

CANADIAN MENNONITE

March 28, 2016

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disaster response ever
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EDITORIAL

Can *CM* survive?

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

Perhaps the more pointed question should be: Do our readers and congregations of Mennonite Church Canada want us to survive?

At the risk of this editorial sounding self-serving and turf-protecting, let us clarify that the level of this question goes far deeper than protecting a 62-year-old enterprise or saving staff positions. It has more to do with the future of our church body, and how we function and stay together in light of cultural changes that seem to be forcing us into divisions, technological changes that affect how we produce and deliver the product, theological reasons that undergird our core values as Anabaptist/Mennonites, and finally, financial stability.

First, allow us to quote selectively on this question from some of the 442 written responses to our recent independent survey, as reported on page 15:

- **CANADIAN MENNONITE** is what it is because of its timeless nature. Trying to radically alter it, or make it more digital/technological, would only hurt the end product and the charm it has.
- **CM'S PURPOSE** should not be to make us feel good, but rather to inform and provoke more questions and searching.
- **I THINK** conveying news of Mennonite issues and interest, warts and all, is very necessary.
- **SOMETIMES I** feel that the point of *Canadian Mennonite* is to remind me

that not all Mennonites suck, which sounds really harsh, but sometimes I need a reminder to fix my cynicism. One of the best things that ever happened to you was when the government threatened to pull your charitable status because you were being too political; that, more than anything, says you are going in the right direction. Thank you for existing. I appreciate it very much.



We choose these quotes because they go to the heart of the matter. The "soul" of this publication is its function as a mirror of our best practices as a faith community (stories from across the country). We are a national gathering place to discuss our many issues on a bi-weekly basis, and lead the conversation in a productive manner, which, by the way, is not always putting a positive spin on things, but also providing critique from time to time to keep things in a reality-based perspective.

Are these the values worth keeping for the future of the Mennonite churches of Canada, and to help infuse them with an identity that sustains them through changing structures and frameworks? That's the more prescient question.

If these values are affirmed, then the question of financial stability moves into place. Not before.

It is our experience that people will pay for what they value, what they think they can't do without. The vision, the intangibles come first, then the buy-in.

What is at stake financially? First off, more than a third of *CM*'s budget income comes from MC Canada and the area churches under a Publishing Partnership Covenant that comes to an end in 2017. With MC Canada's future in doubt, and no indication that the area churches are prepared to pick up the \$111,000 it provides to *CM*, we would have to drastically cut back expenses, which would ultimately affect content.

We are putting in place an advisory board that will launch a three-year strategic plan, including serious fundraising, that anticipates this challenge. We are grateful for the nearly \$80,000 per year that comes now from personal donations and we hope that will increase. We ask that more of you respond to our spring and fall fund drives to help keep us afloat.

We place the question of survival into your hands—readers, friends, congregations. Do you want this publication enough to help it pull through an uncertain future and beyond? We leave that with you.

New Manitoba correspondent

• **BETH DOWNEY SAWATZKY** of Niverville, Man., has been named the new *CM* correspondent



for Manitoba, beginning April 1. She succeeds Josiah Neufeld. A soon-to-be graduate of Canadian Mennonite University, with a major in English and minors in music and biblical/theological studies, she and her husband Scott are members of Saint Benedict's Table and are closely connected to Niverville Community Fellowship, a congregation of MC Manitoba. She can be reached at mb@canadianmennonite.org or at 204-371-8259.

ABOUT THE COVER:

Asar and her sons Musab and Abdilbari open an MCC school kit they will use at an after-school educational program they attend in Jordan. The Syrian family has been in Jordan since 2014, but her husband can only find work a few days a month. Their last names are not used for their security. See Cover Story by senior writer Will Braun on page 20.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF JANE ELLEN GRUNAU

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490 DUTTON DRIVE, UNIT C5,
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Phone: 519-884-3810 Toll-free: 1-800-378-2524 Fax: 519-884-3331

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Facebook.com/Canadian.Mennonite @CanMenno

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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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Head Office Staff:

Dick Benner, Editor/Publisher, editor@canadianmennonite.org

Ross W. Muir, Managing Editor, managinged@canadianmennonite.org

Barb Draper, Editorial Assistant, edassist@canadianmennonite.org

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Natasha Krahn, Circulation/Finance, office@canadianmennonite.org

Aaron Epp, Young Voices Editor, youngvoices@canadianmennonite.org

Virginia Hostetler, Web Editor, webeditor@canadianmennonite.org

Advertising Manager: D. Michael Hostetler, advert@canadianmennonite.org,
toll-free voice mail: 1-800-378-2524 ext. 224

Correspondents:

Will Braun, Senior Writer, seniorwriter@canadianmennonite.org, 204-822-8288;

Amy Dueckman, B.C. Correspondent, bc@canadianmennonite.org,

604-854-3735; **Donita Wiebe-Neufeld**, Alberta Correspondent,

ab@canadianmennonite.org, 780-436-3431; **Donna Schulz**, Saskatchewan

Correspondent, sk@canadianmennonite.org, 306-232-4733; **J. Neufeld**, Manitoba

Correspondent, mb@canadianmennonite.org, 204-221-8022; **Dave Rogalsky**,

Eastern Canada Correspondent, ec@canadianmennonite.org, 519-577-9987.

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Award-winning
member of the
Canadian Church Press



EASTER SERMON

Easter is past . . . where is Jesus now?

BY UDO WOELKE

Excerpted and translated from a sermon preached at Niagara United Mennonite Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., on April 26, 2015. It is based on chapter 21 of the Gospel of John, the well-known story of the disciples back in Galilee shortly after Easter.

Yes, sometimes we are not prepared for the way life is going to treat us, in spite of all the warnings we were given, just the same as Peter wasn't prepared for the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

The entire Easter story is full of tension and contradictions. And the disciples had to live through all of it: The glorious entry into Jerusalem, the repeated sparring with the Jewish religious leaders, followed by Jesus' apprehension, the religious and secular court hearings, the crucifixion and finally his burial. It all must have seemed like a huge storm with a terrible, tragic end. And in spite of all the warnings and predictions Jesus had given them, they were not prepared for it.

But then came Easter morning. And for that they were not prepared either, even though Jesus had predicted that as well. The disciples were completely lost. Their entire world was turned upside down. They could not see how life would continue or what would happen next. Everything must have seemed as in a fog: "Lord, where shall we go? What do you want us to do now?"

Of course, they knew that Jesus had risen from the grave. After all, they had seen him several times and had even touched him. But everything must have seemed beyond reason and understanding. Now they had returned to Galilee. That was where they had lived most of their lives. And, after all, Jesus had told them to go back to Galilee, and that he would meet them there.

'Lost in my own wilderness'

When I saw the lostness of the disciples, and especially Peter, it felt as if I was looking into a mirror, and saw myself last year, lost in my own wilderness, shortly after the death of my wife of 50 years.

Finally, Peter made what he must have considered to be a reasonable suggestion. "I'm going fishing" he said. It seemed to be the most natural thing to do: go back to what they knew best and what they had done all their lives. And the others followed. And why not. Now they

'THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES' BY KONRAD WITZ, 1444. (EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG)



When I saw the lostness of the disciples, and especially Peter, it felt as if I was looking into a mirror, and saw myself last year, lost in my own wilderness, shortly after the death of my wife of 50 years.

at least had something useful to do and they hoped that the fresh sea breeze would blow all those miserable thoughts out of their minds. And once they were properly tired from some honest work, they hoped to be able to sleep again. And tomorrow the sun would rise again, and there would be a new day—for them and for me.

How often have I been through that same miserable state, when stress rises to the point to wake me up at 4 in the morning, and I can't go back to sleep any more? Yes, I can understand Peter all right. I also prefer to work, rather than to think and worry.

But sometimes you work all through the night and you still don't catch anything. "Lord, what shall we do?" Not even fishing works any more! Yes, sometimes I don't understand life any more. It's all a giant puzzle, and none of the pieces fit together. You work so hard! And you strain to get it all done. But sometimes all our busyness doesn't seem to get us anywhere. Could it be that we are trying too hard to get it all done by ourselves, often without God?

'How is life treating you?'

Sometimes people greet me with the question: "How is life treating you?" Personally I don't like that view of life. I don't like to sit back and wait to see how life is going to treat me. I prefer to treat life myself, my way! But with the passing years I have had to learn that I don't always have the choice. Sometimes life treats me, and not always the way I like it.

Yes, sometimes we are not prepared for the way life is going to treat us, in spite of all the warnings we were given, just the same as Peter wasn't prepared for the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. In spite of all the warnings, he was not prepared for the temptations in the high priest's courtyard. He had been so self-assured: "*Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you,*" he said. "*Don't deceive yourself; Jesus said. 'Before the rooster crows this night, you will say three times that you do not know me.'*" And Peter couldn't shake these thoughts. Every time he heard a rooster crow, the sound cut through his thoughts, and gave him no rest.

Then the morning dawned and they were all tired from a long night of

unproductive work. They had thought they could do something useful: Catch some fish, have something to eat and sell the rest. They were tired, having nothing to show for their efforts, and they rowed back to shore, more lost than before. Everything seemed so useless to them . . . and to me.

Easter has happened

But why? Easter has happened! Jesus has risen! Jesus lives! Sure. But where is he now? What shall we do now? Lord, where shall we go? We thought you had words of eternal life. But what will the present life demand from us now? We have no problem with eternity. It's this present life that is an awful bloody mess that we don't know how to deal with any more!

And then this man stood on the shore, asking his disciples: "*Well friends, did you catch any fish?*" "No, not a single one." "*Well, cast your net on the right side of the boat. Then you will make a good catch.*"

What difference would that make? What did he know about fishing? After all, the fish were in the water where they wanted to be. They didn't care about one side of the boat or the other. But

they were too tired to argue, and just did what the stranger said. And suddenly it happened! Where did all these fish come from? They caught so many fish that they couldn't even pull the net into the boat.

Finally John recognized the stranger. *"It's the Lord,"* he shouted. Really? Is that really possible? And when they reached shore, Jesus already had a fire burning, and even some fish on it, and bread as well.

This was too puzzling; they couldn't understand life any more. Later, after they sat down and finished eating, Jesus took Peter aside for a little talk and the battle raging inside Peter was obvious. Jesus asked him, *"Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"* Ouch! That hits where it hurts! *"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,"* Peter replied. And Jesus said, *"Feed my lambs."* And then a second, and a third time: *"Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?"* Now Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, *"Do you love me?"* He said, *"Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you."*

But could he still not hear what Jesus was really trying to tell him? Well, I think I can understand Peter. I would also much rather just go fishing, forget everything, start afresh, without all these complications and uncertainties!

But Jesus gave Peter a new assignment. *"Feed my sheep,"* he said, because he knew that they—and we—are all like sheep without a shepherd. And he added, *"Take care of my sheep."* Was that really a sign that Jesus had long forgiven Peter? Had he not given Peter the same assignment three years ago? *"Simon,"* he had said, *"your fishing days are over. From now on you will catch men. . . . Now take care of my sheep."*

Starting afresh

Peter was allowed to start fresh. In fact, he was supposed to start afresh! But not in his own old way. Jesus said to him, *"I tell you the truth, Simon, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you, and lead you where you do not want to go."*

I would also much rather just go fishing, forget everything, start fresh, without all these complications and uncertainties!

