of sharing I enjoy from *Die Botschaft*." Recipes vary from family-sized dishes to amounts required for a barn-raising. Accompanying the recipes and simple step-by-step instructions are stories submitted by the cooks who shared their recipes. Leid has included her own kitchen tips spread throughout *Gather Around the Amish Table*, from adding wheat germ to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches healthier to suggestions about how to use water left over from boiling eggs. Melissa Engle was food photographer, with Cherise Harper serving as food stylist. The two women also worked on recent Herald Press cookbook updates: *Mennonite Community Cookbook 65th Anniversary Edition*, *Extending the Table Revised Edition* and *Simply in Season 10th Anniversary Edition*. Leid lives in Lancaster County, Pa., where she and her husband are part of the Groffdale Mennonite Conference.

—Herald Press



PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY



Ben Bolt Martin, an instructor and music director at Conrad Grebel University College, plays *Soul Dance Solstice*, a new creation by Carol Ann Weaver, Grebel's professor emerita of music, at the "Earth Voices" noon-hour concert on Sept. 16 in the Grebel chapel. Also performing were Weaver and Rebecca Campbell, providing voice, piano, soundscape and visuals. The major piece of the concert, "Earth Voices," includes texts from 24 Mennonite writers about land and human interactions. This concert, together with one two days later, functioned as the launch of the book of essays from *Sound in the Land 2015: Music and the Environment*. The second concert featured the works of 12 women composers.

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Promise of peace returns to Burkina Faso after coup

After a coup d'état in Burkina Faso brought shooting in the streets, Mennonites in the country are safe and "cautiously hopeful" that the worst of the violence has been resolved.

canadianmennonite.org/burkina-faso-after-coup

MCC cyclathon raises \$1 million dollars for Syrian refugees

Participating in the Mennonite Central Committee B.C. Pedalling for Hope Cyclathon, 150 cyclists braved the rainy weather and brought in more than \$1 million to support Syrian refugees now living in Lebanon.

canadianmennonite.org/cycles-raise-million-Syria



CMU recognizes grads with Distinguished Alumni Awards

An Olympian-turned-lawyer, a language educator, a businessman and a couple in long-time ministry are the recipients of Canadian Mennonite University's 2015 Blazer Distinguished Alumni Awards.

canadianmennonite.org/CMU-2015-alumni-awards

Helping businesses connect with customers with social media

Jeff Horst is one of the 2014 recipients of MEDA's 20 under 30 Award. He credits his family and Mennonite background for his balance and success.

canadianmennonite.org/connect-customers-social-media



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'I'm on sacred ground'

Columbia Bible College

"What has been your most transformative class?"

Ask that question on the campus of Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, B.C., and one answer will come up again and again: "Old Testament Survey with Ken Esau."

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- **READ THE** Old Testament almost in its entirety;
- **LEARN TO** break its story down into 13 historical stages; and
- **WRESTLE WITH** key questions arising from the text.

Even more legendary is the professor's love for the material.

"He is so passionate about what he's teaching," one student comments. "It spills over to the students. I got excited about the Old Testament because of Ken Esau."

That's quite a feat, considering that Esau has taught the class close to 80 times in his 24 years at the college. Sitting in his classroom, you would not notice a hint of boredom or lecturing by rote.

Asked to account for his ongoing enthusiasm, he refers to a saying common among educators: "I teach students, not subjects." Those students amaze him with their positive energy and how they allow the Old Testament to shape them.



Ken Esau

They're particularly appreciative of his efforts to teach the Old Testament not as a collection of 39 books, but as a single story on the theme of *shalom*, God's all-encompassing peace and justice.

Many students tell Esau that they are sharing what they're learning with their friends, family and youth groups, and they express how God is working in their own lives as a result.

"It's amazing to be a little part of that. I feel I should take off my shoes when I'm teaching," he says with a smile. "I'm on sacred ground."

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Ready to take a leap of faith

Chic Gamine shifts musical directions and looks toward a bright future on new album

BY AARON EPP
Young Voices Editor

With its propulsive rhythm and alluring harmonies, “Light a Match”—the new single and title track on Chic Gamine’s latest album—seems like a simple pop song at first. That simplicity is deceptive.

