

CANADIAN MENNONITE

December 14, 2015

Volume 19 Number 24



A labyrinth of Advent blessing

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EDITORIAL

More transparency please

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

Sexual misconduct cases by our pastors are difficult to process. These stories, numbering three in the last two years in congregations across Canada, are even harder to report in our publication.

They are stories of abusing power, of crossing boundaries, of letting down congregations and trusting congregants, of creating victims all around—not only of accusers, but of the perpetrators' family and network of friends, destroying reputations and legacies—especially in the recent case of a long-deceased Ontario pastor.

When the news breaks, friends of both the accused and the accuser tend to take sides: the one, along with advocates, feeling relief that the abuse is finally made public; the other, knowing the perpetrator's good side, at first disbelieving the story, then questioning the accuser's credibility and finally expressing anger with the church leadership for announcing the abuse. We have seen enough of this pattern in the last two years across Canada to expect these dynamics to take on a life of their own—and not casually.

In the case of the late Vernon Leis, reported in a news release from Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and carried in our Sept. 14 issue, these dynamics were further complicated by the fact that Leis has been dead for 21 years and could not defend himself. And the accuser does not want to be named for fear of recrimination and being wrongly judged in the

court of public opinion.

In charging the deceased pastor, MC Eastern Canada says that after review of the complainant's account of the sexual misconduct, it had "compelling and credible evidence, despite an inability to test it in the usual investigative fashion."



That "inability" raised questions with us and so we inquired with the executive minister just what that meant. What techniques did the area church use to establish "credibility"?

After all, one of the glaring inadequacies in the Leis case investigation is obvious: The one party to the abuse is not here; therefore, any corroboration is difficult if there were no other accusers at the time.

Our questions to MC Eastern Canada about the process of establishing misconduct were met with a default position of confidentiality. We simply wanted a fuller explanation of that process. None was forthcoming.

This brings us to the bigger question of transparency in any sexual misconduct case. Since the landmark John Howard Yoder case, has the pendulum swung too far in the other direction? From the Yoder case, embedded in a past era of patriarchy where powerful men were protected and women victims disbelieved, at worst, or intimidated into silence, at best, our wider communion learned an important lesson, hopefully—that sexual misconduct must be confronted and exposed no matter what level of power of

the abuser.

In the Leis case, the area church has focussed, rather, on the healing dynamic. In follow-up stories to the original announcement, all three leaders of MC Eastern Canada are clear that the purpose of dealing with sexual abuse in private—and, when necessary, in public—"is healing, creating a safe place for victims, and ensuring the church is a safe place for everyone," according to a related article by Eastern Canada correspondent Dave Rogalsky, "Between a rock and a hard place," on page 15 of this issue.

They are absolutely right. Healing is the ultimate goal. But in getting to that place, would these area church leaders not better serve that purpose by describing more fully the process by which they came to their decision, to provide more information to expressly avoid the kind of division and anger that has followed, especially in this difficult case of charging a dead person? It would be sad if the handling of this case diminishes the respect for, and confidence in, the leadership of MC Eastern Canada. We would hate to see this overshadow all the good leadership the area church is offering.

We are in a new era with sexual misconduct by pastors. No one is completely satisfied with outcomes. Yes, church leaders are put in a difficult position. They would help themselves and us better, we think, if they would be more forthcoming about the process. We appeal to them to open the investigative doors a little wider, to give us a glimpse of the struggle and enlist our empathy, rather than risk diminishing our trust in them.

The Vernon Leis story is not the only one we reported in the last two years. There were two cases in Manitoba. In all of them, we appeal for more transparency on the part of our church leaders.

ABOUT THE COVER:

Pastor Gordon Allaby blesses his grandson in an Advent labyrinth created at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Waterloo, Ont., last year. For web-exclusive story, visit canadianmennonite.org/advent-labyrinth.

PHOTO: JENNIE WIEBE, JENNIEWIEBEPHOTOGRAPHY.CA

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Guiding values:

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



A CHRISTMAS STORY

The shepherd

BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

EMERGENCY

CLEARANCE 8'-2"

STOP HERE
AT ENTRANCE

Originally told to her congregation at First Mennonite Church, Edmonton, at Christmastime 2013, as a way of imagining who the shepherds might be today and how they might react to a special birth



childhood, along with the engineers, doctors and technicians who also have hungry children at home to feed, clothe and shelter.

One night, a cold one during the holidays, I had just finished shepherding some revellers home from their liquid wilderness. I had to stop at the carwash to clean the backseat of my taxi and was feeling sorry for myself. While I washed my hands in the bathroom, a young man approached to ask directions. His English was shaky; he was new to the city and trying to find his cousin's apartment, where he and his young wife would stay the night. I told him we could look at the GPS unit in my car, but when I saw his wife was very pregnant and their rattle-trap of a car that wouldn't start up again, plans changed.

I took them straight to the hospital. She was trying to hide her growing discomfort, and her husband kept saying they should go to his cousin's place. It was hard to argue with him. His accent was strange to me, he was nervous, and I was watching the icy roads and distracted Christmas drivers!

Finally, I realized my passengers were worried that they couldn't afford the hospital. I tried to assure them it was okay. I'm not sure they understood, but by then we were at the emergency room doors. The nurses whisked the young soon-to-be mother away in a wheelchair so fast that the husband had no choice but to follow.

Happy they were safe, I went back outside and took my car over to the "yellow zone," to wait for a fare. It was a moonless night and the stars were unusually bright in the cold sky. It was gorgeous, but I was worried about these strangers, my lost sheep. And I kept wondering, too, about things like how many homeless people were freezing, about what my kids were

(Continued on page 7)

I still think of myself as a shepherd. Every day, actually every night, I'm out there. I look for the lost, the wanderers and the weary, and I bring them home. It's a living. At times, it's easy; they know the way and I just help them along. Other times, it's dark and cold, and I worry about predators in the shadows. My lost ones might—or might not—be in good shape. Sometimes they are full of good cheer, other times they're belligerent. Sometimes they turn on me, so I'm always on edge. I have to defend myself even from the ones I'm trying to help. Those are the nights I'm not sure of my new country, the nights I curse the shiny yellow car that is now my office, my vocation, my shepherd's rod and staff.

When I was a boy, I was almost a traditional shepherd. I was a cowherd: just two cows and their calves. As the youngest in our family, it was my job to find grass and to bring my little herd home at night. Sometimes it was an idyllic

job—warm sun, butterflies and bird-song—but mostly it was deadly boring. Occasionally, it was scary. There were snakes hidden in the grass, and people who tried to take my cows. I didn't like it, but someone had to do this "entry level" job, as I've come to call it.

Eventually, I grew up, went to school and found work in the city. Things looked good for me, but that was before the troubles. When the fighting started, I lost my job. The various armies were trying to grab us young men, so I ran into the bush to hide along with a few friends. Soon there was no food, no money and no safe place. Some of us, the very lucky ones, managed to get out and eventually found our way here.

When I came to this country as a refugee, they said my credentials weren't at the right standards. I need to upgrade before I can get back to my profession, but school is expensive and takes a long time. My family needs to be fed now. So I'm back to a kind of herding: driving a taxi and revisiting my



Supplies for school kits ready for assembly adorn the Gingrich dining room table.



The Gingrich grandchildren assemble school kits in 2014.

Christmas: A time for giving

Gingrich family gives wide and far

BY DAVE ROGALSKY
Eastern Canada Correspondent

Barb and Orrie Gingrich of Holyrood, Ont., have quite a crowd of grandchildren.

It was 2008 when Barb began to think of all the gifts being exchanged at her place during the family Christmas festivities. Each family bought gifts for all the children and the adults exchanged names among themselves. What would happen, she wondered, if the money spent on gifts was funnelled instead into giving gifts to needy people? That Christmas, school kits, refugee kits and new mother kits were prepared for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), instead of giving gifts to each other.

The pattern has continued over the years, with the grandchildren now mostly teenagers and young adults, and one change: only school kits are assembled now.

During an afternoon gathering at the Gingrich house, the dining room table is cleared and then assembly begins. But beforehand, Barb surveys the families about how many kits they will contribute, and then she sews the bags. The Gingriches drive Old Order Mennonites in their community to town for appointments and shopping, and throughout the year Barb keeps her eye out for suitable cloth remnants in thrift stores.

Daughter Lori Longwell notes that when the last bag is full, the last person on the assembly line pulls the draw string and Grandma puts the finished bags into a box for delivery to MCC in Kitchener, about 120 kilometres from their rural home.

The Gingriches, who attend Hanover Mennonite Church, don't give gifts to the grandchildren "except home preserves or games found at the thrift store," reports Barb, who adds, "I hope that the children do feel a sense of helping out when things are tough for people." During the kit assembly, she does give a bit of a speech, she says, to remind the children of the needs of other people.

Some years up to 70 kits are prepared!

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LORI LONGWELL



The first Christmas the Gingrich family opted to give to others, rather than each other, was in 2008. The grandchildren proudly show off their work from the inaugural event.

When I came to this country as a refugee, they said my credentials weren't at the right standards. So I'm back to a kind of herding, driving a taxi and revisiting my childhood.

(Continued from page 5)

doing at the moment, about if I'd make enough money tonight to buy something nice for my wife. I sat there worrying about what to do, worrying about other new refugees and trying to remember how I managed that first year. The world overwhelmed my thoughts and despair crowded out hope.

Then my worrying was interrupted by a chatty lady who had convinced her doctor she could go home for Christmas Eve. I drove her there, listening to long lists of the extravagant gifts she had bought for what she called "my spoiled grandchildren." I silently agreed about the spoiled bit when I walked her to the front door of her very large and very empty house. What a strange world.

Soon I found myself back in the hospital parking lot, looking up at the brightly lit windows and wondering if the couple was now a threesome. Was the baby okay? What could a poor taxi driver do?

A van pulled up and a group of brightly clad people burst out, laughing and holding black folders. I knew what they were, and I had an idea. I jumped out of my car, grabbed a few of my fellow shepherds from their cars, and we followed the carollers into the hospital.

"Hark the Herald," "Joy to the World," "Away in a Manger": they sang them all with angelic voices. We shepherds joined in, unable to remain silent, adding a few rather earthy but enthusiastic tones to the choruses. We sang in waiting rooms, where people with tear-stained faces reacted with smiles. We sang in the common areas and people quit rushing. We sang at the nurses desk, and tired eyes sparkled.