In other words, "Peter, you thought you could master your own life. You didn't have to wait to see what life would offer you or how it would treat you. You grabbed life with your two fists and pressed your own will on it. But since then you have had to learn that was not always successful. Life does not always obey our own will! Now follow me because you do not know the way! But that is not necessary now. You are not leading the way any more. Now I am leading you. I am the way! You just follow me!"

Just follow? Peter wanted to know more. Just like you and I do. He still didn't want to give up. He turned around, saw John following them, and asked, *"Lord, what about him?"* But Jesus said, *"If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"*

In other words, "You are responsible for yourself and for your assignment, not for

him. You just follow me. Feed my sheep!"

A final prayer

"O Lord, You know all things. You know how I want to get away from everything. You know that I would rather just go fishing again. You know how worn out and tired I am from everything. What will I say and do when I get into trouble next time?"

"But you say, 'Take care of my sheep. Don't worry what you will say next time. I will put the right words into your mouth at the right time. You just follow me! Take care of my sheep! I will take care of you!'"

And God is faithful. He keeps his promises. When we read the beginning of the Book of Acts, we see how he has turned Peter into a courageous witness in Jerusalem, and into one of the leaders of the early Christian church.

And in the end we all have sheep that we are supposed to feed and take care of, because Jesus calls us as well: *"Follow me. Take care of my sheep. I will take care of you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Amen! ☩



Udo Woelke is a lay minister in charge of the German program at Niagara United Mennonite Church.

For discussion

1. Why would Peter and the rest of Jesus' disciples have felt bewildered at the end of Jesus' ministry? What are some aspects of life that cause tension and frustration for you or for your congregation? Do you feel as though you are in control of your life?
2. Udo Woelke writes, "Could it be that we are trying too hard to get it all done by ourselves, often without God?" How do you respond to this question? Under what circumstances should we try to influence the course of our lives? When is it best to relax and accept what life brings?
3. Woelke says that Peter went fishing instead of thinking and worrying. Is doing something and working harder your normal reaction to fear and worry? What are some strategies that might help us deal with fear and worry?
4. How does the Easter message affect the fears and tensions of our lives? What do you think Jesus meant when he told Peter to feed his sheep? What do you think Jesus' message is for us in a post-resurrection world?

—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.

✉ Mennonite histories 'are not that different'

RE: FUTURE DIRECTIONS Task Force editorials in the Jan. 18, Feb. 1 and 15 issues.

The editor is to be thanked for wading into the Future Directions Task Force report. That analysis raises a number of issues that warrant more discussion.

One of my concerns has been that the process seems hurried. Perhaps after the lengthy Being a Faithful Church procedure we are in no mood to enter another protracted process. Still, I think we may regret doing a rush job. There are too many "directions" at stake here.

I want to point out a kind of disappointment I felt in the Feb. 1 editorial that has to do with the composition of the Task Force and the polity issue the editor ties

(Continued on page 8)

FROM OUR LEADERS

Strange, suspect voices

STEVE HEINRICHS

One of the things I most admire about Scripture is the space it creates for the undominant voice, specifically the strange and suspect voice. For sure, the text is far from perfect. Alongside all those male authors, heroes and stories, give us some more women! And next to those Israelite colonists, how about a few Canaanites—those dispossessed natives—offering their truths?



Yet within this unbalanced collection, marginal voices burst forth to shock and woo us out of the status quo, bringing a "God-breathed" word. Think Moabite Ruth, Hosea's grieving earth or Isaiah's King Cyrus (a "pagan" messiah).

Although I grew up with the Bible by my side, I was suspicious about "outsider" voices. They didn't know what my Mennonite, middle-class community knew. At the very least, "they" didn't know the truth as fully as we did.

Yet the Bible queries such exclusive

postures. It invites us to look beyond our church circles to learn about God, to receive truths about power (political, economic and religious), to be shocked into neighbour love and wooed to repentance. The Bible suggests that alongside the holy disciplines of worship, fasting and solitude, we should discipline ourselves to listen to the suspect and strange.

I'm convinced the Spirit is calling the church to open our ears to indigenous people groups. Robbed of land, children and traditional ways, the indigenous have been pushed to the "strange" margins. And in the eyes of most mainstream Canadians, they are suspect. Can we listen to them?

It won't be easy. It wasn't easy for Jesus.

In Matthew 15, Jesus encounters a native woman who seeks help for her daughter. Jesus has the resources and power to offer such, but he doesn't want anything to do with her. She's a Canaanite "dog" (his words), and he came to serve the Israelites. It's a difficult scene. Yet because of her persistence, because she

continues despite the ethno-centric prejudice of Jesus, something miraculous takes place. Jesus has a conversion. He sees this woman. And he listens.

For generations, Canada's Indigenous Peoples have persistently voiced their concerns to our churches and the state. For the most part, their voices have been ignored. But because of their persistence in the face of settler society's profound ignorance and racism, something miraculous is taking place. Pockets of settler society are experiencing a conversion. Some are seeing host peoples for the first time. And they're listening. Really listening.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) gifted us with a new, more accurate history of indigenous-settler relations in Canada along with 94 "calls to action," six of which are geared to the church, that we can take to heal our collective brokenness. Like Scripture, the history and these calls aren't perfect. But, like Scripture, they can point us in life-giving directions. They can shock us out of status quo settler unawareness. They can woo us into paths of healing justice. I encourage you to pick up a copy of the TRC's Summary Report and read it alongside Scripture.

Steve Heinrichs is Mennonite Church Canada's director of indigenous relations.

(Continued from page 7)

into that. When we consider that some 4,000 members of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada are from the Dutch-North German background, the three-out-of-nine mix is pretty fair, by my calculations. I have spoken to several leaders about this matter, and none so far have felt good about raising this. One mentioned, "I thought we were past that." If not, then it is a

theological, and not a demographic, issue. The account of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 could help us with our theology here.

On the polity issue around congregational autonomy and authority of leadership, I would say that our histories are not that different. Prior to the 1960s, pastors/leading ministers were not authorized to perform baptisms, nor serve communion, in the then

FAMILY TIES

Gently lead the mother sheep

MELISSA MILLER

“What this is about,” the counsellor said kindly, “is the end. How your mother faces the end—her dying—impacts everyone else in the family. How you and your siblings respond to your mother affects each person as well. You are all in this together.”

I had sought counselling not because my mother was terminally ill, but because she was facing a host of aging issues—vision, hearing, mobility, pain, judgment—and she and her family were disagreeing vigorously about how to deal with those issues. I was swept up in intense, swirling emotions. The counsellor’s words and her compassion brought a framework and focus to the confusion.

The end. Dying. I took a deep breath in and out, and allowed myself to settle into the reality of my mother’s end.

Questions soon followed. What does my mother’s end mean to her? More immediately, what do the multiple health challenges and increased limitations mean for her? How does she respond to pain and restrictions? What does my mother’s end mean to me? To my siblings? How do any of us face that loss? How do we care for her and care

about each other in the midst of it?

With the questions, in time, came some answers. My mother is in a crisis. Her Christian faith assures her that she need not fear death, a proclamation she readily asserts. Dying, though, is another matter. Gradually losing one’s abilities, health and independence is tough, and there’s often no certainty about the timing or the degree of the losses. Her fear and frustration are understandable.

Adult children do react to the messy business of their parent’s aging. Some become intensely engaged; some pull back. Some are steadfastly patient; others, the opposite. In my case, the “bifocals” I’m wearing nearly split me apart. One set of eyes is focussed on my mother as I



How we respond to her, I believe, makes it easier—or harder—for her to come to terms with aging.

witness her brave journey and anticipate the yawning hole that will come when she dies. Sometimes I lament with her; other times, I’m her champion.

With another set of eyes, I see my own mortality looming in the not-too-distant future. Yoked to my mother, I wonder how I will react if and when I become old and frail. To what degree will I yield

peacefully to the changes of aging? How likely is it that I will rail and resist, stirring up trouble around me?

Sadly I remember difficulties with my grandmother and great-grandmother in their final years, illustrating the persistence of family patterns. Fortunately, these memories are seasoned with wit, as when my grandmother needed her daughter, “I do like to contrary you.”

Likely there is opportunity in this crisis. Perhaps we can, as a family, learn new ways to walk towards the end. Clearly Mother is at the centre; she has physical, emotional and spiritual challenges to address. Decisions to make about health, finances and housing. By and large, these are her decisions, which others must accommodate. How she responds to these tasks affects everyone else in the family, as the counsellor said. How we respond to her, I believe, makes it easier—or harder—for her to come to terms with aging.

In the midst of the most difficult days, a Bible verse, unfamiliar to me, showed up in the lectionary readings. From Isaiah 40:11: “[God will] gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and

gently lead the mother sheep.” What a beautiful, comforting image!

Near the same time, I heard God’s response to my prayers, “I’ve got her covered; she’s in my hands.” I’m counting on it.

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

Conference of Mennonites in Canada. We had an *aelt-ester* (bishop/elder) empowered to do this via a second ordination. These *aeltesters* commonly were in charge of a cluster of congregations, usually in contiguous geographical areas. Congregational autonomy as understood today was not the norm then, as a number of these *aeltesters* exercised considerable authority.

BILL BLOCK, WINNIPEG

✉ Reader concerned camper not wearing a life jacket

I'M ASSUMING THAT the photograph on the front cover of your Feb. 29 issue was taken at one of our church camps. If this is the case, I am alarmed that the staffer is wearing a life jacket while the camper is not!

BARRY BERGEN, LEAMINGTON ONT.

GOD, MONEY AND ME

It's time we had 'the talk'

SHERRI GROSZ

It's time for "the talk." You know, the one we've been putting off because it's uncomfortable. That end-of-life conversation. There is, after all, a 100 per cent certainty of our death. The Psalms remind us of our frailty: *"Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is"* Psalm 39:4 (New International Version).

More than half of all deaths are sudden or unexpected, but even when expected, too many don't make plans or discuss their wishes with family and friends. This can cause profound heartache for those left behind. I've heard the stories of families fighting over healthcare decisions and siblings who are estranged because of how the possessions were divided. There can also be confusion over who should make important decisions.

Here's your primer to get the conversations started:

• **WILLS:** Do you have an up-to-date will? Are family members capable and willing to handle your estate, or should you hire a professional estate trustee service? Could they find the original copy of your will? Does your estate distribution still make sense? Have you included a charitable gift in your estate? Is there an up-to-date summary of what you own and what you owe? Have you created or updated your charitable giving plan

with Mennonite Foundation of Canada (MFC)?

• **INCAPACITY DOCUMENTS** for health: There are many reasons that we may not be able to make decisions about our healthcare or the things we own. Have you prepared legal documents permitting someone to act on your behalf, if needed? Have you notified the people you've named? Are they aware of your preferences for healthcare treatments? Have they met your primary care physician?