Ask band member Alexa Dirks what the song means to her and she reveals that important questions lie at the heart of the song. “What are you going to do with the opportunities you have?” is the big question, the Winnipeg singer says. “Are you really going to go for it and . . . take the leaps of faith that are put in your path, or

Lord definitely did have other plans,” she adds.

The group initially began recording in Winnipeg in the spring of 2014, but ended up abandoning those sessions. Members regrouped last October in Montreal, where Turenne, Daoud and Benoit live, to start from scratch. Working with producer Sébastien Blais-Montpetit at his home studio, Chic Gamine was able to record the album in a month.

The finished product is a departure for the band, which first made a name for itself with bare-bones instrumentation that

*‘I just have the faith that I’m supposed to be doing this for a reason. It feels like the most right thing in my life, and it always has.’
(Alexa Dirks of Chic Gamine)*

are you going to sit in your basement and hope for the best?”

Dirks and her band mates—Andrina Turenne, Annick Bremault, Sacha Daoud and Benoit Morier—are ready to take a leap of faith. *Light a Match*, which comes out on Oct. 23, is Chic Gamine’s first album of original material in five years. The group is looking forward to releasing the 11-song collection and getting back on stage to perform for people around the world.

“We thought this record was going to be out a year ago, but sometimes the Lord has other plans,” Dirks says, half in jest, before becoming more serious. In the case of Chic Gamine and *Light a Match*, “The

mixed gospel, soul, R&B, doo-wop and world music with a heavy focus on harmonized singing. On *Light a Match*, the music is more pop-oriented, with a variety of instrumentation not heard on 2010’s *City City* and 2008’s Juno Award-winning self-titled debut.

Dirks attributes the change in musical direction to the addition of Benoit after founding member Ariane Jean left the group for a life off the road, as well as a natural evolution as band members learned new instruments.

Chic Gamine (chicgamine.com) let the music go where it needed to go, Dirks
(Continued on page 28)

PHOTO BY AARON EPP



Alexa Dirks is one of the singers in Winnipeg/Montreal pop group Chic Gamine.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHIC GAMINE



*Chic Gamine’s new album, *Light a Match*, marks a musical departure from its previous releases.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHIC GAMINE



Chic Gamine has concerts coming up this month in Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa, with more to be announced in November.

(Continued from page 27)

says. “It wasn’t just us relying on our voices anymore, although that is a focal point of the band. That is something that is still at the heart of what we do—the harmonies and the female voices singing strongly together.”

Since forming in 2007, Chic Gamine has toured across Canada, the U.S. and parts of Europe. It has opened for Motown legend Smokey Robinson and gospel great Mavis Staples, and played before Queen Elizabeth II. Its music has been used on ABC’s *The Fosters* and *General Hospital*. Last winter, the band toured across Canada in support of a holiday-themed EP with Stuart Maclean’s Vinyl Cafe.

During her spare time, Dirks has collaborated with a variety of acclaimed Winnipeg musicians. She sang back-up vocals on “Turn It Around,” the lead single from Steve Bell’s recent *Pilgrimage* box set, and co-wrote three songs on the Juno Award-winning debut album from roots-rock outfit, The Bros. Landreth.

Dirks, who grew up at Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, got her start on stage while still in high school, singing back-up for worship leader Jon Buller.

While her faith has changed over the years, Dirks says it still remains important to her. “[The music industry] can be a dark place to be sometimes . . . having

job security being nebulous, being a small-time musician,” she says. “As much as we’re releasing records and we’re out there to a certain degree, we are still very small-time. We’re still touring as much as we can, we’re hustling, we’re trying our best. That can sometimes be discouraging, but I just have the faith that I’m supposed to be doing this for a reason. It feels like the most right thing in my life, and it always has.”

Dirks doesn’t want to sound as though she’s complaining. Her music career pays her rent and groceries, which she says is a success. “I can be happy with that, but then I just need to have faith that I’m going to be able to continue to do this,” she says. “I can’t really see myself doing anything else.”