I approached a nurse and asked about the young couple. After a brief phone call, she got up from her chair and came around the desk. The whole bunch of us—taxi drivers and fancy singers—followed her to the maternity ward. We

waited outside a small room until she beckoned us in with a shushing finger over her lips. The young couple were sitting together on the bed. When we were all gathered around, a tiny brown face yawned up from where it was swathed in hospital whites. Collectively, carollers, taxi drivers and the nurse all said "Aahhh!" And then we laughed with the new parents.

We sang quietly, while they stroked the child's face with gentle fingers: "It came upon a midnight clear / that glorious song of old. From angels bending near the earth / to touch their harps of gold. Peace on the earth, goodwill to men / from heaven's all gracious king. The world in solemn stillness lay / to hear the angels sing."

With whispered congratulations and Merry Christmases, the carollers tiptoed away. The taxi drivers followed. I stayed for a moment to tell them I would come the next day to take them to his cousin's apartment. They said thank you and then

began to settle in for the night.

It touched me, how, with so much going on, they were at peace. Their hearts were so full for this child, for their new country, for the warmth of strangers. Hope seemed to spill from their eyes and light the whole room. It filled me and chased away the last shadowy bits of worry. Somehow, this was going to turn out.

I caught up to my fellow shepherds in the parking lot. Several were already in a loose circle, digging into coat pockets and wallets. Somewhat comically, a couple others had their bums in the air, searching under seats for loose change.

The collection wasn't a lot, but it was what we had. It would make a nice gift, a welcome. A thank you for the chance we had to gaze on a miracle and recharge our hearts with hope. After that, I hurried to tell my family all that I had seen and heard this holy Christmas night. ❧



Donita Wiebe-Neufeld is Canadian Mennonite's Alberta correspondent, co-pastor of First Mennonite Church, Edmonton, and author of Thirty Bucks, a recently released children's book.

/// For discussion

1. What have been some of your "entry-level" job experiences? Do you think humdrum work provides a better opportunity to listen for the voice of God? Have you ever been surprised by a moment of hope in the midst of what felt like a world of despair? What are some of these sparks of hope that can recharge our hearts?
2. In her story, Donita Wiebe-Neufeld suggests that the cab drivers of today are like the shepherds in the Christmas story. What are the similarities and differences between shepherds and cab drivers? Is this comparison helpful for a deeper understanding of the story?
3. Wiebe-Neufeld's story has a refugee theme. How was the baby Jesus like a refugee? Does our modern celebration of Christmas make enough room for refugees and their stories?
4. Has your family considered doing a Christmas project like that of the Gingrich family? What are the challenges in organizing this type of alternative to exchanging gifts? What are the benefits?

—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.

✉ Demographics play a big role in the future of MCC

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

I appreciated Will Braun's attempt to ask this question.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is experiencing the narrowing of its donor base. This is evidence of a demographic decline, where those with deep roots in the agency, its mission and values continue to give, but those donors are not being replaced by a similar cohort.

I do not have specific data, but I suspect that the average MCC donor is progressively aging, and will probably pass in the next 10 to 15 years. Demographic decline of Mennonite churches in Canada will mean that there will be fewer church members called upon to give in a similar fashion as the previous generation.

In the mid-1990s, MCC slowly shifted from being

FROM OUR LEADERS

My mechanic, my teacher

RICK NEUFELD

It may sound a little odd, but I really like my mechanic. I like him because I am very inadequate in my mechanical knowledge and I am grateful for anyone who can provide expertise and knowledge concerning my vehicle. As much as I appreciate his knowledge and his comprehensive understanding of my vehicle, I also value the fact that when he isn't sure, he is upfront with me and willing to let me know what might be the problem and what the options are to fix it.



Despite the fact that it is only when my vehicle is in need of repair that I go to see him, I certainly feel at ease when I go, and am grateful for his caring quality and especially for his willingness to tell me about his day!

Having people in our lives who care about us, and who even take the time to greet us by name, is a wonderful and special gift. It warms our hearts and increases our sense of self-worth, as well

as our faith in one another. Since I live in a smaller community, my mechanic is not the only one who knows me by name or greets me with words of welcome. I feel welcomed within the business sector and political circles, as well as the service and healthcare professions. These relationships offer me a good and healthy sense of belonging and connection.

As I visit congregations and observe their corporate life, I am delighted by the many experiences of welcome and genuine hospitality demonstrated through the church where congregations are engaging people within their communities. I consider this a wonderful quality and it certainly aligns with our understanding and expression of our faith in Christ, who shared everything with those whom he met.

Focussing and reminding ourselves of our common purpose is helpful and necessary, but is it enough? Being friendly is important and the rewards of such relationships are a blessing, but true authentic community is best formed when

we can offer our own vulnerability and fragility. Meaningful relationships of trust and open honesty are best maintained and affirmed when we don't ignore our human differences, but when we can welcome and accept them.

Creating authentic community begins with being real and living in the reality of who we are in light of God's grace and goodness. Creating authentic communities involves stretching ourselves beyond our usual comfortable places and inviting others to speak into our places of vulnerability and honest living.

I find tremendous hope in this challenge of what the church is called to be! Relationships are the life-giving source of our journey together. I believe that our relationships embody and carry with them the life and ministry of Christ Jesus, who came and dwelt among us in vulnerable human form and who offers his broken life as a way of peace and hope for all.

This is hardly mechanical, but sometimes it begins with a friendly reminder from my neighbourhood garage!

Rick Neufeld is Mennonite Church Manitoba's area church minister.

a people and funding agency to becoming primarily a funding agency. This was meant to honour the skills and abilities of agencies in the developing world: a good thing.

What it also resulted in was fewer and fewer alumni returning from overseas service to take up church membership and becoming an unofficial support for MCC. More and more volunteers who do go out with MCC have no connection to Mennonite congregational

life. The result has been an erosion of lay-led leadership.

We are on the cusp of a significant demographic downturn that will challenge most of our church-based institutions with funding shortfalls, a smaller pool of volunteers, and a smaller reach in what can be accomplished. We will need to learn to do discipleship with much smaller institutions than have been at the

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OUTSIDE THE BOX

War, Christmas and Pentecost

PHIL WAGLER

“**W**e’re at war.” These were the words of French President Francois Hollande after the Paris attacks. This Friday the 13th will be remembered like 9/11. Is war the new reality? Or have we just ignored the depressing thought that it’s one of humanity’s constants?

Why did Islamic State target Paris? Its statement claiming responsibility declared the city as “the capital of debauchery and vice and carrying the banner of the cross in Europe.”

We may vehemently disassociate ourselves from that statement. We might even silently agree with the debauchery observation. But France, an unapologetically secular state, is one of the last countries that should be confused with promoting Christianity.

The Islamists, of course, are convenient students of history. Dragging up the crusader’s “cross” awakens Muslim anger while weakening already faltering Christian conviction in the West. We rightly don’t want to be associated with that politicized cross of emperors and popes, but in our secularized discipleship we risk throwing away the cross of Golgotha as if it was the same cross. This is sloppy theology and a sly ploy of the Evil One.



So how now do we live?

It is time to become more, not less, Christian. In no way does this mean recovering some nostalgic fantasy of a “Christian” nation. Rather, it is time to unashamedly hold up Jesus and his cross as the hope of the world. He told us to take up our cross and follow him. It is time we wake up from our slumber and the debates that are distractions and death-nails to our witness of Christ in the world, and declare that we exist to bring him glory. He is the risen king and in him alone is there salvation from what ails this incredibly messy planet.

In the grace of God alone revealed in Christ is there rescue from our proud sin-sickness. In Jesus’ crucified body alone is there hope for an end to hostil-

[I]t is time to unashamedly hold up Jesus and his cross as the hope of the world.

ities and the creation of a new people, a new household. This is the gospel hope of Ephesians 2 and it is the gospel blessing promised to Abraham in Genesis 12. It is for all people—even Islamic State!

Surprisingly enough, a cry for renewal is coming from German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Seeing her people disturbed by Islamic fervour and frightened

by incoming refugees, she called for a spiritual reawakening. Rather than slither further into secular emptiness and dither in spiritual confusion, she told Germans to get back to church, read the Bible and take their faith seriously. In a prophetic challenge to shaky western Christians, she declared, “If you were to get people to write an essay on the meaning of Pentecost, you would soon see that people’s knowledge of Christianity leaves much to be desired.”

Ouch. Is she right about Canadian Mennonites?

What would you and your church say about the meaning of Pentecost? Yes, we’re at Christmas, but Pentecost is when he who was born in a manger set fire to the world. He still threshes for good wheat and burns away religious chaff by baptizing those who repent with the very breath and power of God (Matthew 3:11-12). This is power to witness to Jesus as Lord. This is power to be freed and transformed from our pride, debauchery, and “Jesus Lite” and other cross-corrupting theologies. This is power to be the people

of God—a true people of peace—in a world at war.

It’s Christmas, friends, but it’s time for a new Pentecost.

Phil Wagler (phil_wagler@yahoo.ca) and his family live in Surrey, B.C. They are seeking to take up their cross and follow the king for the sake of the world God so loved.

(Continued from page 9)
forefront of our public faith.

We will also have to reckon with the fact that our many and manifold ministries have not resulted in non-believers seeking faith and community with us in numbers that will sustain these ministries into the future in North America.

WALTER BERGEN, ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

✉ MC Canada leaders should be 'free to be prophetic'

RE: "FINDING MY prophetic voice," Oct. 12, page 11.

I am deeply disturbed to hear that, as a leader working with Mennonite Church Canada, Vic Thiessen was basically muzzled, unable to comment on any existing policy that he might not agree with. That is not my

NEW CANADIAN VOICE

Seeking asylum for freedom and justice

JOSEPH M. WUOL

"A society that does not recognize that each individual has values of his own which he is entitled to follow can have no respect for the dignity of the individual and can not really know freedom." (Friedrich Hayek)

Sudan achieved independence from British colonialism in January 1956. A protracted civil war followed, raging between successive Islamic fundamentalist ruling cliques in the north and the Christian-dominated south. Eventually, this led to the south becoming an independent state in 2011.

In 1983, conflict broke out due to the repressive political and religious policies of the Islamic fundamentalist regime. The Christian south reacted against institutionalized Islamization, slavery, employment inequality, injustices in wealth sharing and the infringement of basic rights and freedoms.

