

CANADIAN MENNONITE

June 10, 2019 Volume 23 Number 12



A tender touch of gospel paradox

Remembering the life
of Jean Vanier, pg. 13

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EDITORIAL

Between *Pure* and Mennonite Heritage Week

Virginia A. Hostetler
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



On the last week of May, season 2 of the crime show, *Pure*, started airing on the Super Channel. The show's promotional material shows women in conservative Mennonite dress wielding rifles and filling packets with cocaine. Men in overalls, plaid shirts and straw hats intimidate a victim. The show purports to be "based on true events of the Mennonite mob."

That same week, there was discussion in the House of Commons about designating the second week of September as Mennonite Heritage Week. Video clips showed Independent MP Jane Philippott speaking in support of M-111, a proposal made last February by Conservative MP Ed Fast of Abbotsford, B.C. A self-designated Mennonite, Fast put forth a private member's motion for this special recognition of Mennonite contributions to Canadian society. In another clip, Sheri Benson, NDP MP for Saskatoon West, praised Mennonites for their work in her province through refugee sponsorship, restorative justice efforts and feeding the hungry.

When people generalize about Mennonites, we all become saints or we're all drug traffickers. (Oops, a generalization of my own!) But we're a lot more complicated than those stereotypes. While there are saintly members of our faith, others of us have committed immoral and illegal acts. Most of us don't fall on either end of that spectrum. Yes, some of us wear beards or long dresses, but many Mennonites are visually indistinguishable from their non-Mennonite neighbours. Plus, we succumb to some of the same regrettable behaviour.

In the House of Commons discussion, several members gave history lessons on our faith ancestors and applauded the motion. One MP highlighted Mennonites as humble, inventive and ready to help our neighbours. According to her, we, as a people, make delicious *rollkuchen*, have a sense of humour and all of us love music. She says of us, "They will set their mind to do something. Possibly it is a problem that they themselves need solved. They will find that solution."

Hurray for those who fit all those designations! But I don't make *rollkuchen* or fix farm machinery. I do love singing with groups of other Mennonites, large and small. But I'm not known for my sense of humour, and I'm not always as helpful and generous as I should be. Why paint us all with the same brush?

There's no denying that, historically, our people have made positive contributions to life in Canada. But ask our Indigenous neighbours about our legacy on the land their ancestors inhabited. Consider how our communities today are not always stepping up to care for the environment or for the vulnerable people living near us.

Some of us criticized season 1 of *Pure* for the inaccuracies in its portrayal of our Old Order cousins ("A not-so-pure depiction of Mennonites," Feb. 13, 2017). The feeling was that the show disrespected an entire Mennonite sub-group that would not defend itself. And maybe some of us feared that we would be connected with the exotic characters it portrayed.

One thing we can learn from tributes and TV shows is to be careful

about how we paint people of other faith traditions. Do we offer them the same grace as we wish was extended to our community? Those of us who object to the mangled portrayal of Old Colony Mennonites in *Pure* should refrain from viewing other people groups in a monochrome light.

Second, the stories of foibles and misdeeds, whether exaggerated or not, can serve as a warning that we, too, are subject to greed, dishonesty and downright meanness. We need to acknowledge, maybe especially to outsiders, this side of our identity.

Forget about Mennonite Heritage Week. But let the high praises that come our way inspire Mennonites of all stripes to live up to higher standards, and call us to practise our faith with integrity and transparency.

Digital edition

This year during our summer slowdown, *Canadian Mennonite* will produce three digital issues, starting with the July 8 issue. We will print one issue in July and one in August (the 19th), but subscribers are eligible to receive a digital issue by email in two-week intervals. See more details on page 30 or at canadianmennonite.org/subscribe/digital.



Correction

When Joel Kroeker made 200 pizza crusts, he was working for the Night Oven Bakery in Saskatoon, not as Bæker Kræker. This was unclear in "Sourdough spirituality," May 13, page 22. *Canadian Mennonite* regrets the ambiguity. ❧



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Jean Vanier, seated right, and L'Arche members are pictured at the 50th anniversary celebration of L'Arche in 2014. Read Will Braun's tribute to the life and ministry of the late Jean Vanier on page 13.

PHOTO: L'ARCHE INTERNATIONAL

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CANADIAN MENNONITE

Phone: 519-884-3810 Toll-free: 1-800-378-2524 Fax: 519-884-3331

Website: canadianmennonite.org

Facebook.com/Canadian.Mennonite @CanMenno

Please send all material to be considered for publication to:

General submission address: submit@canadianmennonite.org

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Board Chair, Henry Krause, hakrause@telus.net, 604-888-3192

Canadian Mennonite Staff:

Publisher, Tobi Thiessen, publisher@canadianmennonite.org

Executive Editor, Virginia A. Hostetler, editor@canadianmennonite.org

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

Online Media Manager, Aaron Epp, onlinemgr@canadianmennonite.org

Contributing Editor, Rachel Bergen, contribed@canadianmennonite.org

Editorial Assistant, Barb Draper, edassist@canadianmennonite.org

Graphic Designer, Betty Avery, designer@canadianmennonite.org

Circulation/Finance, Lisa Jacky, office@canadianmennonite.org

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

Senior Writer, Will Braun, seniorwriter@canadianmennonite.org

B.C. Correspondent, Amy Rinner Waddell, bc@canadianmennonite.org

Alberta Correspondent, Vacant

Saskatchewan Correspondent, Donna Schulz, sk@canadianmennonite.org

Manitoba Correspondent, Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe, mb@canadianmennonite.org

Eastern Canada Correspondent, Janet Bauman, ec@canadianmennonite.org

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(e-mail) office@canadianmennonite.org

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FEATURE

The gifts of grey hair

By Claire Ewert Fisher



PHOTO © ISTOCK.COM/NINAMALYNA

"O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come" (Psalm 71:17-18).