With *Light a Match* ready to hit stores, Chic Gamine is currently touring in support of the record. The group has concerts coming up this month in Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa, with more to be announced in November.

Dirks says she enjoys performing because being on stage and connecting with audiences through music is a big part of who she is and how she sees herself as a person. “At the end of the day, it’s [about] communicating with people, unifying people through music and also just contributing to something beautiful in the world,” she says. “If I have the ability to do that, I want to try.” ❧

VOICE |
of the marginalized

Cutting, burning, starving and forgiving

High school student overcomes bully’s torment with love

BY RACHELLE GIRARD

Special to Young Voices

Upneet Bala was bullied online to the point that she attempted suicide, but she rose above the hurt by meeting her tormentor and relying on two foundations of her faith: forgiveness and love.

Bala, who graduated this past spring from a private high school in Abbotsford, B.C., received her first e-mail stuffed with hate three years ago. “At the time I had the

confidence to delete them, ignore them even,” Bala says. “I didn’t even consider the possibility that something like cyber-bullying could happen to me.”

But as her inbox filled, her confidence dropped. Bala eventually gave in and opened the e-mails. “They were horrible, just horrible,” she says. “Filled to the brim with mean words, and cruel hate.” Fat.

Ugly. Worthless. There was no indication what started the invective or who was behind the onslaught.

Bala refused to show that she was hurting. At school, she remained a highly involved honour-roll student. But at home, she carved her pain into her body. “Run out of places to cut? Try burning, try puking, try starving, try scratching, do anything. Anything but love yourself,” she says of her ordeal.

One night, Bala hit bottom and lay beneath a table with a handful of pills. A friend, sensing something was wrong, sought her out. He crawled under the fur-

reflections of how she felt about herself.

Although the girl’s story does not justify her actions, Bala responded with love and compassion. Her forgiveness resulted in a friendship between the two girls and mutual healing. The scars are forever, but so is the love Bala showed.

She credits her strong faith and says Christians are not called to be “good people,” but “advocates of love.” They must even forgive those who make them want to die.

“There is really no one way to solve the problem” of bullying, says Lisa Hiebert, a youth leader at a Mennonite church and

Bala asked the anonymous bully to meet in a public place. As she arrived for the arranged meeting in an Abbotsford coffee shop, alone, she thought, ‘What have I done?’

niture to be with her. “He just saw a very anxious girl crying over who knows what,” Bala says.

Bala revealed the e-mails to him. He eventually convinced her to choose life.

Bala asked the anonymous bully to meet in a public place. As she arrived alone for the arranged meeting in an Abbotsford coffee shop, she thought, “What have I done?” She was surprised to find the bully was shorter than she was. The two girls slid into a booth and began to talk.

Instead of a dramatic showdown, Bala says, “I was so overtaken by the love of Christ that I immediately offered her forgiveness.” The girl Bala says she was “so terribly afraid of” was in tears. Bala was speechless. “She’s not allowed to cry, is she? That’s my job!”

The person behind the cruel e-mails told her story. She was raised in a house with an alcoholic father and her mother’s cries filled their home. She told Bala how she and her mother left eventually, but the pain and brokenness that came with abuse clung to them and followed them no matter where they went.

The girl’s mother bounced between minimum-wage jobs while drenched in depression. Bala says this girl “dealt with anger, pain and darkness I’ve never had to feel.” The e-mails this girl sent were

a former teacher at Bala’s high school.

Hiebert believes it is best to deal with bullying on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the individual student’s background.

This is what Bala did. She confronted the person, listened to her story and offered forgiveness.

Bala’s method is not a guaranteed solution to abolish bullying. However, high school would be radically, wonderfully different if everyone adopted her attitude of relentless love and forgiveness. ❧

Rachelle Girard, 19, is a second-year student at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), majoring in biblical and theological studies. She worships at the Winnipeg Centre Vineyard church.