The conflict raged until 2005. During this time, many Sudanese people like me did not know life apart from this state of violent conflict. More than two million people died during this time. Generations lost opportunities at education and dignified living. Hunger and starvation, disease, human-rights violations and crimes against humanity, child soldiering, the abuse of women and children, torture

and disappearances were commonly experienced by many South Sudanese Christians with dark African skin.

In May 2000, I made my first attempt to flee the country. I was stopped by security at the airport, even though I had valid travel documents. I was taken in for investigation, and accused of inciting the public against the government and of supporting the rebel's opposition calling for democracy and rule of law.

Two months later, I was picked up by security and accused of conducting secret meetings with government representatives who secretly opposed the government and who were collaborating with rebels. I spent four months in political detention without any court procedures before being released with strict terms and conditions. I was not allowed at public gatherings and could not visit the offices of government or non-governmental organizations. I could not travel anywhere outside of Khartoum. Failure to comply would be met with serious consequences.

My friend who worked for the government warned me not to ignore their threats. He had seen many people being

tortured at night in the detention centres known as "ghost houses."

In April 2001, I decided to flee for good. Two months later, I left Khartoum, leaving behind my wife, three young children and the country of my birth-right. With a forged passport, I took the two-day train journey to Halfa, where I boarded a river barge across the Nile to the Port of Aswan.

Throughout this escape, I was lost in a nightmare of deepening feelings and disbelief. I played over in my mind the fate of my family, colleagues, close relatives, friends, and, above all, my loss of dignity and statehood. My questions did not lead to any convincing answers, except to praise and thank God for protecting me from security agents.

In Egypt, I surrendered myself to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and was granted asylum.

In July, I received a call that my family had arrived. That reunion was a happy turning point for me. In August, we were ready to travel to Canada. Unfortunately, the tragic 9/11 bombing delayed us, but we travelled to Fredericton, N.B., in December 2002.

My asylum journey for freedom and justice continues to shape my life to this day. My memories are both painful and happy. The violent conflict forced me into years of life in exile, depriving me of meaningful parenthood, community life and a nation to be proud of. My children have also been affected by this tragedy.

Joseph M. Wuol and his family came to worship at Kitchener (Ont.) First Mennonite Church in June 2006. He is the chair of the South Sudanese Peacebuilding Organization in Kitchener.



expectation of leadership. Do we not appoint individuals with ability, insight and experience because we believe they have something specific to offer us? It sounded like he was expected to maintain the status quo.

Before returning to pastoral ministry, I spent much of my time and energy in management and leadership training. I learned that the opposite of quality is “good enough.” When we stop challenging the way things are, we will never get to where they should be.

I believe that applies to every sphere of life and certainly to leadership in the church. We have not yet arrived in any of our policies and practices. Can we not set our leadership free to be prophetic in their roles and lead us to new places?

ART SHEIL, PARKHILL, ONT.

Art Sheil is the pastor of Nairn Mennonite Church in Ailsa Craig, Ont.

✉ **By only listening we withhold Jesus’ divine love from others**

RE: “READY TO listen and learn,” Nov. 9, page 9. Katie Doke Sawatzky’s statement that she’s “not interested in converting anyone to Christianity immediately affected my spirit. I assume this statement was borne out of a reaction from some who try to force Christianity on people as a doctrine, informed no doubt by our own sorry history in the Indian Residential School system.

I can understand a reaction like this, but it is depressing because such a stance of only listening—and not sharing—neuters the transformative love that

is embodied in Jesus. To withhold this divine love, especially in the face of real pain and brokenness sure to accompany refugees from the Near East and East Africa, would be a great loss, both to the one sharing this love and the one receiving it.

Evangelism isn’t about having all the right answers and shoving it in everyone else’s face. It is about seeing people from God’s perspective, recognizing and validating their true value and seeing how Jesus has already been acting in their lives.

This is exactly what Christians should do. The verse from I John 4:7 comes to mind: “*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.*”

JONATHAN JANZEN (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ **Is the church afraid if love goes unchecked?**

MY EXPERIENCE WITH the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests—a movement where sexual orientation is irrelevant—has resulted in me rethinking much of what has evolved in our Mennonite Church Canada agenda in “Becoming a faithful church.” What authority do we, as a church, have to tell God who he or she can love or not love?

I find it very difficult to accept that we are happy to pay lip service to the idea of bearing with one another in love, so long as we can continue the practices of exclusion we have held to all along.

WILLIAM TAVES, LEAMINGTON, ONT.

Read the rest of this letter online at canadianmennonite.org.



A moment from yesterday



Abram Regier of the Coaldale, Alta., area in a field at an irrigation trench in 1946. Early pioneers realized that for the Coaldale and Lethbridge areas to grow, a new water source would need to be established. Plans were drawn up for an irrigation system in 1893, and was made a reality in 1904, with water coming into the Coaldale area. Water is becoming a more urgent issue around the world for food production in areas like Mexico and California, and water-intensive industries such as the oil industry’s use of water in fracking.

Text: Conrad Stoesz / Mennonite Heritage Centre

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre



archives.mhsc.ca

VIEWPOINT

Where is the
'good news'?

SEAN EAST

Although not an active participant, I follow the same-sex marriage discussion and its ethical and theological implications for our church. Through personal research I am most comfortable affirming our historical beliefs, although simultaneously uncomfortable with their articulation and practice. With each new story or column on the topic, I hear the same question echoing through my head: "Where is the 'good news'?"

By "good news" I am not meaning the conclusive and irrefutable answer to a complicated inquiry, a final abdication of one set of beliefs in bludgeoned deference to the other, or a final resolution from our denominational leaders freeing us up to move on. Nor am I thinking of journalistic negativity. What I mean is: "Where is the 'good news'—the gospel of/about Jesus Christ and the God he reveals?"

I just finished reading *Simply Good News* by N.T. Wright. He suggests that reporting the gospel as good news differs from sharing the gospel as good ethical advice. Not that good ethical advice is bad. But it's not the news. The "good news" about Jesus Christ has three components to it:

- **THE HISTORICAL** component reports that the tomb was empty and that Jesus is alive.
- **THE FUTURE** component reports that one day Jesus will return heaven to earth and reconcile all things to God.
- **THE PRESENT** component of already-but-not-yet reports that we can experience pockets of this reconciliation now through the power of the Spirit at work in the world. Contrary to popular opinion,



the existence of our God is good news because God is not fearsome like an angry judge but available like a loving parent seeking the best for a child.

Paul states in I Corinthians 1 that "*we preach Christ crucified—a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness*

to Greeks, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." In other words, not everyone will immediately see the goodness in the news, but for those who can see it, things change for the better.

I think in sports analogies. A few months ago, the hockey world buzzed with news that Mike Babcock was the new coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs for a bargain price of \$50 million over eight years. In Toronto, trumpets sounded the good news, and as a long-suffering Leafs fan I got excited! This news had a historical component because Babcock had been hired. It has a future component because it promises a Stanley Cup for Toronto . . . someday. And it has a present component of already-but-not-yet because Babcock's reign unfolds now in hopeful anticipation of what is to come.

For fans in Buffalo and Detroit—other teams that bid for Babcock's services—the news wasn't good. It became a stumbling block because the news didn't represent the world they sought because

The news the world desperately needs to hear gets lost in advice we are all too happy to give.

Babcock could no longer be their hockey saviour. The news was foolishness to many because of the ludicrous salary or the irrelevance of hockey. But no matter the hearer's reaction, the news itself remained true: Babcock is the coach of the Leafs.

I fear that our well-meaning effort to bring clarity on same-sex marriage has positioned us to the church and the watching world as if our decision—rather than the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ—is the hinge point in world history. It's like the news being good depends on the right answer to this question, instead of it being the power and wisdom of God. I fear that our obsession with researching the story has blurred the headline. And regardless of who—if anyone—ultimately gets it right, I fear that trying to find a way for the news to sound good to everyone risks making it sound good to no one.

It seems to me that our role as people of God is twofold:

- **FIRST**, to live lives with each other that operate under the rule of God, not the rule of culture, distinctively bearing witness to the God we worship. We do our best to wrestle with the ethical and theological implications that recognizing God's rule bring, but they cannot be the only story.
- **OUR SECOND**, equally important role is to be reporters—witnesses—to the gospel, the "good news" of/about Jesus Christ.

If the lead story is always about the first point, I wonder who lasts to the back page where we finally report the second one. The news the world desperately needs to hear gets lost in advice we are all too happy to give. Isn't it time for "good news" to be the main story? I, for one, would love to celebrate a headline that proclaims "Extra, extra, read all about it! God so loved the world—there's no doubt about it!" ❧

Sean East is pastor of West Hills Mennonite Fellowship, Baden, Ont, and financial manager of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

- Ens-Parker**—Abram Anthony (b. Oct. 20, 2015), to Stephanie Ens and Timothy Coughlan, Springstein Mennonite, Man.
- Froese**—Micah Peter (b. Nov. 7, 2015), to Matt and Jesslyn Froese, The First Mennonite, Vineland, Ont.
- Green**—Daniel Nicholas (b. Oct. 3, 2015), to Andrea and Nick Green, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.
- Pawlikowski**—Niko Menno Plett (b. March 27, 2015), to Ruth Plett and Krystan Pawlikowski, Community Mennonite, Stouffville, Ont., in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- Petkau**—Bruno David (b. Nov. 7, 2015), to Justin Petkau and Sylwia Sieminska, Carman Mennonite, Man.
- Sawyer**—Jerrett William (b. Oct. 23, 2015), to Rich and Heidi Sawyer, Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.
- Schlegel**—Abigail Erin (b. Oct. 16, 2015), to Erin and Tobin Schlegel, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.
- Snyder**—Emmett Charles (b. Nov. 11, 2015), to Teena and Murray Snyder, Stirling Avenue Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.
- Wiebe**—Mae Celena (b. Oct. 30, 2015), to Jordan and Rhiannon Wiebe, Sterling Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Marriages

- Alkema/Reusser**—Andrew Alkema and Catejo Reusser, Stirling Avenue Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont., Oct. 17, 2015.
- Bowman/Gerber**—Catrina Bowman and Nolan Gerber, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont., Aug. 15, 2015.
- Burkholder/Harris**—Kaite Burkholder and Tyler Harris (Ottawa Mennonite), Oct. 24, 2015.
- Collins/Reesor**—Rachel Collins and Ben Reesor, Stirling Avenue Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont., Aug. 29, 2015.
- Epp/Umulisa**—Darrell Epp and Dorothee Umulisa, at Hamilton Mennonite, Ont., Oct. 3, 2015.
- Guenther/Loewen**—Bruce Guenther and Emily Loewen, Hope Mennonite, Winnipeg, Oct. 17, 2015.
- Loewen/Plett**—Annie Loewen and Paul Plett (both attend Home Street Mennonite, Winnipeg), in Landmark, Man., July 18, 2015.
- Martin/Musselman**—Darcy Martin and Rachel Musselman, Stirling Avenue Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont., Aug. 8, 2015.
- McMillan/Sawatzky**—Kate McMillan and Jeremy Sawatzky (Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.), in Winnipeg, Nov. 7, 2015.
- Riquelme/Zehr**—William Riquelme and Francine Zehr, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont., Aug. 29, 2015.
- Schumm/Zehr**—Matthew Schumm and Kelsea Zeher, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont., Aug. 28, 2015.