• **INCAPACITY DOCUMENTS** for finances and property: Do they know which financial institutions you use? Have they met your financial planner, accountant and lawyer? Should you conduct annual reviews together? Have

aware that we didn't know what Mom wanted. She recovered, but after that she began conversations about aging, dying and death. Mom wove it into everyday conversations. She was careful not to overwhelm us, but she was quite clear about what she did and did not want.

"She also began to invite us to join appointments with lawyers, accountants and her physician. Mom lived independently until her late 80s and died just after her 90th birthday. My sister and I knew exactly what Mom wanted, what was important to her. It made a difficult time much easier for both of us.

"I know Mom did it because she felt strongly that parents should teach and guide their children. Even in my 60s, Mom was still able and willing to teach me about aging well, dying and death. I've continued the tradition and have begun to have conversations with my spouse and children. It's hard sometimes, but it's the least I can do for those whom I love."

Set the example for your family and



Have you created or updated your charitable giving plan with Mennonite Foundation of Canada?

you discussed your wishes about charitable gifts? Some provinces have rules about the amounts that can be donated if an incapacity document is in use. Is your family able to navigate tough conversations respectfully? Or should you involve an outsider to help?

A few years ago, John (a pseudonym) shared this: "My dad died when I was young, so it's just been Mom, my sister and me. Mom had a serious health scare in her mid-60s, and we were keenly

start the conversation today. MFC has resources available to help. Go to MennoFoundation.ca or contact the nearest office at 1-800-772-3257.

Sherri Grosz is a stewardship consultant at Mennonite Foundation of Canada serving generous people in Ontario and the eastern provinces. For more information on impulsive generosity, stewardship education, and estate and charitable gift planning, contact your nearest MFC office or visit MennoFoundation.ca.

✉ Scholar provides 'stellar example' of biblical interpretation

RE: "WHAT IS 'good' and 'acceptable'?" Feb. 15, page 4.

I heartily commend Darrin W. Snyder Belousek for his contribution to the issue of marriage. It is a stellar example of responsible interpretation of the biblical witness on this question. It totally avoids the misleading proof-texting on both the liberal and conservative

sides of the issue.

At the same time, he takes all the texts in question seriously, not ignoring them nor allowing them to stand alone, but linking them with others to produce biblical answers to contested questions.

I applaud *Canadian Mennonite* for making this excellent model of biblical interpretation available to its readers. Perhaps it can help, not in producing uniformity of thought, but unity in the commitment not to shatter the already fragile community of faith. The history of

MENNONITE HUMOUR

Back to the Future Task Force reports its findings

FRED MARTIN

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

With all the recent coverage of the Future Directions Task Force, it seems to me that Canadian Mennonite needs a bit of humour. Readers may not remember "Fly on the newsprint" or The Mennonite Distorter, a fine rag penned by some "marginal Mennonites" in the 1980s. In that spirit I submit the following:

At its last meeting, the Back to the Future Task Force gave its recommendations for structuring the Mennonite church based on feedback and a "re-heated" vision for the future.

Some congregations and their leaders are nostalgic for a time when marriage was more simple and gender roles more clear. These folks are looking back to the "Old" times, and while they may "evena" create a new name they maintain a sense of originality; perhaps they can be better described as "Old Mennonites" or OMs. The remaining Mennonites will have a generic name, and the Task Force is recommending calling them simply the "General Conference" or GCs.

The Task Force also reported a push for a more regional focus in church polity. This was borne out by the re-emergence of the Western Ontario Conference, an area west of Waterloo where Mennonites with Amish roots are located. Apparently, beards with no moustaches are making a

comeback.

There is also the development of a collection of congregations across Ontario and into Quebec known as MCOQ. What remains in Ontario is another group of congregations with no geographic centre, but united by their common heritage of food and culture. They refer to themselves as "United Mennonites."

This does leave one congregation in New Brunswick in limbo. But given the congregational autonomy envisioned by the Task Force, the pastor and leaders of Petitcodiac can decide if they fit best with the United Mennonites that share the same culinary tradition as their current pastor, or perhaps even join a conference in the U.S. because the pastor's wife is American.

This type of cross-border conference shopping is not unheard of, as a Canadian who is pastor at James Street Mennonite in Lancaster, Pa., has made

inquiries about joining a Canadian conference. "I just think we have more in common with you's north of the border," said the Waterloo County native.

In other parts of Canada, western congregations are coalescing towards Winnipeg as the natural centre by creating Central Mennonite Conference or CMC. The Task Force heard many Manitobans say that "Winnipeg is in the centre of continental North America, and that makes us important," even though some feel CMC is in the middle of nowhere.

The Back to the Future Task Force realized that decentralization needed a committee to counter-balance decentralization, so they advocated a strong "Central" committee. This organization will do the important work of the church, like feeding the hungry and responding to those in need. The hope is that this Mennonite Central Committee will do a lot to keep us connected even if the church structure doesn't.

With reports from The Mennonite Distorter.

the church, including the Mennonite church, has many cases of church schism over ethical and theological issues. Those who leave because they are convinced they have God's mind soon find themselves in new controversies, resulting in yet more schisms.

I believe that Belousek's careful, non-judgmental interpretation can help us all to stay together, "so that the world may believe."

WALTER KLAASSEN, SASKATOON

✉ Let's not 'add another lane' to salvation

RE: THE BEING a Faithful Church process.

Over the last years, as I look at our church history, there is one thought that really concerns me: "Let's add another lane."

In our part of Canada, we are adding extra lanes to highways to ease congestion and make travelling easier. In our supermarkets, they will add more lanes at the checkouts when there is congestion. All adding of lanes is to facilitate the movement of people and make life easier.

This mentality of "adding another lane to facilitate life" is taking more and more hold in the church of Jesus. And Jesus certainly was aware of our tendencies. He said to his followers: "*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it*" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Clearly there is only one lane when it comes to entering the life eternal. I suppose any additional lanes will bypass the gate. What are we doing about it? What will our delegates at the July convention in Saskatoon do about it?

ISAAK EITZEN, ST. CATHARINES, ONT.

Isaak Eitzen is a member of St. Catharines United Mennonite Church.

✉ Money is not the root cause of church restructuring proposal

RE: "MC B.C. considers call to missional engagement," March 14, page 18.

I was sufficiently encouraged by our gathering for worship and decision-making during the 2016 Mennonite Church B.C. conference. The motion to accept the Future Directions Task Force's recommendations passed with 89 percent in favour.

A few brief conversations at the conference confirmed for me that no one is so naïve as to buy into

the notion that this shortfall in donations of a rather small sum of money to MC Canada is the real impetus for this restructuring. It's a large red herring, to be sure, and maybe many may feel that it's better for us to nibble away at the edges, rather than continue to devour each other.

It's also sobering that it takes a shortage of money for us to start looking at what is going on. And for the record, our household has been re-directing money.

I accept that the heart of this potential restructuring is meant to strengthen the local church, which happens simultaneously with the strengthening of the local Christian. Betty Pries's challenge to us sets the stage for this strengthening: "How can I nurture a spirit of reconciliation in my life?"

The Bible talks about iron sharpening iron. I learned how to sharpen drill bits when I served my apprenticeship. Respect for a metal's properties is critical, since grinding it too hard, or too much, causes overheating and the loss of its ability to hold a sharp edge, rendering it useless.

One could also say that it's a kind of warped sense of humor that our God has, in that it's the people with whom our lives cross paths that cause us difficulty, but they can actually become the people who help us to mature.

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

✉ A cynical response to the Future Directions Task Force

RE: THE FUTURE Directions Task Force.

Sometimes, grown-up eyes are the worst. While being a grown-up can be okay sometimes, lately I have found myself wishing that Mennonite Church Canada could find some childlike joy and lose its grown-up cynicism.

And I am talking, of course, about the work of the Future Directions Task Force.

As Dick Benner's editorials in the Jan. 18, Feb. 1 and Feb. 15 issues of *Canadian Mennonite* have made abundantly clear, it's easy to look down on this group and its work and name its shortcomings.

But since when have we been a people who focus on the faults of others? Since when have we been a church that intentionally focusses on shortcomings and what's missing, instead of what we have and where it can take us? Since when have we decided that, as a church, we are grown up enough to have all the answers and have no need for the eyes of a child? This is not the response of the church, this is not the response Christ calls us to.

As we all consider the work of the Future Directions Task Force and the shape we hope our beloved church will take in the coming years, my hope and prayer is

three-fold:

- **THAT WE** can all continue searching for ways to understand the Task Force's final report for ourselves, not accepting the summary or biases of others, but seeking for ourselves the foundation the report is aiming to give us.
- **THAT WE** can accept joyfully what we have and not

spend time lingering in fear for what is missing.

- **THAT WE** come to Assembly 2016 willing to set our grown-up eyes aside and be willing to consider the opportunities the final report gives us.

KIRSTEN HAMM-EPP, SASKATOON

Kirsten Hamm-Epp is MC Saskatchewan's area church youth minister.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Eggert—Matthew Jacob (b. Feb. 9, 2016), to Daniel Eggert and Mara Eggert-Altamirano, First Mennonite, Edmonton.

Mulholland—Poppy Janette (b. March 4, 2016), to Amanda (Thoman-Quiring) Mulholland (Faith Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.) and Guy Mulholland.

Peters—Ada Audrey (b. Feb. 26, 2016), to Eric and Jill Peters, Foothills Mennonite, Calgary.

Robins—Callista Robyn (b. Jan. 5, 2016), to Heidi and Lorin Robins, Hanley Mennonite, Sask.

Tataryn—Walter James (b. Feb. 14, 2016), to Kathryn Janzen and James Tataryn, Osler Mennonite, Sask.

Wiebe—Wyndham Francis (b. Feb. 18, 2016), to Julie Rempel and Curtis Wiebe, Hope Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Deaths

Bowman—Paul, 63 (b. April 13, 1952; d. March 3, 2016), Wilmot Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Friesen—Leona Verna (nee Fehr), 77 (b. Feb. 26, 1939; d. March 2, 2016), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Hemingway—Anne (nee Neudorf), 72 (b. Aug. 9, 1943; d. Feb. 29, 2016), Brussels Mennonite, Ont.

Kipfer—Alfred, 93 (b. March 27, 1922; d. Feb. 9, 2016), Poole Mennonite, Milverton, Ont.

Rempel—Jeff, 43 (b. April 5, 1972; d. Feb. 19, 2016), Osler Mennonite, Sask.

Ryplanski—Susan (nee Thiessen), 82 (b. Sept. 10, 1933; d. Feb. 26, 2016), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Siemens-Heide—Anne (nee Siemens), 93 (b. Nov. 11, 1922; d. March 6, 2016), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones announcements within four months of the event.

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

A moment from yesterday



'Braun, Harder, Andres with wives at Montreal River,' read the caption on the back of this photo taken by conscientious objector Wes Brown in 1942. As luck would have it, I knew Ted and Mary Harder, the centre couple, who were my great-uncle and great-aunt. E-mails to relatives confirmed the couple at left as Mary and Henry Braun. But who were the Andreses? Conscientious objector lists and obituary records in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario were inconclusive. Then came a delightful e-mail from my parents. On a hunch, they tracked down a local Jacob Andres in the Niagara area, who confirmed that he and his wife Helen were the couple on the right. This is the power of archival photographs; they not only memorialize the past, but connect people in the present.