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

PHOTO COURTESY OF UPNEET BALA



Upneet Bala was tormented by a bully who sent her hateful e-mails.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RACHELLE GIRARD



Rachelle Girard

Calendar

British Columbia

- Nov. 13-15:** Senior Youth Impact Retreat, at Camp Squeah, Hope.
- Nov. 14:** LifeBridge Ministries fundraising breakfast.
- Nov. 22:** Joint MC B.C./Columbia Bible College services: (10 a.m.) at Living Hope Christian Fellowship, Surrey, with a lunch to follow; (2 p.m.) at Living Stones, Surrey. Music at both services by Columbia students.
- Nov. 28,29:** Advent vespers with Abendmusik Choir: (28) Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, Abbotsford; (29) Knox United Church, Vancouver. Both services at 8 p.m.

Alberta

- Nov. 7:** Equipping Day at Foothills Mennonite Church, Calgary.
- Nov. 21:** Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta annual general meeting, at Trinity Mennonite Church, De Winton, Alta., at 1:30 p.m. Speaker: Esther Epp-Tiessen, author of "Mennonite Central

Committee in Canada: A History."

Saskatchewan

- Oct. 24:** MC Saskatchewan Equipping Day at Eigenheim Mennonite Church, "Engaging Anabaptism Today," beginning at 9:30 a.m. Call 306-249-4844 for information.
- Oct. 24:** RJC Corporation meeting at 5 p.m. and RJC Appreciation and Fundraising banquet.
- Nov. 24:** RJC Kielke and Sausage Supper at Bethany Manor, Saskatoon.
- Nov. 27-29:** "This Will Lead to Dancing," a new play by Theatre of the Beat that addresses LGBTQ inclusion, at Wildwood Mennonite Church, Saskatoon. All shows at 7 p.m. RSVP in advance to production@theatreofthebeat.com to ensure a seat.

Manitoba

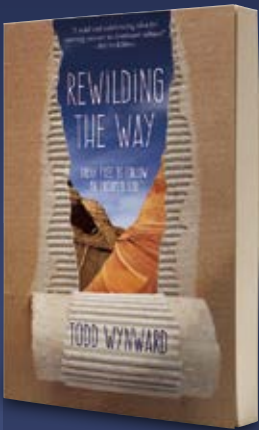
- Oct. 23-24:** "Mennonites, Medicine and the Body: Health and Illness in the Past and Present," an academic and community education conference hosted by the Chair in Mennonite

Studies at the University of Winnipeg. More info at: <http://mennonitestudies.uwinnipeg.ca/events/>.

- Nov. 7:** "Singin' in the Grain" fundraising concert for Canadian Foodgrains Bank at Springfield Heights Mennonite Church, at 7:30 p.m., featuring the Winkler Men's Community Choir and Eastman Male Choir from Steinbach. Call 204-829-3570 for information.
- Nov. 12-14:** Westgate presents "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Gas Station Theatre.
- Nov. 15:** Mennonite Community Orchestra presents its fall concert of works by Weber, Bach and Beethoven, at CMU's south campus chapel, at 3 p.m.
- Nov. 17:** Evening of the Arts at Westgate, 7 p.m.
- Nov. 19-21:** "This Will Lead to Dancing," a new play by Theatre of the Beat that addresses LGBTQ inclusion, in Winnipeg. Location TBA. All shows at 7 p.m. RSVP in advance to production@theatreofthebeat.com to ensure a seat.
- Nov. 22:** First Mennonite Church Choir, Winnipeg, performs its annual Memorial Sunday concert featuring Cherubini's "Requiem," at 7 p.m., at the church.
- Nov. 23:** Annual general meeting at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, 7 p.m.