Deaths

- Braun**—Mary (nee Schmidt), 99 (b. April 9, 1916; d. Oct. 28, 2015), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.
- Derksen**—Agatha (Lil) (nee Stoesz), 90 (b. April 3, 1925; d. Nov. 14, 2015), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.
- Dick**—Edgar, 91 (b. Nov. 25, 1923; d. Oct. 20, 2015), Carman Mennonite, Man.
- Enns**—Jacob, 98 (b. Aug. 23, 1917; d. Nov. 11, 2015), Vineland United Mennonite, Ont.
- Epp**—Edward G., 91 (b. Feb. 29, 1924; d. Oct. 27, 2015), Eigenheim Mennonite, Rosthern, Sask.
- Friesen**—Jerry, 62 (b. Sept. 6, 1953; d. Nov. 5, 2015), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.
- Heinrichs**—Esther (nee Suderman), 84 (b. Sept. 10, 1931; d. Oct. 31, 2015), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.
- Hiebert**—Helen, 97 (b. Sept. 17, 1918; d. Oct. 24, 2015), Carman Mennonite, Man.
- Hunsberger**—Willa (nee Thompson), 75 (b. March 23, 1940; d. Oct. 22, 2015), Erb Street Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.
- Janzen**—Henry David, 83 (b. July 14, 1932; d. Sept. 21, 2015), First Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.
- Janzen**—Olga (nee Melcosky), 84 (b. Aug. 12, 1931; d. Nov. 11, 2015), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.
- Krahn**—John, 91 (b. June 3, 1924; d. Nov. 4, 2015), First Mennonite, Calgary.
- Kroeker**—David, 72 (b. June 8, 1943; d. Aug. 30, 2015), Tofield Mennonite, Alta.
- Loewen**—Judy, 71 (b. July 26, 1944; d. Aug. 30, 2015), Foothills Mennonite, Calgary.
- Neufeld**—Jack (Josh/Jacob), 88 (b. Oct. 16, 1927; d. Oct. 30, 2015), Carman Mennonite, Man.
- Rempel**—Gertrude (nee Kroeker), 88 (b. Oct. 11, 1927; d. Oct. 25, 2015), Carman Mennonite, Man.
- Ruby**—Samuel, 86 (b. June 28, 1929; d. Sept. 29, 2015), East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.
- Schellenberg**—John, 83 (b. Nov. 14, 1931; d. March 21, 2015), Foothills Mennonite, Calgary.
- Unrau**—Don Alfred, 79 (b. Sept. 9, 1936; d. Nov. 8, 2015), Faith Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.
- Voth**—Elvira (Ellie), 94 (b. Feb. 6, 1921; d. Nov. 11), Toronto United Mennonite.
- Weber**—Norma (nee Shoemaker), 90 (b. July 14, 1925; d. Oct. 24, 2015), St. Jacobs Mennonite, 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.

GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

MC Canada national office lays off five

Projected budget shortfall required immediate action

BY WILL BRAUN
Senior Writer

Mennonite Church Canada laid off five staff members on Nov. 28, as part of the cost-saving restructuring efforts that fall under the banner of the Future Directions Task Force. While decisions on the task force's final report will only be made at Assembly 2016 next summer in Saskatoon, a projected budget shortfall of nearly \$300,000 this year required immediate action, MC Canada stated in a news release.

The names of those laid off have not been made public. Two were full-time, three were part-time. They included people from the finance, human resources and Christian formation departments, the latter of which includes Sunday school curriculum development and the resource centre.

Along with related program reductions, the changes are expected to save more than \$500,000 over two years.

While reductions were no surprise, concerns were raised on social media and elsewhere about the manner of the lay-offs. At least some of the five were relieved of all duties immediately upon being notified and provided transportation home. Severance packages in line with MC Canada policy will be paid out.

In response to concerns, MC Canada spokesperson Dan Dyck said via e-mail that released staff were treated with "sensitivity and caring."

On Dec. 1, MC Canada executive director Willard Metzger posted a letter online responding to some of the concerns. "Great care was taken in informing affected staff," he wrote. "An offsite location was selected to provide privacy and rides were offered to remove any concerns about transportation."

"Such an immediate end to an employment relationship does not allow for a

completion of projects," he added.

The letter also expressed thanks to the released workers, saying their work was "an expression of worship."

Kirsten Schroeder, the former head of human resources, was among those released. In a Facebook post, she sought to diffuse the anger that some have expressed toward MC Canada leaders. Schroeder,

In response to concerns, MC Canada spokesperson Dan Dyck said via e-mail that released staff were treated with 'sensitivity and caring.'

who was not party to decisions about who would be released or how, believes it is important to hold the church to account, but feels that no injustice was done in this case.

She said of the decision makers, "I know these people love and care for me." Their decisions were in essence the decisions of the broader church. "The churches have spoken with their financial support," she wrote, "and we know that the church has to change." ❧

/// Briefly Noted

Church awarded for creating wheelchair access

Home Street Mennonite Church has won an award from the City of Winnipeg for its efforts to make its 95-year-old building wheelchair accessible. For decades, church members with limited mobility struggled to navigate a flight of stairs to get from the front doors to the sanctuary. Several attempts at solving the problem ended in disagreements over cost and design. Finally, in 2011, the church struck an accessibility committee and hired Ager Little Architects. The project, which involved eliminating a concrete step, building a box to house a new elevator, and installing larger doors and new washrooms, cost \$650,000. The church received a \$40,000 grant from Manitoba Community Places and \$25,000 from the bequest fund of Shantz Mennonite Church in Baden, Ont. The remaining \$585,000 was raised by the congregation. "People emptied their coin jars for this project," said Brenda Suderman, who was on the committee. "We had about 100 households pledge or make donations." This year, the City of Winnipeg recognized the architects and the church for their grassroots efforts to make a building accessible to people with disabilities. It was the only privately funded project to win an award.

—STORY AND PHOTO BY J. NEUFELD



Three members of the Home Street Mennonite Church Accessibility Committee, Brenda Suderman, Christine Ens and David Neufeld, are pictured with the award from the City of Winnipeg.

Between a rock and a hard place

MC Eastern Canada struggles with boundary crossings by credentialed leaders

BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
KITCHENER, ONT.

Leaders at Mennonite Church Eastern Canada feel they are caught between a rock and a hard place, as they have had to deal with a number of boundary crossings by church leaders over the past five years. Such work can consume time and energy in immense amounts because the denominational leaders want the victims to be treated with dignity and confidentiality, and they want to move the abuser and congregation toward healing.

Executive minister David Martin says that each case is different and is dealt with in a situational way. Reporting a case to the public depends on the sphere of the abuser's influence, which can be from local to international. One of the reasons for making a name public is to "open the way for other potential victims to come forward," he says, and potentially move toward healing. Often victims have already done significant work on that path. The time lag between the abuse and the reporting often includes the victim getting significant help with the violation experienced.

To handle the reporting of such cases, MC Eastern Canada, in collaboration with the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, Brethren in Christ Church and Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, formed the Sexual Misconduct and Resource Response Team (SMARRT). MC Eastern Canada also established a web page on its website (mcec.ca/reporting-sexual-misconduct-church-leaders) that provides specific contact information. "Church leaders" can refer to either credentialed pastors or lay leaders with positions of trust in congregations.

Henry Paetkau, area church minister, then prepares a report for MC Eastern Canada's Leadership Council. The area

church's Executive Council is made aware when boundary crossings of credentialed leaders happen, as Leadership is responsible to the Executive, according to moderator Paul Wideman. Names of abusers are not released for vindictive or shame-producing purposes, but to promote healing in the church, and to attempt to create a climate in which such boundary crossing is seen as unacceptable.

Victims' names are held in confidence, so as not to inflict any more pain on them or their families. The Executive, says Wideman, errs on the side of being too confidential about victims. Victims sometimes choose to go public themselves, but should only do so after counselling by trained workers, like those who serve on SMARRT.

The web page indicates that confidentiality and the commitment to listen to victims' stories without judgment are important. However, Martin says that victims' stories are tested carefully for accountability.

Wideman believes that the web page is an interactive mode for victims to enter into conversation with the church about what has happened to them, since many are no longer active in congregations. The process in the church looks for truth, justice and healing, rather than being an adversarial legal process, says Paetkau.

MC Eastern Canada has not only set up the web page and dealt with boundary crossings, but is actively working on education in congregations and with their leaders. All credentialed leaders are expected to attend a day-long seminar on boundary maintenance every five years, as a way to refresh and extend their self-care. Pastors who fail to take time for themselves and

their families, or to have a life beyond their church connections, are more likely to cross boundaries in situations with power differentials. All pastors also sign ethical covenants with their congregations.

Martin says that "story articles" are being prepared to "deepen understanding about misconduct": what it is and how to both stop it from happening, and to deal with it when it does.

Martin, Wideman and Paetkau are all clear that the purpose of dealing with sexual abuse in private—and, when necessary, in public—is healing, creating a safe place for victims, and ensuring the church is a safe place for everyone. ❧

In the interests of full disclosure, Dave Rogalsky, besides being Canadian Mennonite's Eastern Canada correspondent, is also the pastor of Wilmot Mennonite Church, an MC Eastern Canada congregation in New Hamburg, Ont.

Staff change

Pastoral transition in British Columbia

• **TIM KUEPFER**, who had served as lead pastor of Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond since 2003, has ended his service there to answer a call as senior minister of First Baptist Church, Vancouver. Originally from Millbank, Ont., Kuepfer earned a master of divinity degree from Prairie Bible College in Three Hills, Alta., and studied the New Testament in 2002 at Regent College in Vancouver. He and his wife Sandra have three sons.