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing, Mennonite Archives of Ontario

Photo: Herbert Enns/Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Truth is being

TROY WATSON

The way many Canadians understand and talk about truth has changed. Some Christian thinkers believe the church needs to change how we understand and talk about truth as well, if we are to engage our fellow Canadians in meaningful conversations about God and faith. This shift would need to begin with the church acknowledging and accepting that we can't know the Truth with absolute certainty.

Many Christians seem uncomfortable with this, insisting our call to bear witness to truth means proclaiming "we know with absolute certainty that what we believe is the absolute truth."

I must confess that I'm puzzled by this. As Christians, do we not believe:

- **"WE WALK** by faith, not by sight" (II Corinthians 5:7, New American Standard Bible [NASB]).
- **"WE SEE** things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror. . . . All that I know now is partial and incomplete" (I Corinthians 13:12, New Living Testament [NLT]).
- **"WE KNOW** in part and we prophesy in part" (I Corinthians 13:9, NASB).
- **"IF ANYONE** supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know" (I Corinthians 8:2, NASB). Or, as the NLT puts it, "Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much."

How did we become so caught up with knowing the absolute truth with absolute certainty?

Of course, we can, and ought to have, good reasons for believing what we believe, but why do we often confuse this with trying to use logic, science, history or archeology to prove to others that



what we believe is the absolute truth?

In his book *The End of Apologetics*, Myron Penner, Ph.D., critiques the modern Christian understanding of truth and explores new ways of understanding truth in the postmodern context. He posits that Christian truth is not so much a "thing" to be known and

proved, but rather a way of being, understanding and living. Being a Christian is not about knowing the truth, but becoming the truth.

As Christians, we are called to "live in truth," to borrow a phrase from Vaclav Havel, a writer and the last president of Czechoslovakia, more than objectively

Christian truth is not so much a 'thing' to be known and proved, but rather a way of being, understanding and living. Being a Christian is not about knowing the truth, but becoming the truth.

and intellectually grasp the truth. For example, when Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life," Jesus is saying the truth is being, it is lived. Jesus points to his very being, rather than to an idea or concept, implying that truth must be incarnate, it must be embodied. It is not a doctrine, it is a state of being or a way of life.

Penner writes, "One of the serious problems for modern apologetics is that it treats Christianity as if it were an objective "something" [a set of propositions or doctrines, for example] that can be explained, proven and cognitively mastered. [Philosopher Soren] Kierkegaard's favourite response is to point out that being a Christian is far less a matter of knowing the truth than that of becoming the truth—that is, of being truly, rather than thinking truly—so that the truth is

expressed in a fully integrated life before God. Christianity, then, is much more a way or an invitation to live [walk, grow] in the truth than it is a doctrine or set of beliefs [a position] whose truth we can grasp and cognitively master, as the modern apologetic paradigm seems to imply."

Penner believes that the attempts of modern apologetics to prove the intellectual superiority of Christian belief, "as if we are Christians by dint of our genius," is detrimental to our call to be a faithful witness to God's truth in our 21st-century context. People today are not looking for theoretical answers to intellectual challenges. People need personal responses to personal and spiritual problems. Christ does not come to us as the answer to an intellectual puzzle, but as a real presence of hope, joy, meaning, healing, peace, love, renewal and grace in the midst of our existential struggles.

So when we talk about Christianity in the postmodern shift, instead of asking, "Is it true and can we prove it?" it is prob-

ably more helpful to ask:

- **IS OUR** faith intelligible? Does it make sense in our 21st-century context?
- **IS IT** meaningful? Does it bring a sense of significance, direction and purpose to our lives?
- **DOES IT** work? Does it nurture our spiritual growth or help us experience God's presence?
- Are we becoming truth? Are we living and embodying the way, the truth and life of Christ?

This is Pt. 3 of of "The pursuit of truth" series. To be continued

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

VIEWPOINT

What to make of the church's unholiness?

ANTHONY G. SIEGRIST

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

I realize it's depressing to say this, but taking on a pastoral role feels a bit like donning the jersey of a losing team.

This is not related at all to the particular congregation I serve. Rather, it's the larger picture that is disheartening: Christian communities in

the West are shrinking. With ratcheting steadiness we read accounts of pastors who have used their power in abusive ways or covered for others who have.

Obviously this isn't true of all, or even of most, but it is true of too many. And so there are times when being associated with a church feels like being on a losing team, or maybe like being related to a famous criminal. At such a time it's not surprising that going it alone spiritually is no longer a mark of rebellion, but the status quo.

There is more to this crisis, though, than how it makes us feel. One of the basic claims the church makes about itself seems implausible: that it is holy. We have traditionally understood the church as "one, holy, catholic and apostolic." That's the Nicene Creed.

I find this ancient ecumenical statement quite useful, but I know not all Mennonites do. Discomfort with the Creed doesn't get us off the hook, however. The very DNA of Anabaptism carries the claim that the church is visible and not hidden, that it is distinct from institutions of the world and not as fault-filled as they are.

Both hold that somehow the church is different. Except it isn't. There are many wonderful people leading and participating in Christian congregations, but that



isn't the whole story. And the rest of the story isn't only written outside Mennonite circles. The shadowy, manipulative and sinful part of the story is written by us as well.

We find the biblical centre of the issue in the fourth and fifth chapters of Ephesians.

Near the end of the fifth chapter, Paul claims that Christ gave himself to make the church holy. Paul claims, too, that we are members of Christ's body. When the sin of the church is obvious, such a passage can be hard to take seriously.

As much as we might want to think that we've just now discovered some hidden hypocrisy, some hidden double standard, some unmet sales claim, we haven't. The church has always known that it is sinful, although some Anabaptists may have forgotten.

Over time two common theological responses have developed:

- **ONE IS** to simply detach the church from the people who make it up. This allows us to say that, even though members or leaders of the church commit grievous wrongs, the mystical church isn't implicated, and remains holy. The problem with this approach is that it separates the church from the error-prone people who make it up.

- **THE SECOND** approach involves the belief that the church is both sinful and holy, equally and totally, at the same time. But this is a recipe for submitting to the status quo—unthinkable for those of us who care about people harmed by the church.

We find a more helpful approach by looking closely at the claim made in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. In the 15th verse we read about Paul's hope that the church will "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."

Paul's words here carry two important assumptions:

- **THE FIRST** is the distinction that he retains between the body and the head. The two are linked. They are part of the same organism, after all, but they are also distinct: Christ is the head of the body. He has priority in the body's identity and actions. The church is holy, then, through its connection to its head, in whom dwells the fullness of the holy one of Israel. On our own we remain as we obviously are—an unholy, fractious and violent body—a losing team, to be sure.
- **THE SECOND** assumption carried by Paul's phrase is the ongoing necessity of maturation. The church's holiness is not a static feature. Instead, it's a characteristic of a people on the way. It is calling and motion amidst the stuff of life.

We can continue to affirm the visibility and the holiness of the church, but not because there is some way to achieve a perfect, harmless community with spotless leaders and saintly members. We certainly cannot affirm it by believing that Mennonite churches or their leaders are uniquely moral. We can affirm that the church is holy in as much as it is the visible gathering of disciples who are identifiably on the way.

In short, we can affirm the church's holiness in our ongoing willingness to repent of the harm we, as the church, have caused. It's here, in the gravity of repentance and change, that we see the Spirit at work. That is holiness. 卐

Anthony G. Siegrist was recently called to serve as lead minister of Ottawa Mennonite Church and is the author of Participating Witness: An Anabaptist Theology of Baptism and the Sacramental Character of the Church.

GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

Readers want CM to remain a print publication

An end to the sexuality debate would please many

BY BARB DRAPER

Editorial Assistant

Canadian Mennonite thanks everyone who took the time to fill out the reader survey distributed late in 2015. The responses were positive overall and showed that the magazine is generally well liked. Readers clearly prefer to read print, rather than online, and there is great resistance to the idea of making the magazine digital-only. Various comments indicated that many readers would also be happy to have an end to the sexuality debate.

This survey was administered by Barefoot Creative, an independent communications agency, and staff at *Canadian Mennonite* did not see the response forms. Printed survey forms went out as a loose insert in the Oct. 12, 2015, issue with the option of going to an online form. The agency provided *Canadian Mennonite* with detailed feedback.

Barefoot Creative was surprised and pleased that the survey response rate was higher than 10 percent, with 1,221 surveys returned. Of those, 204 were done online. Geographically, respondents to the survey were spread across the provinces in the same proportion as our readers. Not surprisingly, only a tiny percentage of our readers have a first language other than English or German. Of those who responded to the survey, 85 percent attend church at least once a week.

The age range of our readers was informative. Of those who responded to the survey, 64 percent are over 65 years of age and only 10 percent are under 45. We tell ourselves that maybe younger people will read *Canadian Mennonite* more when they are older, but this is a frightening statistic.

One of the survey questions asked if readers prefer to read magazines in print. The response was a resounding “yes.” Even

CANADIAN MENNONITE

those 45 and younger prefer to read print and many comments begged *Canadian Mennonite* not to switch to digital. Although most readers use a computer and e-mail, not many follow *Canadian Mennonite* online through the website, Facebook or Twitter. We have been working to increase the number of people engaged online and we are seeing good year-over-year increases, but there is still room for improvement.

When asked for favourite and least-favourite parts of the magazine, the answers were less clear. Among the most frequently mentioned favourite parts were editorials,

Many people took the time to comment that they would like a break from sexuality issues; others chastised the magazine for taking a one-sided approach.

features, letters, Milestones, Viewpoints and Young Voices. Troy Watson was the columnist mentioned most often. For least-favourite parts, readers mentioned letters, fragmenting issues, local news and ads. Letters to the editor had the highest rating, both favourably and unfavourably, which seems a bit paradoxical. We assume that readers like to know what others are thinking, but they do not like the debate to be acrimonious. The dislike of fragmenting issues bears out this interpretation.

The church has been very divided on issues of sexuality, and we assume that this is at the centre of these “fragmenting

issues.” Many people took the time to comment that they would like a break from sexuality issues; others chastised the magazine for taking a one-sided approach. Perhaps the take-away is that you cannot please everyone.

In a question about types of articles they appreciate, readers indicated they like stories about people, local stories and articles dealing with Mennonite history. Here again, there is a discrepancy, because local stories were among things listed as least-favourite. We have noticed that readers like to see their own local stories; readers from the east regularly complain there are too many stories from the west, and vice versa.

When asked about the purpose of the magazine, the highest responses were to “inform” and to “connect Mennonites.” Younger readers responded with “connect Mennonites” more than older readers. Other purposes listed were to challenge ideas, to inspire, to educate and to provide spiritual food. Younger people tended to see the magazine as a place to challenge and discuss ideas, while some older readers saw its purpose as more spiritual or inspirational. Given the feedback, we will continue to cover news and encourage conversation, rather than to move toward more devotional writing.