Ontario

- Until Dec. 18:** "Exploring resilience through the artwork of Shannon Moroney," at the Conrad Grebel University College Gallery, Waterloo.
- Oct. 18:** Twelfth annual gospel music hymn sing based on "Life Songs II" at Detweiler Meetinghouse, Roseville, at 2:30 p.m. Led by Bob Shantz.
- Oct. 23,24:** "This Will Lead to Dancing," a new play by Theatre of the Beat that addresses LGBTQ inclusion. (23) Community Mennonite Church, Stouffville; (24) Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Markham. All shows at 7 p.m. RSVP in advance to production@theatreofthebeat.com to ensure a seat.
- Oct. 24:** "The growth and spread of Old Order Mennonite communities since the 1960s," hosted by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, at Floradale Mennonite Church, at 2 p.m. Speakers: Clare Frey and Amsey Martin.
- Oct. 24,31:** MCC refugee sponsorship information sessions: (24) at Martin Luther Evangelical Lutheran Church, Toronto, from 1 to 3 p.m.; (31) at St. Catharines United Mennonite Church, from 9:30 a.m. to noon. For more information, visit mcco.ca/events.
- Oct. 30-Nov. 1:** Women of MC Eastern Canada women's retreat, based in Mennonite Women U.S.A.'s "Sister Care" material, at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. For more information, contact Phyllis Ramer at 519-236-7332 or e-mail peramer@hay.net.
- Oct. 31:** Mennonite and Brethren Marriage Encounter Eastern Canada annual general meeting, at Wilmot Mennonite Church. For more information, contact Jim and Ruth Martin at 519-794-3891 or visit www.marriageencounterrec.com.
- Nov. 1:** Anabaptist Heritage Concert at St. Catharines United Mennonite Church, at 7 p.m.; freewill offering in support of MCC's response in the Middle East.
- Nov. 1:** Menno Singers performs its 60th-anniversary concert, at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, at 3 p.m.
- Nov. 6-8:** Marriage Encounter weekend, at the Monastery of St. Carmel Spiritual Centre, Niagara Falls. For more information, contact Mennonite and Brethren Marriage Encounter Eastern Canada at 519-669-8667 or www.marriageencounterrec.com.
- Nov. 8:** Fourth annual male chorus sing at Detweiler Meetinghouse, Roseville, at 2:30 p.m. Former male quartet, chorus or want-to-be members welcome to sing old gospel songs and anthems. Led by Bob Shantz.
- Nov. 14:** MCC Ontario fall conference, "At Peace and Unafraid," at Bethany Community Church, St. Catharines, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
- Nov. 14-15:** St. Jacobs Mennonite Church 100th anniversary celebration; (14) see website, (15) Worship service and choir at 10 a.m. and "Simpler Times: Stories and Songs for the Soul" at 2:45 p.m. Details including choir invitation at www.sjmc.on.ca or 519-664-2268.
- Nov. 20-21:** Nairn Mennonite Church, Ailsa Craig, presents its annual "Spirit of Christmas" juried craft and live music show. One-of-a-kind crafts, Ten Thousand Villages, homemade baking.



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Music by Randy Grey, Camping's Blessings and the Valleyview Male Chorus (20) 6:30 to 9 p.m.; (21) 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Nov. 21: Annual Fairview Mennonite Home handicraft sale, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tea room and lunch available as well as Christmas decorations, gifts, bake sale and more. For more information call 519-653-5719.

Classifieds

Announcement

Mennonite Support and Advocacy Group for Parents and LGBT persons in Southwestern Ontario. We provide confidential group and individual support, resources, fellowship and opportunity to dialogue for family members and LGBT persons. For more information contact rvfast@rogers.com, pmsnyderangel@rogers.com, or Roy and Mary Gascho 519-742-1850

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.

For Rent

House for rent in Waterloo, ON. Newly renovated with all appliances. Main floor of house with basement apartment can be rented separately or together. Close to schools, shopping and public transportation. Available Nov.1 **Contact helmkwiebe@gmail.com**

For Sale

The Village Casketmaker Funeral caskets and urns sold directly to public. Sensible and eco-friendly. Made in Winnipeg. Shipping beyond Manitoba available. Learn more: thevillagecasketmaker.com

Employment Opportunities



Lead Pastor

Community Mennonite Fellowship in Drayton, Ontario, is seeking a lead pastor for our vibrant rural congregation. Rooted in our local community and our Anabaptist faith tradition, we strive to live out our mission to be "Enthusiastic followers of Jesus Christ, spreading his Good News in our community and around the world."