Tim Kuepfer

• **MARK FOX** began as transitional minister at Peace Mennonite on Oct. 1. Fox has served as a minister, chaplain, teacher and software developer. He also attended Regent College.



Mark Fox

—BY AMY DUECKMAN

MC Manitoba envisions new future for camps

By J. NEUFELD

Manitoba Correspondent

Mennonite Church Manitoba has a new vision for its camping ministry, one that involves relinquishing two of its camps and significantly improving the third.

“The question was, how do we ensure the camping ministry remains sustainable in the years to come,” said Dorothy Fontaine, MC Manitoba’s director of mission, on Oct. 26 at the fall delegate meeting. “That means everything from financial sustainability to, are we going in the spiritual direction God is leading us in?”

One of the challenges the camping ministry has faced in recent years is a decline of about 100 fewer campers per year. Part of that is due to challenges of communicating with campers outside the area church constituency. At one time, 70 percent of the campers were from MC Manitoba churches and 30 per cent were not. Now those figures are reversed.

According to the new vision, MC Manitoba will relinquish Camp Moose Lake and Camp Koinonia. The area church is negotiating with two groups, each of which is interested in either owning or managing one of the camps. MC Manitoba would then rent the camps from their new owners/managers during the summer months, in order to continue its regular summer camp programming.

At the same time, MC Manitoba wants to repair some deteriorating cabins at

Camp Assiniboia and upgrade other facilities. The camping ministry’s new vision is to “nurture the spiritual growth of the next generation, and also to create spaces, resources and opportunities for [MC Manitoba] churches to explore and align with God’s reconciling mission to ‘gather all things in him’ (Ephesians 1:9-10). Our vision seeks to embrace God’s remarkable mission through self-reflection and prayer, learning and thoughtful dialogue, relationship-building, and acts of love and service.”

Some of the ideas proposed in the vision document include:

- **RUNNING A** gap-year program that would give students opportunities for voluntary service and faith development, including a one-week service trip within North America;
- **OFFERING SPIRITUAL** retreats for MC Manitoba congregations;
- **EXPANDING THE** camp farm to include a “diversity of animals, vegetables and fruit,” and an outdoor gazebo/teaching area;
- **DEVELOPING FOREST** trails that would encourage meditation, ecological learning and recreation; and
- **BUILDING A** cabin in which the families of missing and murdered indigenous women could stay near Winnipeg while searching for their missing family members.

The vision document outlines a series of

PHOTO COURTESY OF
MENNONITE CHURCH MANITOBA



Campers at Camp Assiniboia harvest potatoes from the farm.

developments that would happen in stages. While the overall proposal for Camp Assiniboia is still in the discussion stage, a few urgent renovations are set to begin this spring. Mennonite Disaster Service will be replacing the camp’s deteriorating circular summer cabins with all-season cabins that can accommodate families and rental groups. The new cabins will include wheelchair-accessible washrooms and showers. Two dorm-style rooms on both sides of the mini-conference centre will also be converted into four private rooms. The renovations will increase the camp’s rental capacity by at least 25 people and make it more accommodating for group rentals. The camp estimates it turned away \$132,000 worth of rental business last summer due to a lack of space.

Plans are also in place to move the pool and ropes course out of the flood zone of the Assiniboine River and to construct a floating dock for fishing and boat rides.

The capital costs for the first stage of facility development are estimated at between \$516,000 and \$608,000. A longer-term development initiative for the camp, which includes a capital development plan, will be presented at MC Manitoba’s annual general meeting this coming March. MC Manitoba is encouraging congregations to consider the new vision so that a capital development plan can be approved at that time.

“I think this is a really exciting venture,” said Ken Warkentin, MC Manitoba’s executive director. “It’s not a new venture because the emphasis is going to continue to be on children’s camp, youth and faith development—but the added dimension of congregational mission going into this is very exciting.” ❧



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PHOTO COURTESY OF OLIVIA DEAN



A small sample of the summer 2015 verein at Leamington (Ont.) United Mennonite Church: from left to right, front row: Shania Trepanier, Karlee Driedger, Emma Konrad, Melissa Froese, Olivia Dean and Shane Klassen; and back row: Jesse Driedger, Katrina Wagner and Ashton Fehr.

Old name . . . new idea

Young adults create 'verein' for fellowship, worship and prayer

BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
LEAMINGTON, ONT.

Verein: club, association, organization, society, union, social club, guild.

Many congregations with a Russian Mennonite background would find the idea of a group of women—usually older women—gathering to sew and fellowship under the “verein” label very normal.

But at Leamington United Mennonite Church in southwestern Ontario, a new group of mixed university-age young adults decided to call itself a verein five years ago. To the title they added 640, referencing Luke 6:40: “A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher” (NRSV).

According to Pastor David Dyck, the idea came as he noticed that many young people would go through catechism, be baptized and join the church. This commonly happened at the end of high school and some of the new members never returned, going to university in the fall and beginning lives elsewhere.

The idea for a summer group that would continue the discipleship process attracted four or five young adults for the first two summers, but in the third year two

University of Guelph students, Olivia Dean and Shane Klassen, who had been part of a Christian discipleship group called Power to Change Ministries at university, took leadership. Mennonites, Catholics and even a few people with no religious

affiliation gathered to discuss, learn and support each other, sometimes in gatherings of up to 40 or more.

The group fellowship is like many young-adult programs, but also focusses on worship, study, mutual caring and prayer. Each evening ends with the group gathered in a circle praying for each other. Dyck says he has seen many instances of God at work, what he calls “unexpected movements of the Spirit,” as the young adults share about their lives of faith at home and at university.

While some in the congregation complained when few of the young adults came to church on Sunday morning, others saw the weekly group from May to August as another valid form of church.

“I have seen first-hand how important it is that we, as a church, continue to encourage and actively challenge our young adults to continue growing in their faith after high school,” Dean reported to the congregation. “I know from personal experience going away to school, that it is not easy to keep your faith in the midst of a society that is constantly pressuring you to give it up. . . . I hope that this ministry can continue for many summers to come and I thank the [Leamington] church family for their support of this group. It is so refreshing to see how God truly is present when we gather in his name.” ☞

MENNONITE HERITAGE TOURS

Affiliated with the California Mennonite Historical Society

SEEING POLAND THROUGH MENNONITE EYES

June 11-22, 2016

Tour Leader: Alan Peters

THE MENNONITE PAST AND PRESENT IN NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM

July 11-22, 2016

Tour Leaders: Paul Toews and
Valerie Rempel

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God at work in the Church

Snapshots

PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY



The anniversary choir, conducted by Rick Martin, sings at Shantz Mennonite Church's 175th-anniversary celebration on Oct. 3. The Baden, Ont., congregation began in the late 1830s, as Mennonite families settled along what eventually became Erb's Road in Wilmot Township, west of Waterloo. By 1840, a congregation formed there at the corner of Erb's and Sandhills roads. A stone building was built and used until 1929, when it was replaced by a brick edifice. In 1956, that building lost its roof to a tornado! Additions on the south and east sides added needed Sunday school, office and foyer space, and an accessibility lift was built. As the celebrations were taking place, a decision on whether or not to build anew was in process. The full story of the anniversary and more photos are available online at bit.ly/1PEtNKr.



PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY



Nella Cameron, Marie Lepp and Anne Penner look at photos recounting the history of Bethany Mennonite Church, Virgil, Ont., at the congregation's 50th anniversary celebration on Oct. 2. For a story and more pictures, visit bit.ly/1HmPJHk.



ROSTHERN JUNIOR COLLEGE PHOTO



Arnold Boldt, left, who attended Rosthern (Sask.) Junior College (RJC) from 1973-75, shares about being a recipient of the Order of Canada at the recent RJC fundraising and appreciation banquet while being interviewed by Karalee Kuny and Ryan Wood. Boldt has been a Team Canada Paralympic Athlete in both high jump and cycling. His world record for high jump still stands today. Boldt is also a member of the Saskatchewan and Canadian Athletic halls of fame. The event raised more than \$50,000, which will go towards the college's operating budget.

GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Mennonite Disaster Service steps in

After weathering four floods, couple grateful for the help

BY J. NEUFELD

Manitoba Correspondent

SELKIRK, MAN.

The first three times their house flooded, John and Mary Webb managed to make repairs. But in 2011, after the Red River filled it with water for the fourth time, they were broke.

“We’d put our retirement money into this house,” says Mary. “We didn’t have any funds left. We were poor.”

The Webbs own a house along the banks of the flood-prone Red River on Breezy Point Road north of Selkirk. Every year, when the ice breaks up and the river begins to swell with spring run-off, they watch the surging waters to see if they’ll need to build a sandbag dike to protect their house. During the record flood of 1997, volunteers helped construct a 10,000-sandbag wall that kept their house dry. But some years the sandbags aren’t high enough and the river spills over into their basement.

“It’s very eerie because you’re in your home and all you hear is the trees snapping from the ice floes and the water rushing in,”

says Mary.

After the 2011 flood, the Webbs appealed to the Manitoba government for assistance. To protect against future flooding, they needed to lift the house up, erect a metre-high wall atop the foundation, set the house back down and build up an earthen embankment around it. The garage also needed to be relocated. The provincial government and the Red Cross provided grant money to pay for building materials, but the Webbs still could not afford to pay for the labour. Both of them are retired and John has chronic back pain that prevents him from doing physical labour.

That’s when Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) stepped in. The provincial government contacted the Red Cross, which contacted Dan Klassen, chair of the Manitoba chapter of MDS, to see if the organization could help out. MDS agreed to provide all the labour free of charge.

“I cannot express my thanks enough for

the support of the Mennonites,” says Mary. “Without their manual labour and paying for things up front, I don’t know what we would have done. Dan and his crews have been absolutely marvellous.”

Klassen estimates MDS invested more than 3,000 hours of labour into the project, with more than 50 women and men helping out.

“It’s quite unbelievable that people would come forward and want to help like that,” Mary says.

The Webbs have been living in their son’s basement for the past four years while they have been trying to finish the work on the house. John is currently in England with his 93-year-old mother, who is recovering from surgery. Once she is feeling well enough, he will help her move to Canada, and she will live with the Webbs in their newly renovated house.