We were pleased to see that *Canadian*

Mennonite is used as a resource for conversations, as well as for sermons or small-group discussions. We were also gratified to read comments indicating that people who have no Mennonite church nearby read the magazine to stay connected.

Given this feedback, *Canadian Mennonite* does not plan to switch to a digital-only publication. While we will try to encourage online engagement, we will continue to keep our congregations connected with printed stories and articles that educate and inspire our faith while fostering dialogue on issues facing Mennonites in Canada. ❧



Marcus Kruger of Wildwood Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, describes something he experienced to Matt Derksen of Zion Mennonite Church, Swift Current. The listening exercise was part of a Listening and Discernment Committee workshop.

Bound to disagree, freed to love

Saskatchewan delegates learn how to disagree well

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent
OSLER, SASK.

Conflict within, uncertainties without. Perhaps it was because of these that planners of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan's annual delegate sessions chose "Bound together, freed to serve" as their theme for the March 11 and 12 event.

Chains encircling a Bible provided a visual reminder of that theme as three speakers shared thoughts on Ephesians 4.

Ryan Siemens, Saskatchewan's area church minister, said that Jesus' disciples didn't always agree with one another. "We are united as a body not because we agree with each other, but because of what God accomplished through the cross of Christ," he said. "Through the cross of Christ we are bound, chained, imprisoned in the Lord."

Cindy Wallace of Warman Mennonite echoed Siemens's thoughts in her message

to delegates. "I believe we grieve Christ when we tear his body limb from limb," she said. "The goal is not to have no disagreements. It's to disagree well, and to inspire those who observe us with the love we have, even as we disagree."

Rose Graber of Grace Mennonite in Regina, agreed with Wallace. "We're not going to agree about sexuality. Not in this generation," she said. "If we spend our time fighting about who can be part of the body and who can't, we take our eyes from Jesus. If we focus on Jesus, others will know we are Christians by our love."

Delegates focussed on Jesus through: worship ably led by members of the host church, Osler Mennonite; as they heard reports and voted to accept a budget of just under \$376,000; as they participated

in workshops and learned more about the area church's various ministries; and as they asked questions and expressed concerns about the recommendations of the Future Directions Task Force.

The Listening and Discernment Committee, also known as the Ad Hoc Committee on Same-sex Marriage, which was appointed following the 2015 annual delegate sessions, offered a workshop in which participants were guided through several listening exercises.

"True reflective listening doesn't compromise one's beliefs," said committee member Cheryl Woelk. "It takes vulnerability and work, but it's risk-free." She invited participants to think about how the skills they were learning might be used in conversations about same-sex marriage.

Delegates' listening skills were tested during the final business session, as Sam Dyck of Warman Mennonite presented a resolution on behalf of his congregation. The resolution asked that MC Saskatchewan member congregations be polled "in order to determine the level of support for affirming Article 19 [of the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*], or for recommending a process of revision." The article in question is entitled "Family, singleness and marriage." Dyck said his congregation has lost members already and may well vote to leave MC Saskatchewan if it feels the delegate body doesn't reflect what it believes.

Both Ted Janzen of Rosthern Mennonite and Darlene Martens of Aberdeen Mennonite said that voting in favour of the resolution would bring division to their congregations, rather than peace, but that voting against it would suggest that Warman Mennonite's voice is unimportant. Since neither outcome would be acceptable, they said they would abstain from voting.

Peter Neufeldt moved to table the resolution. His motion was quickly, though not unanimously, passed. At this point, a number of delegates came forward to say they felt the tabling motion had been too hasty. Parliamentarian Peter Peters advised that if what delegates wanted to achieve was contrary to Robert's Rules of Order, it was "okay" as long as the decision allowed them to achieve what they wanted to do. So delegates voted to "undo" the tabling

motion, which was then amended to indicate that the resolution be tabled until the work of the Listening and Discernment Committee is completed. After a time of discussion, reflection and prayer, this motion was carried.

In response, Dyck thanked delegates for their patience in a difficult issue, and said, "We'll be praying for you. I hope you'll be praying for us."

Pauline Steinmann, representing the Vision and Wholeness Committee, summarized the sessions this way: "We would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge the air of tension and anxiety. We are anxious about losing the church we know. But in the midst of anxiety we also heard words of encouragement and hope. In the last session we heard that Robert's Rules of Order don't need to be what we are enslaved to. We are enslaved to Christ and that needs to take precedence." ❧

See more on *Future Directions* at bit.ly/future-directions-sask.



AMBS PHOTO



Bryan Moyer Suderman, an itinerant Bible teacher from Stouffville, Ont., who is also widely known as an Anabaptist singer-songwriter, led Pastors Week sessions at this year's event at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary entitled 'The Bible says what?' See story online at canadianmennonite.org/amb-pastors-week.

Alberta youth enjoy snow camps

Canadian Mennonite

Despite a warm winter, there was enough of the white stuff for youth from Mennonite churches across Alberta to call their annual winter retreats "snow camps."

On the weekends of Jan. 15 to 17 and Feb. 26 to 28, junior- and senior-high youth, respectively, enjoyed fellowship, outdoor games and Bible study at Mennonite Church Alberta's Camp Valaqua in Water Valley. The theme for the events was "As I am."

At the junior-high event, speaker Donita Wiebe-Neufeld, co-pastor of First Mennonite Church, Edmonton, retold the gospel story of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet, looking at how Jesus accepted her as she was and encouraging campers to feel accepted for who they are.

Camper Hayden Goosen said, "It's great to be around like-minded people. Everyone got along and had fun."

Senior-high speaker Nikki Olfert used the great commandment from Matthew 22:37-39, emphasizing the need for people

to love themselves.

Cassidy Brown, a member of the Youth Leadership Team (YLT), said, "This is good for this age group. . . . They are becoming more aware of themselves and comparing to others. Often they feel they don't measure up."

Camp director Jon Olfert and Calgary Foothills youth pastor Chad Miller work with the Youth Leadership Team, made up of five young people from Edmonton, Didsbury and Calgary, to plan province-wide events, providing background support for the team while encouraging them to do the actual administering and leading.

"It is always such a joy to spend time with the future of our church," said Olfert. "So many wonderful leaders in this group! Hopefully we can bring this energy into our summer camp program."

Laura Wiebe, a parent and youth sponsor at the junior-high event, was impressed with the team's work. "Great leadership from the YLT," she wrote. "Your enthusiasm and humour made the weekend!" ❧

PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD



Claire Dueck of Lethbridge, Alta., centre, tags Patrick Allen, left, also of Lethbridge, as Devlin Patrick of Edmonton dodges a tag during this year's snow camps at Camp Valaqua.

Do young people care about the future of the church?

Students answer with a resounding 'yes'

By J. NEUFELD

Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

Never let it be said that young people don't care about the future of the church.

Late last year, Katrina Woelk, a sociology student at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) and a member of the student council, was having a conversation with some other students and members of the university administration about the challenges facing Mennonite Church Canada.

"We were asked, 'Do you think students care?'" said Woelk. "We looked at each other and said, 'I think so.'"

They were right.

Woelk and a couple of other students sent an e-mail to all the MC Canada-affiliated students on campus, mentioning the changes MC Canada is going through: discussions about lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) inclusion and same-sex marriage, financial shortfalls,

job cuts and the recommendations of the Future Directions Task Force. They invited anyone who was interested to meet over the lunch hour to talk.

About 40 people showed up.

"We realized there was a lot of interest," said Woelk.

The discussion was so lively, a group was formed to continue the conversation. Emerging Voices Initiative has been meeting regularly since January to talk about their ideas for the future of the church. The group consists mostly of CMU students, and represents congregations from across the country. At first, the conversations focussed on the recent report from the Future Directions Task Force.

"Then at one of those meetings someone pointed out that the discussion was feeling really heavy and bureaucratic and structural, and that we hadn't really started

from a theological standpoint," said Jonas Cornelsen, a theology student who attends Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. "So we decided take a step back and think about our collective vision of what the church should be."

Cornelsen invited the group to meet at his house for snacks. Over three hours, they talked about their hopes and fears for the church. They jotted their vision for the church onto cue cards and came up with a list of 11 things they believe the church and its members are called to do. The list includes:

- FOLLOWING JESUS
- WORSHIPPING TOGETHER
- ENGAGING NEIGHBOURS
- FORMING DISCIPLES
- BRIDGING SOCIAL DIVIDES
- NURTURING GLOBAL FAMILY

The full list can be found online at bit.ly/emerging-voice-vision.

On March 5, members of the student group presented their 11 points at a workshop during Mennonite Church Manitoba's annual general meeting. The room was crowded with people and buzzing with energy.

"We're aiming not to be too reactionary," said Woelk during the presentation. "We acknowledge the Future Directions report was lovingly put together, and it's a good place to start. But we don't need to shy away from the hard questions."

Two questions the group is asking are:

- **WHAT MIGHT** we find faithful and/or unfaithful about perceiving local congregations—as opposed to a national or global church—as the most important unit of church?
- **DO WE** agree that congregations will feel revitalized by this model and ultimately called back to renewed relationships with one another in the future?

Many who attended the workshop had questions and comments of their own.

"I hope we, as congregations, have been open enough to listen to you people," said Moses Falco, pastor of Sterling Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

David Driedger, pastor of First Mennonite

PHOTO BY BETH EPP



Anika Reynar presents the vision of the Emerging Voices Initiative to the Mennonite Church Manitoba annual general meeting at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, on March 5.

Church in Winnipeg, noted the absence of the word “mission” from the vision document. “I affirm that,” he said. “It reflects the idea of mutual expression.”

“It’s amazing the way you’ve balanced worship, work, formation and witness in your vision,” said Elsie Rempel, who attends Charleswood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. “You give me hope for the future.”

The student group left the workshop feeling energized and affirmed. Members hope to broaden their discussion to engage with students at other Mennonite universities. They are keeping a blog (bit.ly/emerging-voice-blog), and have started a Facebook group. The group members see this period of change within the church as an opportunity to address other topics, such as how technology is changing relationships, settler-indigenous relationships and environmental issues.

“I’m part of a common family that reaches across a pretty vast geographical space and pretty vast theological lines,” said Cornelsen, who has participated in several different MC Canada churches. “In each of them I’ve felt a sense of home and I think that’s because we’ve built a broad identity for ourselves as Mennonites across Canada. For me, that’s very, very important.” ❧

/// Briefly noted

Grace Mennonite leaves area, national churches

WINKLER, MAN.—Grace Mennonite Church, Winkler, is the second congregation leaving Mennonite Church Manitoba and the third to leave MC Canada. In a Feb. 18 letter, it declared its decision to sever ties with the area and national churches, but gave no reasons for its departure. When contacted by *Canadian Mennonite*, Keith Friesen, the lead pastor, would not comment on the church’s reasons for leaving. The congregation of 304 active members was founded in 1961 as a breakaway from Winkler Berghthaler Mennonite Church over the use of the German language. Membership is down from a high of 449 in 2011.