Contact Henry Paetkau, MCEC Area Church Minister, at hpaetkau@mcec.ca or visit communitymennonite.com



PRICA GLOBAL ENTERPRISES INC EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Prica Global is a forward-thinking property development and construction management firm and we are looking for a Landscaping/Snow Removal Associate to join our growing team.

Experience with driving a ¾ tonne truck is essential as well as having experience with lawn maintenance, plants, shrubs, and trees. Applicant must live in or close to Waterloo, Ontario. Please send your resume to jbaxter@pricaglobal.com or call 519-340-0191.




Mennonite Central Committee LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Lead a team of passionate, dedicated development workers overseas. Mennonite Central Committee is looking to fill these MCC Representative positions:

- Bangladesh
- Jordan – Iran – Iraq

Other leadership positions are also posted: <http://mcccanada.ca/get-involved/serve/openings>




AMBS EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary seeks a full-time **data services manager** for the development office.

Qualifications include experience with fund-raising software (Raiser's Edge preferred); strong skills in database management, communication, attention to detail; and familiarity with tax regulations related to charitable contributions. Responsibilities include processing gifts, preparing reports, data entry and management of data for the department.

Full description at www.ambs.edu/jobs. To apply, send letter of application, resume and three references to mkschrock@ambs.edu. Review of applications begins immediately.



AMBS EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary seeks a **Director of Library Services** to oversee the collection and staff, lead instructional programming, administer the library budget, plan cooperation with other libraries and information agencies, and assess the effectiveness of the library.

Qualifications include a master's degree in library science, administrative experience, intercultural competency, written and oral communication skills, abilities to use new technological applications and to work well with people. Graduate degree in a theological discipline, fluency in Spanish or other modern language, and prior experience in teaching/instruction and strategic planning preferred.

To apply, send letter of application, CV and names and addresses of three references by November 15 to Dr. Rebecca Slough, academic dean: rslough@ambs.edu.

Calvary Mennonite Church in Monetteville is in need of a full-time pastor for our 40 member, northern Ontario congregation. We are located 65 minutes south of North Bay and Sudbury and about 90 minutes north of Parry Sound, near beautiful Lake Nipissing. Please call 705-898-1574 or email calvarymenno@gmail.com for more information.

Advertising Information

Contact
D. Michael Hostetler
1-800-378-2524 x.224
advert@canadianmennonite.org

MENNO PLACE PHOTO



With bouncy castles, a bean bag toss, a craft table sponsored by The Reach Gallery, story time sponsored by the Fraser Valley Library, a photo booth, live entertainment, hot dogs, popcorn, bubble and button stations, temporary tattoos and karaoke, there wasn't time to sit still at the National Grandparents Day Party held at Menno Place, a residential care facility for the elderly in Abbotsford, B.C., on Sept. 15. Pictured are Menno Place's manager of dietary experience, Angela Ross-Fehr, and her granddaughters Meadow and Marella Herle, who all dressed up for the photo booth. More than 600 people joined in the festivities, twice the number expected.

PHOTO BY MARIANNE ENNS / TEXT BY MARIA H. KLASSEN



Fresh corn was steamed to perfection on Sept. 12 using a 1916 steam engine, pictured in the background. Despite the inclement weather, the corn was picked that morning and enjoyed by many families and friends at St. Catharines United Mennonite Church's community corn roast later in the day. It was an opportunity for the community to draw together in a relaxed atmosphere.

CONRAD GREBEL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE PHOTO



God at work in the church Snapshots

Johnny Wideman, who graduated with a bachelor of arts degree with a drama major from the University of Waterloo, Ont., has been named the 2015 recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Service Award by Conrad Grebel University College. After graduation, Wideman was involved with Willowgrove Day Camp near Markham, Ont., developing a peace curriculum for campers that incorporated drama. His passion for theatre continued to grow, and in 2011 Wideman drove the vision to establish Theatre of the Beat with other Grebel alumni. His current play, This Will Lead to Dancing, is currently on tour in Mennonite Church Canada congregations in western Canada. The Distinguished Alumni Service Award recognizes alumni who have made a significant and unique contribution to the church, community, nation or world.