“It’s a dream come true,” says Mary, hoping their house will be ready to move into by Christmastime. ❧

/// Briefly Noted

Canadians eager to help Syrian refugees

As Canada prepares to settle 25,000 Syrian refugees across the country, offers of help are pouring into the office of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Manitoba. “I haven’t seen this kind of response since the early ’80s with the boat people,” MCC’s migration and resettlement coordinator, Arisnel Mesidor, told the CBC, referencing the wave of Vietnamese people who fled their country more than 30 years ago. Churches from different denominations, businesses and groups of individuals have been calling MCC to ask how they can sponsor refugees from Syria,” he said, noting that others are giving money to assist relief efforts in Syria. Between now and Dec. 31, the Canadian government will match every dollar donated to a registered charity in response to the Syrian refugee crisis. MCC is encouraging Canadians to give generously.

—BY J. NEUFELD

PHOTO BY KEN LOEWEN



John and Mary Webb’s house nears completion after more than 3,000 hours of repairs by Mennonite Disaster Service volunteers following a 2011 flood of the Red River near Selkirk, Man.

Completion of MDS work in High River celebrated

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alberta Correspondent
EDMONTON

Sandra and Harold Friesen of Calgary and Linda and Jim Dyck of Pincher Creek spent the last two years volunteering as project coordinators for Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) work in High River, Alta., cleaning up after a summer 2013 flood in Calgary and area—the worst in the province’s history—that displaced more than 100,000 people and caused an estimated \$5 billion in property damage.

Until the project wrapped up in October, the Friesens, who live in Calgary, spent every Wednesday working in High River, coordinating clean-up and the rebuilding of homes for those who did not have the means or ability to do it themselves.

The MDS effort in High River involved

a total of 1,051 volunteers—41 percent of whom were under the age of 26—whose work has been valued at nearly \$1.6 million. In total, 155 projects were completed.

“I was so impressed with the love our volunteers poured into their work and specifically showed towards the clients,” Sandra wrote. “The bonus was that most of our clients were living in the home while the volunteers worked there. That gave them an opportunity to get to know them and connect.”

Special touches to the MDS flood response came from two Calgary Mennonite churches. Trinity Mennonite became a welcoming “home base” for volunteers from far away, and provided hot meals



Sandra and Harold Friesen of Calgary and Linda and Jim Dyck of Pincher Creek spent the last two years volunteering as project coordinators for Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) work in High River, Alta., cleaning up after a summer 2013 flood in Calgary and area. They and other volunteers were honoured at a dessert night and MDS fundraiser in Edmonton on Nov. 6.

and rides to and from the airport for the volunteers. Some members of Foothills Mennonite made quilts that were given to MDS clients.

A dessert night and fundraiser hosted by Ken and Jody Tse and the Edmonton Christian Life Community Church on Nov. 6 raised more than \$5,000. ❧

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Glen Kauffman, chair of the Mennonite Disaster Service Alberta board, shows off his building skills in a tower-building game at a Nov. 6 dessert night and fundraiser in Edmonton.

A powerful pen

Retired school teacher becomes pen pal to prison inmates

BY J. NELSON KRAYBILL

Mennonite World Conference

A retired school teacher and prison inmates are unlikely pen pals who have exchanged thousands of letters in Curitiba, Brazil, over the past decade.

It began when a man in prison responded to a short piece 76-year-old Dona Maria Martins published in a devotional magazine in 2006. She replied to the letter that arrived at her church's address, and soon found herself responding to dozens of letters each week from inmates seeking pastoral care.

"Often these men are abandoned by their families," Martins says. "I became a spiritual mother to them."

Her letters tell about Jesus and usually include illustrations clipped from magazines.

Now a small circle of women from Igreja Evangélica Menonita Água Verde (Green Water Mennonite Church) join Martins several times a week to read and answer correspondence. Inmates often request Bibles, so the Mennonites of Curitiba designed a Bible correspondence course. Hundreds of inmates have completed it.

"God is love," Martins declares, "and the letters are my way of sharing that good news." ❧



Retired school teacher Dona Maria Martins, right, and Pastor Fridbert August of Igreja Evangélica Menonita Água Verde (Green Water Mennonite Church) in Curitiba, Brazil, show examples of the thousands of letters she has written to men in prison in recent years.

PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD



Christians, Jews, Muslims, Baha'i and friends gather at Edmonton's Gandhi memorial to pray for peace on the evening of Remembrance Day. Sponsored by the Edmonton Ecumenical Peace Network, Mennonite Central Committee and McDougall United Church, their seventh annual peace walk was not only ecumenical, but also interfaith this year. After a short Christian worship service at the United church, Jewish, Muslim, Baha'i and Christian participants took turns offering readings and prayers for peace at each of four stations along the route. 'This event is not anti-anything,' says Scott Key, chair of the peace network. 'We are praying for peace, for the soldiers and for everyone.'



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Briefly noted

Mennonites 'wage peace' on Remembrance Day

OSLER, SASK.—A Mennonite church is not a typical venue for a Remembrance Day service, but on Nov. 11 members of several Mennonite Church Saskatchewan congregations came together at Osler Mennonite Church to pay tribute to those whose lives have been turned upside down by war. Pastor Patty Friesen led the time of worship, which included songs of peace. Winona Senner of Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon, read Judyth Hill's poem, "Wage Peace." "Our act of remembrance is to work for peace," said Claire Ewert Fisher, executive director of Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan, as she introduced featured speaker Rami Shamma. From Ramallah, Lebanon, Shamma is with the Development for People and Nature Association, which seeks to build peace between Lebanese citizens and the millions of Syrians living in refugee camps in his country. It is work that brings hope to a hopeless situation. "[We] peacebuilders always say we are doomed to be optimistic," said Shamma. "The only thing that makes us get out of bed and go to work is the hope that we can make a better life [for the refugees]." Shamma challenged his audience to think of ways in which they can live in solidarity with the people of Syria.

—STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ



A peace symbol made of twigs graces the communion table at Osler (Sask.) Mennonite Church during a Remembrance Day peace service.

ARTBEAT

MUSICAL REFLECTION

'An ample opportunity to try something new'

ABNER MARTIN

MENNO SINGERS

One could say that, in a musical sense, 1955 was the best of times and the worst of times when compared to today.

From a Swiss-South German Mennonite perspective, we were heirs to a rich tradition of unaccompanied four-part congregational singing that had its origins in the Singing School movement of the 19th century, when itinerant music teachers would come to a community—usually in winter when rural people had more free time—and teach the elements of shaped-note sight reading to adults. Most children of my generation were taught basic rudimentary aspects of sight singing in elementary school, while, at the same time, many mainline Protestant churches had flourishing choirs.

On the other hand, quality concert performances were a far cry from what they are today. The nearest thing to a concert hall in Waterloo Region was the Kitchener Collegiate Institute auditorium. In fact, it was the only public high school in town and there were no universities.

In 1955, the philharmonic choir had a long and storied history, but, with the approaching retirement of Glen Kruspe, was in a modest state of decline, later to be rejuvenated to its world-class status of today. So there was ample opportunity to try something new.

In the 1950s, a yearly musical highlight was when a touring college choir—including those from Goshen, Ind., and Bluffton, Ohio—would make an appearance in the area, all performing at a high level.

It's significant that the co-founders of

Menno Singers, Harold Good and Doris Moyer (they were married one year later), and Edith Shantz, were all graduates of a Goshen College touring choir.

During my two years at Goshen, at least 30 percent of the entire student population sang in one of a number of choirs. Not surprisingly, Menno Singers' concerts during the first five or six years were modelled after touring college choirs. We sang entirely a cappella, in English, and what little income we received came from free-will offerings. It wasn't until the spring of 1962 that we threw caution to the wind, hired an orchestra, charged admission and sang an entire two-hour musical setting of the *Ordinary of the Mass* in Latin. It was a daring experiment, but turned out to be a rather euphoric experience all around.

I wish that everyone could experience the unique joy of singing in a highly disciplined choir. Singing in a group is all about immersing oneself into a community of singers where, as one person said, the "I" or the "me" becomes "us."

Anyone who has had that experience can resonate with the fourth-century bishop Ambrose of Milan, who wrote that "the singing of psalms creates a great bond of unity when all the people raise their voices in one choir." That bond becomes real when a choir achieves the basic principles of unity as they apply to choral singing.

I learned something of this in week-long workshops with various eminent conductors. The basis of good choral sound is that within each vocal line there be a precise unity of pitch, unity of

volume, unity of vowel, unity of rhythm, and a unified sensitivity to the climax and resolution of a phrase and the meaning of the text. When all aspects of good choral singing are in perfect sync, there is a great bond of unity that comes from the exhilaration of singing a perfectly executed phrase. The reward is in the singing itself.

We are living in the midst of a technological revolution that is altering the way we live and how we relate to each other. We can communicate with someone anywhere in the world at a moment's notice, but that is no substitute for personal relationships in general, and, more specifically, for the intense communal and even mystical experience of choral singing. That is why I hope that flourishing choirs will still be around 60 years from now and that our educational authorities will have the wisdom to ensure that music be taught in our public schools. ❧

Abner Martin, Menno Singers' founding conductor, delivered this reflection at the choir's 60th-anniversary concert at St. Jacobs (Ont.) Mennonite Church on Nov. 1. The repertoire featured favourites from the past, including Haydn, Palestrina and Willan.

CANADIAN MENNONITE FILE PHOTO
BY ROSS W. MUIR



Abner Martin is pictured leading members of the Southern Ontario Chapter of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada in singing hymns from various Mennonite hymn books dating back to the 17th century during an event in Toronto in 2005.

FILM REVIEW

Any price for victory

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay (Pt. 2).

Directed by Francis Lawrence. Screenwriters: Peter Craig and Danny Strong.
Starring Jennifer Lawrence and Josh Hutcherson. A Color Force/Lionsgate release, 2015.
Rated PG (violence, frightening scenes).

REVIEWED BY VIC THIESSEN

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

Early in the fourth and final installment of the *Hunger Games* film cycle, Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence), the rebel heroine, is having an argument with her close friend, Gale (Liam Hemsworth), about a planned rebel military action. Katniss is concerned that innocent civilians will be killed. Gale responds with, “No one who supports the Capitol is innocent,” to which Katniss replies, “With that kind of thinking, you can kill anyone you want!”

This fascinating conversation ultimately asks whether the ends justify the means, a theme found throughout the film. Is it not better to kill a few—even civilians—if it results in the saving of the many? The positive answer to this question is a component of the myth of redemptive violence, which asserts that violence can produce redemptive results. My own view is that Jesus would see an intrinsic relationship between means and ends that prevents any good end ever being accomplished through violent means.