—*Canadian Mennonite*

/// Briefly noted

MC Manitoba approves new vision, Future Directions recommendations, and LGBTQ guidelines for churches, pastors

WINNIPEG—Delegates at Mennonite Church Manitoba’s annual general meeting on March 5 approved the area church’s new vision for mission and voted in support of the recommendations made by the Future Directions Task Force about the future of the national church. MC Manitoba’s new mission vision includes plans to relinquish management of Camp Moose Lake and Camp Koinonia, while still using them for summer camp programs; it also involves a capital campaign to develop facilities at Camp Assiniboia so the camp can also be used for congregational retreats. The mission vision passed with unanimous support. The second motion under consideration, the Future Directions Task Force Report, generated considerable discussion throughout the day, but ultimately passed with 71 percent support. Delegates also approved a set of guidelines for churches as they consider questions of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer inclusion and same-sex marriage; the guidelines request that congregations refrain from credentialing ministers in same-sex relationships, and that MC Manitoba-credentialled ministers refrain from performing same-sex weddings until the Being a Faithful Church process wraps up this summer.

—BY J. NEUFELD

Home Street Mennonite votes to accept LGBTQ members

WINNIPEG—Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg voted on Jan. 30 to “accept as full members all people, including those of same-sex attraction and in same-sex relationships, who commit to follow Jesus and to live in covenant relationship with this church body.” Eighty-five percent of the congregation voted in favour, said Steve Plenert, acting as a spokesperson for the church. The congregation has been working through this issue for several years. “We knew there were some gay and lesbian people in the congregation and that they wanted to be further engaged or identified within the congregation,” said Plenert. “We knew that making this decision was going to be hurtful for people who opposed it,” he said. “But we also knew it would be very painful to those we wanted to include. Why do we vote on some people and not on others? It was very difficult to make that decision, knowing that some of the most vulnerable people on both sides of this question could very easily be hurt by it. And there was hurt. There was pain.” During the discernment process, some people left the congregation. But overall, the congregation is pleased with both the process and the decision, said Plenert.

—BY J. NEUFELD



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MENNONITE PARTNERS IN CHINA

GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

COVER STORY

A hope for home

Syrian crisis is MCC's largest disaster response ever

BY WILL BRAUN
Senior Writer

For the most part, Syrians forced from their homes dream not of going to Europe or Canada, but of going back home. “They are in love with their country,” say Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) representatives for Lebanon and Syria, who cannot be named for security reasons.

MCC staff—who work with local partner organizations in some of the most chaotic areas of Syria, as well as with refugees in bordering Lebanon—speak about Syria as a place with a strong pull, not just a place to flee. One bishop they work with in the ravaged city of Homs presides over a church that was founded in AD 47. He’s not leaving. Like many other Syrian Christians, he considers his homeland the cradle of Christianity.

“This is home; they are not going to give it up,” MCC staff say via Skype. They say that local partners speak of how gracious it is of countries like Canada to receive refugees, but the greatest need is in the region itself. People don’t want to have to flee.

MCC staff tell of one refugee father who, driven by desperation, was ready to take his family and risk the treacherous trip by sea to Europe. His wife didn’t want to. That’s understandable, given that since the death of refugee toddler Aylan Kurdi made the world shudder last September, at least 340 more children, many of them babies or toddlers, have drowned in the eastern Mediterranean, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency. Through an MCC partner, the family debating the trip to Europe obtained Canadian Foodgrains Bank food vouchers, which made the difference for them between getting on a dingy headed into the Mediterranean and staying on dry ground.

Based on news reports in Canada, fleeing the region almost seems like the only

option. Syria looks like a country without a future. But the tone of MCC staff in the region is different. Faced with the gravity of the situation up close, they nonetheless look toward a future for Syria, inspired by those who hope to return one day and by those who refuse to leave.

The aid these Syrians receive nurtures that hope. Some refugees in Lebanon speak about aid as that which sustains them in body and spirit while they wait to return home.

Then there are those who have stayed in Syria amid the violence and deprivation. MCC staff speak of how their local partners inside Syria, many of them members of religious organizations, feel called to stay. “These are the people who will rebuild the country,” they say. “They are amazingly resilient.”

Disastrous numbers

To date, MCC has spent \$45.7 million on the Syria-Iraq crisis, making it MCC’s largest disaster response ever. Half of that has been spent in Syria and the rest in the neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan. MCC works through nearly 30 local partners throughout the region.

More than half of all Syrians have been forced to leave their homes; 4.6 million have fled the country while another 6.6 million are displaced within Syria. Another 3.3 million Iraqis are displaced internally.

The situation is going “from bad to worse,” according to Bruce Guenther, director of disaster response for MCC Canada. “We’re rounding to the millions,” he says, in relation to the disturbing magnitude of the crisis.

What aid looks like

MCC’s work in the region falls into two general categories. One, of course, is

MCC PHOTOS BY MATT SAWATZKY



Feryal, left, her parents Elyas and Fatima, and her sister Jandar, whose last names are withheld for security reasons, live in a tent at a camp for internally displaced persons in northern Iraq’s Ninewa governorate. Feryal is part of an MCC-supported project training and empowering young people, including young people who live in this camp, to meet with other displaced people to share stories of displacement, trauma and resilience that are part of being uprooted from home.

humanitarian assistance, which includes food, water, shelter, winterization and education. The other element is less tangible; it includes peacebuilding and dealing with trauma.

MCC staff tell of a community theatre project in Aleppo, Syria. In Aleppo today, electricity is “pretty well non-existent” and water flows once a month if the people are lucky. For many, their days consist largely of dodging sniper fire to get water and food. On a very good day in Aleppo, people may be able to have a family picnic at one of the parks that is still suitable for such purposes. The recent ceasefire has made this more possible.

In that context, the interactive theatre production started out as a love story that crosses traditional divisions. Audience members participated in guiding the ending. Each of the three showings was attended by 400 to 500 people, including Christians and Muslims of various sects. The theatre was 200 metres from a sniper lane that people had to run down to get there. The purpose was to bring diverse people together to enter a story of peaceful co-existence. The project was funded by money MCC obtained from Canada’s

Office for Religious Freedom, established by the previous Conservative government.

MCC also supports a partner organization—such organizations cannot be named for security reasons—that holds weekly gatherings for refugee women in Lebanon. The program offers trauma support, life skills training and simply a dignified environment in which women can gather to share common experiences. Many have been living as refugees for two or three years. This particular program includes many people who fled Islamic State in the Raqqa area of Iraq. They and their children have seen the most dreadful atrocities. The gatherings are a welcome relief from the physically and emotionally exhausting existence of being a refugee.

Sometimes the tangible humanitarian projects also serve deeper needs. MCC staff speak of how an aid project in the region between Damascus and Homs has contributed to inter-religious solidarity. The project, which served both Muslims and Christians, created such a bond between the groups that when extremists threatened a Christian church, local Muslims occupied the church and told the intruders that they would first have to kill them if they were going to desecrate the church.

Message for the West

MCC is closely connected to local partners in the very thick of the most prominent geopolitical hot spot in the world today. What message do these groups have for North Americans?

First is “thanks.” Partners and beneficiaries “again and again say, ‘Please say thank you,’” according to MCC personnel. Second, local people say they want enough assistance that they can wait out the current crisis; they don’t want to leave the region. Third, they want us to advocate for an end to the war. Finally, they say that we should stop sending arms to the region.

MCC has passed this message on to Canadian officials. In a Feb. 23 letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, MCC expressed support for the government’s commitment of \$1.1 billion in aid for the crisis over three years. At the same time, MCC said it is “deeply concerned” about Canada’s ongoing anti-Islamic State military involvement, including its

reconnaissance and refuelling assistance for air strikes. “Our Syrian and Iraqi partners have reported,” the letter stated, “that as coalition airstrikes attempt to retake cities from [Islamic State] not only do they cause immeasurable harm to civilians, but they demolish vital health, sanitation and educational infrastructure.” The airstrikes are “counterproductive,” leaving “cities virtually uninhabitable and fuelling massive displacement.”

MCC also said its partners are “very concerned that Canada’s provision of military equipment will have a destabilizing effect across the region” because the potential for weapons to end up in the wrong hands is “unacceptably high.”

A spokesperson for the Canadian Armed Forces says in an e-mail that Canada “will provide equipment such as small arms, ammunition and optics” to Iraqi security forces. This “bolsters a critical component in the fight against [Islamic State], thereby contributing to the stability and security of Iraq and the region.”

While critical of Canada’s military role, MCC praises its contribution to what its partners see as the only solution: “rigorous support for a comprehensive political process in Syria, strengthening inclusive governance in Iraq, supporting peacebuilding initiatives that prevent religious and sectarian violence, and investing in humanitarian

measures that build regional resilience.”

The future?

A few years back, MCC was struggling to raise awareness and funds for Syria. Syria was old news and matching funds were going elsewhere. That has changed dramatically, due largely to the photo of Aylan Kurdi’s limp body and the Liberal government’s openness to refugees. Canadians have responded enthusiastically. As of the end of January, MCC had received 974 applications from Canadian groups wanting to sponsor refugees from the region.

But has this distracted from the primary need overseas? Guenther says the opposite has happened. Donors are interested in bringing refugees to their communities, and also in supporting those who want to stay in the region. Since last September, when the Kurdi photo appeared, MCC donors have given as much for Syria as they did in the previous four years combined, about \$4 million.

Those contributions help to nurture belief in the future of Syria, a belief that must ultimately be held not only by the bishop of an ancient church in Homs, or bullet-dodging theatre-goers in Aleppo, but by the international community as well. ❧

Visit canadianmennonite.org/braun-syria-crisis for more photos.



Qasim, 8, Tawaf, 5, Hatay, 61, and Murad, 6, fled from Islamic State and have taken refuge in an unfinished house in a small town in northern Iraq’s Ninewa governorate. Their last names are withheld for security reasons.

GOD AT WORK IN US

A Red Sea kind of life

Canadian student switches his major three times before settling on visual and communication arts

BY RANDI B. HAGI

Eastern Mennonite University
HARRISONBURG, VA.

Scott Eyre, residence director of Cedarwood Hall at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU), sports photographer for the Royals, and soon-to-be-graduate, says the journey to the present day has included “a lot of Red Sea parting stuff.” Despite a circuitous route through one hardship after another, the waters have repeatedly parted, and Eyre has not walked through them alone.

“It’s really our story,” he says of his wife Sarah and son Nolan. “Sarah’s the curator of my gallery, but in a lot of ways she’s really the curator of my life.”

A tumultuous start

Even attending college was not a simple choice for Eyre. Instead of finishing high school in Ontario, where he attended Rouge Valley Mennonite Church in Markham, he joined the Mennonite

Voluntary Service Adventure program, and spent a year in Albany, Ore. In 2001, he came to Harrisonburg, Va., to drive a friend home from EMU for Christmas break. The people he met convinced him that EMU was the right next step.

College life wasn’t easy, though. He switched his major three times, from physical education to camping recreation and outdoor ministries, and later to youth ministries. He and Sarah, who is from his hometown of Stouffville, Ont., began a long-distance relationship during his sophomore year.

Coming back for the spring semester, he hit a patch of black ice and careened into a telephone pole, possibly causing a concussion. Then he broke up with Sarah and considered leaving school.

After avoiding Sarah every time he was back home, “she finally cornered me to get this closure,” he says. “Being ‘cornered’ was a good thing, really, because it helped me realize where I wanted to be.”

Eyre dropped out of college, returning to Ontario. He worked at a number of jobs, including photographing weddings. A year after Eyre dropped out of EMU, he and Sarah were married. He eventually became a youth pastor at Rouge Valley.

Coming back

After two years of stability, Eyre faced another Red Sea. He was told without explanation to post his resignation. Their rental home became unavailable. Their bank account was hacked into and emptied. Eyre was passed over for a promising camp director position, so he decided to return to college.

“I’d fought a calling to come back to



From a series by Scot Eyre documenting the faces of EMU’s athletes.

EMU,” he says, and in the face of so many problems, “doors kept swinging really wide open to come back.”

An hour after he called Professor Sandy Brownscombe to discuss returning, she had e-mailed him a 3.5-year curriculum plan. Eyre sold all his photography gear to fund the move, and left Sarah and Nolan in Canada.

Coming together

Slowly, the pieces of family, youth ministry, photography and sports coalesced on one small campus. Sarah filed extensive paperwork to gain nursing certification in the U.S., and Rockingham Memorial Hospital held a job until she was able to move to Harrisonburg. Eyre landed a Northlawn residence director position, beginning his career with Residence Life.

His collegiate trajectory, however, veered from physical education after taking a digital photography course with Professor Jerry Holsopple.

“This whole love of photography came back,” says Eyre, switching his major again.

His social justice slant found a home in photography through EMU’s Visual and Communication Arts Department, where, he says, he learned how to “make a photo that tells a story . . . that conveys a message, and a meaningful one at that.”

The graduate

Eyre recently hosted his senior show at the Margaret Gehman Art Gallery. Called “5×7: An exploration in isolation in New York City,” he says the works show “people living together in a space, finding spots to be alone, whether by choice or because that’s

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCOTT EYRE



After a long journey, Canadian Scott Eyre has found a home at Eastern Mennonite University, where he is a residence director and sports photographer. He will also graduate this spring with a degree in photography, while wife Sarah and son Nolan cheer on his accomplishment. ‘Most people would try to do that before they’re 34,’ he jokes.

[of] the cards they've been dealt . . ."

This summer, he travels to Turkey to retrace Paul's missionary journey. This will fulfill Eyre's cross-cultural credits, the last remaining piece for him to graduate.

"Most people would try to do that before they're 34," he jokes.

But the Red Sea parts in its own time, he says, adding that his current circumstances "are really a God kind of thing, to take different passions and find a way to put them all together in the same space." ❧



For more photos, visit
[canadianmennonite.org/
scott-eyre-emu](http://canadianmennonite.org/scott-eyre-emu).

❧ Briefly noted

EMU announces interim president

Lee Snyder will serve as interim president at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU), Harrisonburg, Va., beginning July 1. Her appointment comes as Loren Swartzendruber retires after a 13-year tenure. The interim arrangement is expected to last no longer than Dec. 31. Snyder has served in several administrative roles, including as eighth president of Bluffton (Ohio) University and vice-president at EMU. She retired from Bluffton in 2006. A native of Harrisburg, Ore., Snyder earned a master's degree in English literature and linguistics from James Madison University and a doctorate from the University of Oregon. Snyder and her husband Delbert taught in Nigeria from 1965-68. She has served in many ways, including as moderator of Mennonite Church U.S.A. Snyder and her husband, who have two adult daughters, now divide their time between Salem, Ore., and Harrisonburg. They are members of Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg and associate members of Salem Mennonite Church.

—Eastern Mennonite University



Lee Snyder

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Our rename and rebrand will be implemented in a phased approach over the coming months. Members can expect to hear additional information about our next steps in the coming weeks.

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ARTBEAT

Celebrating the resilience of Mennonite women

Two historical exhibits depict lives of courage in the face of hardship

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY DONNA SCHULZ
Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON

There are courageous women around every corner, especially at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre in Saskatoon, where the 26 paintings of Ray Dirks's *Along the Road to Freedom* exhibit are currently on display.

Wanting to give Dirks's paintings a local context, the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Saskatchewan partnered with the Diefenbaker Canada Centre to produce a secondary exhibit called *Flight and Resilience: Mennonites of Saskatchewan*. This exhibit features photographs and artefacts from the lives of three Old Colony and Bergthaler women who, like the women featured in Dirks's paintings, lived lives of faith and

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Photo by Randy Martin

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*People attending the opening of the *Along the Road to Freedom* exhibit at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre are eager to study Ray Dirks's 26 paintings of Mennonite refugee women.*

This exhibit features photographs and artefacts from the lives of three Old Colony and Bergthaler women who, like the women featured in Dirks's paintings, lived lives of faith and courage in the face of extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

courage in the face of extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

The music of the church provided hope and encouragement in these women's lives. Several hymns from the era were featured during the opening ceremony, sung by Sine Nomine, a male quartet from Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon. "Welt Ade" is a hymn sung in unison at



Sarah Guenther, left, and her husband Cornie, right, visit with guest speaker Doha Kharsa and her husband Ahmad. The Kharsas came to Canada as refugees from the war in Syria.

conservative Mennonite funerals. Since written music for this hymn could not be found, quartet member John Elias wrote out the melody from memory and harmonized it for male voices.

"This is what we have added to the [Mennonite historical] narrative," said Jake Buhler, president of the historical society.

Reminding the audience that women still face challenging circumstances today, Claire Ewert Fisher, former executive

(Continued on page 26)

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Vietnam Mennonite Church ordains 26

After years of training and preparation, Mennonite pastors from provinces and cities all over Vietnam gather for their ordination service.

canadianmennonite.org/vietnam-ordains



I feel it's my country now

A Syrian refugee family finds a new home in Winnipeg with the help of a local church and Mennonite Central Committee's sponsorship program.

canadianmennonite.org/my-country



Prairie Meadow Place is 'a wonderful place' for seniors

In Rosthern, Sask., a new assisted-living facility replaces the former aging structure. Five local Mennonite churches support the project.

canadianmennonite.org/prairie-meadow



Learning about hunger in Nicaragua

A food study tour group organized by the Canadian Foodgrains Bank travels to Nicaragua to learn about the link between global hunger and small-scale farmers.

canadianmennonite.org/hunger-nicaragua





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(Continued from page 25)

director of MCC Saskatchewan, spoke of the current refugee crisis and introduced Doha Kharsa, a Syrian woman who came to Canada as a refugee a little over a year ago. Kharsa talked about her own flight from war and terror, and her desire for a peaceful life in Canada.

Along the Road to Freedom and Flight and Resilience can be seen at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre until June 19. ❧

Numbers, rather than notes on a staff, indicate pitch in this old German hymnbook.



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PHOTO BY AARON EPP

Researching the past to understand the present

Historian explores Winnipeg politics in the aftermath of the 1919 General Strike

BY AARON EPP
Young Voices Editor

“Why couldn't I have been more interested in Caribbean history?”

That's what historian Stefan Epp-Koop asked himself during a December 2007 visit to Winnipeg, as he trudged through a deep layer of fresh snow in -30 C weather to the City of Winnipeg Archives.

Epp-Koop was visiting the archives to research Winnipeg in the 1920s and '30s. The research was for a major project Epp-Koop worked on while studying history as a master's student at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont.

Raised in Camrose, Alta., Epp-Koop

to Run This City: Winnipeg's Political Left after the General Strike. The book explores the dynamic political movement that came out of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, the largest labour protest in Canadian history, and the ramifications for Winnipeg in the two decades that followed.

“There's been a lot of attention paid to the strike, and what it meant and who the sides were,” Epp-Koop says. “But really, what fascinated me when the strike was over is that the city was just as divided as it had been [before].”

Those economic and political divisions

‘There's been a lot of attention paid to the strike, and what it meant and who the sides were. But really, what fascinated me when the strike was over is that the city was just as divided as it had been [before].’
(Stefan Epp-Koop)

had moved to Winnipeg for his undergraduate studies. He first studied the city's history while completing his bachelor of arts degree at the University of Winnipeg. Sensing that he wanted to move back to Winnipeg and call it home after his grad studies, he wanted to get to know the city better.

“Learning about the past of Winnipeg was a way to understand [the city] in a different way,” the 31-year-old says.

Epp-Koop's research eventually turned into a book. Last September, University of Manitoba Press published *We're Going*

would reverberate in the city for decades to come, says Epp-Koop, who attends Home Street Mennonite Church and has a full-time job running a local food advocacy group called Food Matters Manitoba. He worked on the book on and off for a decade, his research taking him from the reading rooms of Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa to a crowded closet on the second floor of the Community Party's offices on Selkirk Avenue in Winnipeg's North End.

The best part of working on the book is
(Continued on page 28)



Stefan Epp-Koop is the author of We're Going to Run This City: Winnipeg's Political Left After the General Strike.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA PRESS



Protests by unemployed Winnipeggers in response to low levels of unemployment relief were common throughout the 1930s.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF
MANITOBA PRESS



Stefan Epp-Koop admires the desire of the people in his book to make Winnipeg a better place for the city's marginalized, working-class citizens.

(Continued from page 27)

that it allowed Epp-Koop to get to know the people he was researching, as he explored spy files from the RCMP, mainstream and labour newspapers, detailed reports from Winnipeg to the Communist International in Moscow, memoirs, oral histories, letters, advertisements and more.

"There are so many records from that time," he says. "You really get a sense of who these people were. It was very interesting to try to understand them as people and where they were coming from."

His favourite historical figure in the book is John Queen, who was jailed in 1919 for his role in the General Strike and by 1935 became the mayor of Winnipeg. "He ended up leaving quite a remarkable legacy, even though he was so despised by some [people] in the city 15 years earlier," Epp-Koop says.

While he did not always agree with what the people he researched did and said, Epp-Koop says he came to admire their desire to make Winnipeg a better place for the city's marginalized, working-class citizens.

"A lot of the people I studied wouldn't consider themselves Christian, but I think I was really interested in what they were doing to create a more compassionate, caring society," Epp-Koop says.

For Epp-Koop, studying history is a way of understanding why things are the way they are today. "There's so much we can learn about who we are as people, whether that's as a church or a city or a country, and we can draw lessons from that history," he says. "If we are blind to where we come from, we aren't rooted in anything, and we don't learn those lessons from people who have come before."

After all of the work that went into *We're Going to Run This City*, Epp-Koop is happy to see the book on shelves.

His involvement with Food Matters Manitoba and his family life—he and his wife have a nine-month-old son—keep Epp-Koop busy. He is open to writing another book—just not right away. "I can definitely imagine doing [it] again," he says, "but maybe not for a while." ❧

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Welcoming the vulnerable

*MCC seminar offers students a chance to learn
about Canada's response to refugees*

BY AMY MATYCHUK

SPECIAL TO YOUNG VOICES

PHOTO COURTESY OF AMY MATYCHUK



Amy Matychuk

From Feb. 18-20, I was part of a group of 30 students and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) staff from across Canada who met in Ottawa for the annual MCC Student Seminar to learn about refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons. We heard from United Nations staff, MPs, MCC staff who work with refugees, and volunteers who assist newcomers to Canada.