Mockingjay (Pt. 2) features the same solid acting, cinematography and score as the previous films. But its story, a casualty of dividing the final book of the trilogy into two films, is much more limited, focussing almost entirely on the rebel attack against the Capitol. Even within this limitation, we see little of what happens outside of the narrow story of Katniss and her friends, who are trying to survive the traps designed to prevent them from reaching President Snow’s mansion at the heart of the city. During this quest, there is a subplot about the relationship between Katniss and her former lover, Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), who has been brainwashed by Snow and released so he



can kill Katniss. For me, the action was all rather boring and predictable.

The plot twists that end the film are likewise predictable, although here we return to the intriguing theme of means and ends. At one point, there is the clear message that violent means are not always justified and are likely to corrupt the ends, however good those ends might first have appeared. But then, just minutes later, there is a similarly clear message that lethal means are sometimes

required to achieve the best result, giving us a very disappointing ending to the *Hunger Games* saga.

In my review of *Mockingjay (Pt. 1)* (“Join the fight,” Jan. 5, page 31), I noted my hope that the final film might resolve the question of the third film’s apparently sympathetic support for violent revolution, especially the violent revolution of the poor and oppressed against the wealthy oppressors. *Pt. 2* does make that support more ambiguous, suggesting that the rebels were not simply the “good guys.” Ultimately, however, the film promotes the idea that once we have identified the true source of any evil, we are justified to use whatever means are necessary to eradicate it.

The first two *Hunger Games* films could be seen as allegories that criticized the way our wealthy nations exploit the poor and the way violence is so often used as entertainment. The final two films move away from that thoughtful beginning, providing lots of PG violence to entertain our young people while encouraging them to identify with Katniss, who may suffer psychological trauma as a result of her violent actions, but does what is necessary to make the world a better place.

The *Hunger Games* films, and other

Ultimately, however, the film promotes the idea that once we have identified the true source of any evil, we are justified to use whatever means are necessary to eradicate it.

recent dystopian films aimed at young adults, point to the uniqueness of their protagonists and the laudable desires they have to use their special qualities to confront injustice and oppression, to step out of a society that rewards conformity, to prophetically alert people to what’s really going on, and to help make the world a better place. It’s a worthy ideal. But I’m still longing for the day in which I can wholeheartedly recommend a young-adult dystopian film. ❧

/// Briefly noted

Contemplative journal an expression of creative process

April Yamasaki and Lois Siemens have collaborated across the miles on a second creative project. In 2014, the women, who are pastors of Mennonite Church Canada congregations in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, respectively, joined forces to produce the *My Sacred Pauses Daybook*, combining text from Yamasaki's book *My Sacred Pauses* with Siemens's photographs. This year, they have combined their talents in *My Creative, Contemplative Journal*, pairing Siemens's photos with text from *Spark: Igniting Your God-Given Creativity*, which Yamasaki wrote for Mennonite Women Canada and MW U.S.A. The journal format offered "more ways of working with the things that happen in one's day," says Siemens, who hopes journal users "will find themselves moving from fear to freedom." She says, "It seems to me there is a lot of shame around being creative. I want people to realize that everyone is creative—it just takes different forms." In a blog post about the collaboration, Yamasaki writes, "I suppose if we were both more business-like, we would have talked about all of this ahead of time and drawn up a contract. Instead, we've allowed our collaboration to develop more creatively and organically. In that way, our collaboration is an act of faith, like any writing or creative work." *My Creative, Contemplative Journal* is available online at loishelendesigns.ca/categories/journal/.

—BY DONNA SCHULZ



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Old Order Mennonite groups in Ontario are growing

Seeking more farmland and places for new communities, Ontario groups are moving north and west of the Waterloo Region.

canadianmennonite.org/old-order-growing



Hearing God in indigenous voices

Youth learn about indigenous and settler relations at Canadian Mennonite University's Peace it Together conference.

canadianmennonite.org/youth-learn-indigenous

Africa is for babies

The young son of Mennonite workers in Botswana causes them to reflect on the craving for "spiritual milk."

canadianmennonite.org/Africa-babies

Churches of all stripes call for freedom of religion

Leaders of Christian denominations met in Albania to discuss religious discrimination, persecution and martyrdom, calling on governments and churches to recognize the freedom of religion as a fundamental human right.

canadianmennonite.org/churches-freedom-religion



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Forming faith, building character

Rockway Mennonite Collegiate

Janet Bauman, a teacher at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ont., actively engages students in faith development by having them dig into their past!

Her Grade 10 students are challenged to create a family tree, paying particular attention to their family origins and immigration stories. Her students learn to appreciate the challenges, pressures and difficult choices of families and faith communities on the move.

Bauman says the deep value of the project comes from having students explore the traditions, beliefs and practices that have been handed down to them through the generations. They are encouraged to reflect on this heritage, noting what they especially want to

hold onto and what they want to challenge. It is hoped that students will learn their own stories, and also gain deep appreciation for the diverse stories of others in their classroom and beyond the classroom walls.

Another aspect of Bauman's teaching involves having students try a variety of spiritual practices that have sustained people of faith for generations. "Sabbath Fridays" involve students exploring such exercises as the Consciousness Examen, Praying in Colour and various ways of reading the Bible experientially. In a quiet, inviting space, students are encouraged to step away from their culture of distractions, stimulations and competing voices, and connect with God in ways they



Rockway teacher Janet Bauman helps student Nathan Diller Harder with his family tree as part of a faith development class.

may not have tried before.

In these, and other ways, Rockway continues to be a place to form faith and build character.

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PERSONAL REFLECTION

Why I go see Santa every year

A childhood activity has become a meaningful tradition, 30 years running

AARON EPP

YOUNG VOICES EDITOR

As Christmas approaches, one of the things I'm most looking forward to is heading to a local mall with my siblings so we can have our picture taken with Santa.

I have had my photo taken with Santa each December since I was a year old. My brother Thomas joined the fun in 1986, our brother Daniel followed two years after that, and when Daniel got engaged to his now-wife Anna-Marie in 2012, she joined us, too.

Thirty years of going to see Santa is something fun to mention when you're making conversation at Christmas parties. People get a kick out of the idea of four adults doing this year after year.

Better yet is showing people the photos, which are humorous enough to create a BuzzFeed "listicle" that would undoubtedly go viral. The photos are too entertaining not to love:

- **THERE'S THE** terrified looks in our eyes when we were very young.
- **THERE'S THE** year we all wore our Sunday best.
- **THERE'S THE** year we all wore jeans and denim shirts.
- **THERE'S THE** shifting weight and facial hair styles from year to year as we made the transition from childhood to puberty to adulthood.
- **IN RECENT** years, we've adopted a

different theme for every photo. Last year's theme was Christmas ties.

• **THEN THERE'S** the year that Santa sat on my lap for the photo. To this day, I have never seen Santa do that with anyone else.

Our parents started the tradition, as many parents do. When we were children, our parents took us to the mall one evening each December. We ate supper in the food court and then visited jolly old St. Nick.

If not the antithesis of the true meaning of Christmas, Santa Claus can be, at the very least, a distraction from the reason Christians celebrate Christmas. At his best, he is a symbol of generosity and charitable giving. At his worst, Santa is a symbol of unfettered consumption and the desire for more, more, more. So why visit Santa year after year?

As I reflect on my personal motivation for keeping the tradition going well past the age when most people give it up, a few reasons come to mind:

- **FIRST, NOSTALGIA:** Taking the picture with Santa each year reminds me of a time when life seemed more simple and carefree.
- **SECOND, THERE'S** the fun factor I mentioned earlier: Friends and family

(Continued on page 28)

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AARON EPP



1988 was the year all three Epp brothers first appeared in a photo with Santa.



In 2006, Santa sat on my lap for a change.

(Continued from page 27)

get a kick out of seeing these photos year after year, and we have fun posing for the pictures.

• **THIRD, AND** most importantly, I love my siblings very much. They are not only my family, they're my friends as well.

Thomas is the life of the party. Daniel is kind, compassionate and introspective. Anna-Marie has become a most welcome addition to our family, always upbeat and ready to push my thinking when it comes to topics like Canadian politics, food justice and creation care.

Our tradition of going to see Santa each year is an annual reminder to me of how fortunate I am to have these incredible people in my life.



In 2014, we all wore Christmas ties that my father gave us.

Ironically, while Santa is a distraction for many from what is truly important about Christmas—the birth of Jesus Christ, who came to show us the way to God—visiting Santa is, for me, a reminder to focus on what's important. The food and gifts that surround Christmas are fun, but each year they are less and less important to me.

What remains important, year after year, are the opportunities to gather together with the people I love. Visiting Santa with my siblings is one of those opportunities, and I hope the tradition continues for a long, long time. ❧

Visit canadianmennonite.org/aaron-visits-santa for more photos.



PHOTOS BY RACHEL BRNJAS



Mim Harder of Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Stouffville, Ont., and Steve Heinrichs, director of Indigenous Relations for MC Canada.



Retreat participants gather in the Mohawk Chapel.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

All members of one family

Retreat gives participants opportunity to work toward indigenous-settler reconciliation

ALLY SIEBERT

SPECIAL TO YOUNG VOICES

Over a period of seven years, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) heard more than 6,000 survivors of residential schools tell their painful stories of injustice and abuse. With the TRC's work in hand, Christian churches can help write a better next chapter.

A group of us from across southern Ontario started this new chapter at a retreat held from Nov. 12 to 14 at Six Nations of the Grand River, near Brantford. Indigenous and non-indigenous participants gathered for the weekend to talk, eat, dance and work towards reconciliation.

The retreat grew out of a conversation circle based in Kitchener-Waterloo,

consisting of representatives from Mennonite and Lutheran churches, Six Nations Anglican and United churches, and people from traditional indigenous backgrounds. The weekend was sponsored by an ecumenical group that includes Mennonite Church Canada, MC Eastern Canada and Mennonite Central Committee Ontario.

Our speakers, Rick Hill and Adrian Jacobs, both from Six Nations, started the retreat by situating the relationship of settler and indigenous peoples in the context of colonial discourse and cultural genocide, making many of us realize the gaps in our understanding of settlement and treaty history.

On Nov. 13, we participated in a

ceremonial Mohawk welcome that gave us deerskin to wipe away our tears, an eagle feather to unstop our ears and water to clear our throats. We were then asked to reciprocate the welcome.