For two-and-a-half days, we learned

about displaced persons, Canada's response to their needs and ways in which we can help. Those who work intimately with refugees were able to provide insights into the steep set of challenges that refugees face. I learned many details, both about the Syrian refugee crisis and about refugees worldwide, that helped to inform my perspective on how Canadians and Canadian Christians should respond:

♦ **FIRST**, I was shocked to learn how few refugees have the opportunity to resettle in places like Canada and how many remain in refugee camps for indefinite lengths of time. I assumed that refugee camps were places of transition, but many people stay there long enough to have children and grandchildren. I found this fact heartbreaking, but also valuable to know, as I respond to those around me who are upset, or suspicious, about the refugees the Canadian government is accepting.

So much of what news stories seem to focus on are things like security risks, the difficulty of integrating refugees or the amount of money spent on resettling Syrians that could be used to benefit the lives of Canadians. In responding to these suspicious narratives about refugee resettlement, I think it is helpful to focus on the humanity of people who have no choice but to spend huge portions of their lives with no opportunity to work, no access to education and very little hope for their future. One of the speakers, Green Party leader Elizabeth May, described the many years refugees spend in camps as “a waste of human potential.”

As Christians, we should be less concerned about our own wealth or safety, than about being God’s hands and feet, and participating in God’s work, as Jeremiah 29:11 puts it: *“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”*

♦ **SECOND**, I learned about the difficulties refugees face once they reach Canada. As though being displaced from their home countries because of threats of violence wasn’t enough shock and upheaval for a lifetime, they often struggle with some aspects of integration.

For this new influx of Syrian refugees, in particular, the government infrastructure for receiving refugees is sparse and disorganized, according to Jenny Kwan, the NDP critic for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. Because of linguistic and cultural barriers, she said refugees don’t know where to go grocery shopping, how to use public transit, or how to manage the very small living stipend

that the government provides them, the same amount as a Canadian on social assistance.

These facts underscored for me how important it is to be on the lookout for those who need my help, as a Canadian and an English speaker, but also as a friend, advocate and listening ear. As a student, I can’t give much financially, but I realized that I still have time and skills that could dramatically change someone’s life for the better.

♦ **THIRD**, THE presenters at the seminar challenged me to reconsider the way I view my rights as a Canadian. I can guard my rights jealously. I can protest that it is not my fault that I was born in a country that guarantees my rights to movement, expression and religion, and that I should not be responsible for the well-being of people I have never met because I happened to be born in a wealthy country.

On their face, these statements are logical. Nothing legally forces me to be concerned for Syrian children in refugee camps, and there is no code that sets out my obligation to ensure their rights are respected.

However, if I consider my rights as a Canadian alongside the values Jesus exemplified, I should instead be humbled that I did nothing to earn my good fortune. I should consider it the greatest and most significant expression of my rights as a Canadian that I seek to include others in the same freedom and opportunities that I enjoy.

In seeking to extend these rights as far as I can, I should avoid the temptation to fear that my own wealth or safety will be compromised. However compelling these arguments may be, they are distractions that prey on my own greed and self-interest, rather than enabling me to live as Jesus would have.

I hope that in the years ahead Canadians will be able to look back and be proud of the welcome we extended when the vulnerable needed our help the most. ❧

Amy Matychuk, 24, lives in Calgary, where she attends Foothills Mennonite Church.

PHOTOS BY THOMAS COLDWELL



Students and MCC staff from across Canada met in Ottawa in February to learn about refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons.



Green Party leader Elizabeth May describes the many years people spend in refugee camps as ‘a waste of human potential.’



Students listen to United Nations staff, MPs, MCC staff who work with refugees, and volunteers who assist newcomers to Canada.



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Calendar

British Columbia

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

April 16-17: Camp Squeah paddle-a-thon.

April 30: MC B.C. Women's Inspirational Day, "Wisdom in Legacy," with Ingrid Schultz at Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church, Abbotsford, 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Alberta

April 30: Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta is hosting its annual general meeting and spring conference, "Rethinking Mennonite history in light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," at Holyrood Mennonite Church, Edmonton. For more details, or to register, call 780-318-4186 or visit mennonitehistory.org.

Saskatchewan

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

May 28: RJC golf tournament at Valley Regional Park.

Manitoba


Until May 14: Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery,

(re)make 2016


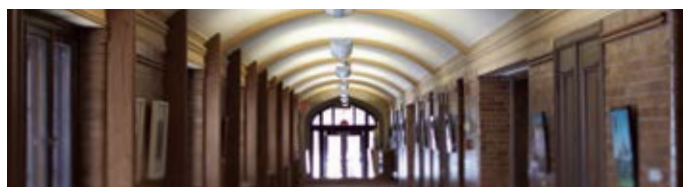
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Instructor:
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CMU | CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY

Winnipeg, hosts "Stories in art from Iraqi Kurdistan," collected by Kathy Moorhead Thiessen of Christian Peacemaker Teams.

April 7: "A fresh look at CMU: A spring evening fundraiser" in support of CMU, and the presentation of the second annual CMU PAX Award to Art DeFehr. For more information, visit cmu.ca/afreshlook.

April 8: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives third annual spring dessert fundraiser at 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg.

April 9: Eden Foundation presents "Stories of hope, healing and community," at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m., a fundraising event: Eden Health Care Services. The Faith and Life Male Choir will also perform.

April 16: Camps with Meaning "build a cabin song-a-thon" fundraiser, at CMU's Great Hall, from 1 to 9 p.m.

April 30, May 1: Faith and Life Choirs spring concerts: (30) at Springfield Heights Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m.; (1) at Steinbach Mennonite Church, at 3 p.m.

May 9: Westgate bursary fundraising banquet.

May 11-14: Canadian Association for Refugee and Forced Migration Studies presents the "Freedom of movement: A path from armed conflict, persecution, and forced migration to conflict resolution, human rights and development" conference at Menno Simons College and the University of Winnipeg. For more information, visit carfms.org.

May 12: Manitoba Day at Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach. Ceremony at the steamer shelter. Made-in-Manitoba craft sale in the auditorium.

May 13-14: Sister Care seminar hosted by Mennonite Women Manitoba at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg. For more information, or to register, visit mennochurch.mb.ca/events.

Ontario

Until April 23: "As the women sew: Community quilts of Mampuján, Colombia," art exhibit at the Grebel Gallery, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo (grebel.ca/events).

Until Dec. 26: New exhibit at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario at

Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo: "Conchies speak: Ontario Mennonites in Alternative Service."

April 9: "The Cost of Peace versus the Cost of War," by Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish, the Gaza doctor, following the AGM of Conscience Canada (2 p.m.) at Danforth Mennonite Church, Toronto, at 3:30 p.m.

April 12: Annual general meeting of Mennonite Savings and Credit Union at Creekside Church, 660 Conservation Dr., Waterloo. Registration at 6:30 p.m., fellowship and dessert to follow.

April 18-21: MCC Meat canning in Leamington.

April 25-29: MCC meat canning in Elmira.

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.

April 29-May 1: Mennonite and Brethren Marriage Encounter weekend at Jericho House, Pt. Colborne. For information, go to www.marriageencounterrec.com or call 519-669-8667.

May 2 or 3: Seniors retreat at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. Theme: "Strangers no more: Sharing gifts of grace." For more information, visit hiddenacres.ca or call 518-625-8602.

May 9: Low German Networking Conference in Aylmer.

May 11: Low German Networking Conference in Leamington.

May 13: Theatre of the Beat presents "This Will Lead to Dancing," a play about wholeness, belonging and LGBTQ inclusion, at Preston Mennonite, Cambridge, at 7 p.m. For more information, visit theatreofthebeat.ca.

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.



UpComing

Peacebuilding conference, festival open for registration

WATERLOO, ONT.—The Conrad Grebel University College community is hosting a diverse group of academics, practitioners, artists and church workers at the Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference and Festival, to be held from June 9 to 12. Involving at least 130 people from more than 18 countries, more than 80 proposals for workshops, panels, papers and art exhibits have been accepted. Opening plenary addresses will be offered by Fernando Enns, director of the Institute for Peace Church Theology at Hamburg University, Germany; Paulus Widjaja, director of the Duta Wacana Christianity University's Centre for the Study and Promotion of Peace, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; and Lisa Schirch, director of human security at the Alliance for Peacebuilding, Washington, D.C. The conference will explore a rich diversity of peace-related topics, covering areas such as inclusion and exclusion in the Mennonite church, development and livelihoods, history and theology, reflective practice, and case studies from Colombia to Canada. The conference will close with a Sunday morning worship service and final plenary. For more information, or to register online, visit bit.ly/grebel-peace.

—Conrad Grebel University College

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PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY



In his mind, Brian Bender could see the combines driving up to the Tim Horton's drive-through window at Cassel Mennonite Church, a small, rural congregation near Tavistock, Ont. While that dream didn't become a reality, the church has begun a monthly Friday morning Cassel Community Café for its neighbours. Dwight Zehr, a key planner, remembers when Cassel had a co-operative cheese factory, a sawmill and other businesses where neighbours would cross paths and catch up; those are all gone now and so the congregation is creating a place for neighbours to find each other. Pictured, clockwise from back: Don Roth, Emerson Ropp, Dan Musselman, Ross Musselman, Laird Schumm and Merv Ropp. Plans are for the April 1 café to be the last until November, as farmers get out to work the land.

MENNOHOMES PHOTO

Don Harloff of Woolwich Community Services, centre, is flanked by Shirley Redekop, left, and Dan Driedger, executive director of MennoHomes, in front of the jointly owned property in Elmira, Ont. Behind them is the site where A Place to Call Home, a 25-unit building with 14 one-bedroom, nine two-bedroom, and two three-bedroom apartments for low-income residents, will be built.

Driedger notes that with fundraising, provincial and federal monies, and developers' credits from Waterloo Region, MennoHomes still needs \$1.7 million to reach its goal. Groundbreaking is tentatively scheduled for April.



God at work in the world Snapshots

PHOTO BY MARIA H. KLASSEN / TEXT BY ANNE LITKE AND LAURIE WARKENTIN



On Feb. 6, the Niagara-on-the-Lake (Ont.) Ten Thousand Villages (TTV) store welcomed four artisans from India's Asha cooperative. Asha, which means 'hope' in Sanskrit, was started by professionals responding to the abject poverty of artisans, the problem of exploitative middlemen and the disappearance of many traditional crafts. Asha's work has encouraged the growth of cottage industries, assisting once-im-poverished individuals and families toward self-sufficiency. Pictured from left to right: Lucas Caldeira, Asha's chief executive officer; Anne Litke, Niagara-on-the-Lake TTV's manager; Ivan Carvalho, Asha's marketing manager; Diana Caldeira, Asha's secretary; Laurie Warkentin, Niagara-on-the-Lake TTV's assistant manager; and Rajesh Salaskan, Asha's assistant manager of exports.