“Watching the settler group struggle with knowing how to welcome the indigenous group was the beginning of my emotional journey during the retreat,” said Mim Harder of Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Stouffville. “It was hard not to step in and help them. They truly struggled to be culturally sensitive, and to make the welcome meaningful. It brought tears to my eyes when the welcome was finally brought to us because it was brought from the heart.”

People and places speak louder than reports and figures, so visiting the former Mohawk Institute Residential School and the Mohawk Chapel, where the children attended Sunday services, were crucial experiences in learning to honestly face the past.

“It is hard enough to hear the stories of residential schools, but to be in one, listening to the survivors’ stories and feeling the spirits that linger there, is heart-wrenching,” Harder said.

Later, we turned our focus to the future by discussing the 94 calls to action outlined in the TRC report, a document that calls on all of Canadian society, including churches, to achieve concrete and timely goals.

We focussed on three calls to action—Nos. 48, 59 and 60—that deal with education within congregations, curriculum within religious educational institutions and the commitment of faith groups to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

What does it mean to “respect indigenous spirituality in its own right?” What does it mean that our churches sit on treaty land?

We worked through these calls in lament, frustration, clarity and hope. No one ever promised that reconciliation would be easy, but we found that stories can provide great wisdom for the road.

Taylor Gibson, a research assistant at Six Nations Polytechnic’s Deyohahá:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre, gifted

our small group with the teaching of *Todadahó*, which quickly became a reference point for our discussion.

“Long ago, there was a male child abandoned and left for dead,” Gibson explained. “As he learned to walk from the animals, they say he had seven crooks in his body. Snakes stuck out of his hair as a sign of the negative mind and bad thoughts. His mind had been corrupted by the negative experiences in life and [he] could not see the good. Death and despair was the sign of *Todadahó*.”

Although grief transformed *Todadahó* into a threat to peace between nations, a Huron man called the Peacemaker eventually sought him out. “The Peacemaker spoke to *Todadahó*, and with his helper, *Hayehwatha*, began healing him by first straightening out his body and removing the seven crooks,” Gibson said. “Next they combed the snakes out of his hair.”

“They were able to restore and heal *Todadahó* into a human being filled with compassion,” Gibson recounted. “Instead of punishing *Todadahó* for his old ways, the Peacemaker changed the way of *Todadahó*’s thinking and people were able to see him as a person.”

The lesson is not about punishment, but about the healing that comes from a connection to each other. As settlers, we must straighten our broken bodies and our broken treaty relationships by listening to our host peoples tell their stories of grief and hope. These stories then turn to action, as together we work out what comes next.

The weekend was spent meeting our neighbours and eating fresh pieces of bannock. It was spent bearing witness to places of violence and laughing as we were taught to dance. Most importantly, it was spent reminding each other that under the Creator, and under the treaties we signed, we are all members of one family: a family now called to relate the stories of our past and to ensure different ones for our future. ❧

Originally from Ottawa, Ally Siebert, 22, now attends Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont., one of the churches involved in organizing the event.



Mim Harder, left, presents Taylor Gibson, centre, and Rick Hill with quilts to thank them for hosting the retreat.



Participants dance as part of the retreat.



Dialogue between indigenous and settler peoples was a key aspect of the retreat, held at Six Nations of the Grand River, near Brantford, Ont. Six Nations is the largest first nation in Canada.

Calendar

British Columbia

Jan. 24: Joint MC B.C./Columbia Bible College service at Cedar Valley Mennonite Church, Mission, at 10:30 a.m., with a lunch to follow. Music by Columbia students.

Feb. 12: "Deeper," a conference equipping leaders to understand, support and walk with youth and young adults dealing with emotional, relational and sexual issues, at Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Feb. 26-27: MC B.C. LEAD conference and annual meeting at Level Ground Mennonite Church, Abbotsford.

March 5: LifeBridge Ministries fundraising concert at Level Ground Mennonite Church, Abbotsford.

April 15-17: MC B.C. Junior Impact youth retreat, at Camp Squeah, Hope.

April 16: Camp Squeah paddle-a-thon.

April 30: MC B.C. Women's Inspirational Day, at Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church, Abbotsford.

Alberta

Jan. 15-17: Junior-high snow camp at Camp Valaqua, Water Valley. For more information, call Jon Olfert at 403-637-2510.

Feb. 26-28: Senior-high snow camp at Camp Valaqua, Water Valley. For more information, call Jon Olfert at 403-637-2510.

March 18-19: MC Alberta annual general assembly.

Saskatchewan

Jan. 8: Mennonite Community Closet, North Battleford, celebrates its 40th anniversary and grand opening of a new doorway between two adjoining buildings, at 2 p.m.

Jan. 8-9: RJC alumni basketball and hockey weekend.

Jan. 10: Mennonite Community Closet, North Battleford, celebrates its 40th anniversary with a service at Hope Mennonite Fellowship, at 2 p.m.

Feb. 5: RJC Friday Night Live youth event, at 7 p.m.

Feb. 28: RJC/CMU concert, at RJC.

May 13: RJC spring choir concert, at 7 p.m.

May 28: RJC golf tournament at Valley Regional Park.

June 24-25: RJC year-end musical performances, at 7:30 p.m.

June 25: RJC alumni decade reunions and banquets.

Manitoba

Jan. 19: Westgate Grade 6 Day.

Jan. 21: Westgate Grade 5 Day, from 4:30 to 7 p.m.

Jan. 21-22: Westgate Jr. High one-act plays, at the Franco-Manitoba Cultural Centre.

Feb. 3: Open house at Westgate, 7 p.m.

Feb. 5: Open house at CMU. For more information, visit www.cmu.ca/ campusvisit.

Feb. 12: Learn about CMU's Outtatown Discipleship Program on campus. To sign up, call 204-487-3300.

March 11: Open house at CMU. For more information, visit www.cmu.ca/campusvisit.

March 18: Learn about CMU's Outtatown Discipleship Program on campus. To sign up, call 204-487-3300.

March 30: Open house at CMU. For more information, visit www.cmu.ca/campusvisit.

May 9: Westgate bursary fundraising banquet.

Ontario

Dec. 20: Menno Singers present "Sing Along Messiah" with orchestra

UpComing

Submissions sought on the theme of 'ability'

Rhubarb magazine, published by the Mennonite Literary Society since 1998, is looking for fiction, poetry and creative non-fiction for the June 2016 issue with the theme of "Ability." The deadline is March 1. *Rhubarb* is looking for poems, visual images and stories—fiction and non-fiction—by those who suffer mentally or physically, those who care for them and those who can imagine it. Fiction and non-fiction submissions up to a maximum of 3,000 words and poetry submissions of up to 30 lines will be considered for publication, although exceptions may be made. Di Brandt will be editing poetry, Bernice Friesen fiction and nonfiction, and Murray Toews selecting visual images and contributing some of his own. Online submissions to rhubarbmag.com are encouraged, although print submissions can be mailed to: *Rhubarb*, 606-100 Arthur Street, Winnipeg, MB R3B 1H3. (Do not send original copies by mail, since paper submissions will not be returned.) *Rhubarb* purchases only first North American serial rights with \$50 per contributor, and two complimentary issues; copyright remains with the writer or artist.

—*Rhubarb* magazine

UpComing

Be a 'community champion' and help the hungry

AUSTIN, MAN.—With just 250 days until the world's largest pioneer harvest commences, Harvesting Hope is pleased to announce its official record target and unveil its community champion campaign. Thanks to the growing response to participate in the event, the Harvesting Hope organizing committee has set its official world record target at 125 antique threshing machines operating simultaneously to harvest a field of wheat. "Every day since our official launch in August, individuals are contacting us to offer threshing machines, equipment and resources to help end global hunger by celebrating our agricultural heritage," says Ayn Wilcox, a spokesperson for the Harvesting Hope committee. "Hundreds of Manitobans are already volunteering and providing in-kind contributions to make this event a success, but financial contributions are also needed. We're asking all Manitobans to join our team in the fight against global hunger by supporting this once-in-a-lifetime event through our community champions program." Through the community champions program Manitobans can support Harvesting Hope by being a threshing team sponsor (\$1,000), adopting an acre of wheat (\$500) or being a friend of Harvesting Hope (\$250). Harvesting Hope: A World Record to Help the Hungry (harvestinghope.ca) is a collaboration between the Manitoba Agricultural Museum and Canadian Foodgrains Bank that seeks to bring Canadian communities together to help those who don't have enough to eat.

—Harvesting Hope



and soloists, at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, at 3 p.m.

Jan. 31: "Glorious baroque: Music for trumpet and organ," at First United Church, Waterloo, at 2:30 p.m. Featuring Jan Overduin, organ, and John Thiessen, baroque trumpet. For more information, call 519-699-5362.

Feb. 27: Menno Singers present "Bach and his Contemporaries" with soloists and the Nota Bene Baroque Players, at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m.

April 30, May 1: Pax Christi Chorale and Menno Singers present "A Cappella Masterworks," featuring Josef Rheinberger's "Mass in E Flat"; (30) at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m.; (1) at Grace Church on

the Hill, Toronto, at 3 p.m. For tickets, e-mail boxoffice@paxchristichorale.org.

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.



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

Travel

Visit Europe the Mennonite Way! Faith based Hotel Tours to Holland, Switzerland, Germany, Poland and Ukraine, focussing on the Mennonite-Anabaptist heritage. More information online: mennoniteheritagetours.eu

For Sale

Christmas special -- In Search of Promised Lands: a Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario. \$60 (regular \$79.99) plus actual shipping cost (\$14-\$18 in Ontario). Contact Sam Steiner (steiner.sam@gmail.com).

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

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Employment Opportunities



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Square One World Media is seeking an Executive Director. We are searching for a committed follower of Jesus who is passionate about sharing Christ-centred media with people around the world. This visionary leader will be an excellent communicator, have a proven history of team-building, and demonstrate a good understanding of media production and distribution. For more information, go to squareoneworldmedia.com/news/hr@squareoneworldmedia.com



CAMPUS HOSTS

Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo

Conrad Grebel University College, a residence and teaching community affiliated with the University of Waterloo, seeks a married couple for the position of Campus Hosts (formerly known as Senior Residents), beginning summer 2016. The role involves living in an apartment in the College's residence building and supervising the College during non-business hours. Rent and utilities are free in exchange for performance of duties. Applicants should be mature, responsible and able to relate to a broad range of people, especially students in residence.

Application deadline is January 15, 2016

Read more at grebel.ca/positions



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Feb. 15	Feb. 1
Feb. 29	Feb. 15

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