I have grey hair; this is where life has placed me. I am getting older.

I am discovering that there is still much to learn as I age. There are still interesting challenges ahead. And I have many companions—the baby boomers, those children who were born after the Second World War. We are a sector of the population who are used to success. We are still pretty healthy. Overall, we have a fair amount of money and we still have dreams for the future.

There is a story in Scripture that can help us out (Genesis 18:1-15). Sarah, the unsung hero, is married to this guy Abe, who keeps hearing God tell him that he is going to be the father of many nations, that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars!

But the couple don't have children. They are not able to conceive a child together. And now they are—well, you might say—old. She is 90 and definitely

Sarah is aging, but her life is anything but over. The changes taking place in her life reflect the power of God at work transforming lives everywhere, all the time.

postmenopausal, and he is 99-plus.

One day, three men appear at the tent of Sarah and Abraham in the heat of the day. Their tent is pitched next to the oak tree of Mamre, near a fine spring well. Abe rushes out to welcome them, offering them water to wash their feet, shade to rest in and food to sustain them. Sarah, maintaining proper role expectations of the day, remains in the tent, listening. One of the strangers, who somehow knows Sarah by name, predicts, “Sarah will have a son.”

I love the next part. Sarah laughs!

It's not clear what was behind the laughter. My husband wonders if it was mocking and derisive. After all, what was being predicted was beyond imagination, unsettling and intrusive. Here they were in the desert, without progeny, without a future, powerless, homeless, landless and desolate.

I, on the other hand, think her

laughter expresses pure joy, is playful and filled with delight at the new prospects. God was promising something new. The future was open. God had promised, and Sarah laughed. I like to think that she was delighting in the possibilities God had just opened up. God was going to make sure that this couple was blessed with a child.

That is precisely what happens. Sarah conceives and gives birth to a son. They name him Isaac, meaning “laughter.” Sarah, who was marginalized in parts of her story, is now drawn into the centre of God's work. Her participation in the story brings new life where none seemed possible before. God is faithful and Sarah is faithful.

Sarah is aging, but her life is anything but over. The changes taking place in her life reflect the power of God at work transforming lives everywhere, all the time.

Some gifts of age

Here are some observations that speak of a life well lived, particularly as one ages:

- **The first observation** has to do with “hospitality.” Hospitality is holding space for another person. Holding space involves creating an environment in which love, acceptance and support are the defining features. Hospitality is opening one's heart, one's time and one's presence to another person. It comes without judgment, but with acceptance, swimming in love, a love that flows out to another for the sake of that person.
- **Richard Wagamese, an Ojibwe author**, has written some powerfully empathetic novels. In *Ragged Company*, he follows the lives of street people whose group grows to include a disgruntled journalist, a lawyer and a

person working for a lottery company. Through the words of one character called Timber, an accomplished wood carver with a particularly bitter attitude towards life, Wagamese teaches us an important lesson. Speaking of another character, Timber says, “I had failed him then. Failed to let him see me. Failed to let him know me in all the corrugated chips and fracture lines. Failed to let him know that friends are imperfect replicas of the people we think we choose, and that imperfection is the nature of it all.”

- **We live together** in community. When we practise hospitality, we belong in someone else's heart. Timber says, “We come together in our brokenness and find that our small acts of being human together mend the breaks, allow us to retool the design and become more.”
- **I wonder if** there is any other earthly thing that is more important than a ragged company to walk with us through life.
- **Another aspect of Sarah's life** is her willingness to embrace the unexpected, the different and the surprise we know as the future. She laughs but she is open to new possibilities and new experiences.
- **Sarah had not** always acted with this kind of openness and patience. A dozen years before, she had been much more impulsive. She had been anxious that Abe would not get his sky full of stars—his descendants—so she had sent her maidservant to Abraham's bed. She had not been prepared to wait on God's timing.
- **Now things are** different. She is now prepared to let others lead while she follows. Perhaps this is what the wisdom of age looks like: no longer pushing ahead with your ideas but rather supporting others in theirs.
- **Ignatius Loyola, a Spanish priest and theologian** also known for his work in spiritual direction, suggests that, as long as we are inordinately attached to our own ideas, to a certain outcome, we are not really listening to God. As long as we accept only one particular solution or result, we are not able to hear God.

Sarah has given up her need to solve God's problem and is now letting God be God.

The blessing box

Sometimes we attempt to work with situations in churches, believing that we have the correct answer. At other times, we listen to God and, through trial and error, discover what God is really saying to us. What happened at Grace Mennonite Church, in Prince Albert, Sask., is a good example.

One of the younger church members suggested that we put up a blessing box on the church property. The church building sits on the main street through town, between the liquor board store and the methadone treatment centre. There is much foot traffic. Almost every day, people with legitimate needs come to the church looking for help.

The blessing/pantry box was envisioned as part of an answer to meet the needs of hungry and cold travellers and people living on the street. Almost each day, people would place food items or items of clothing in the box, to be shared with those who needed them. Each day just before noon, one couple, both in their 80s, prepared a loaf of sandwiches and placed them in the box. Each evening, the box was empty.

Church members invited the neighbouring shop owners to join us in supplying the box with food and clothes. Some were eager to participate. Others were much more cautious. The nearness of needy folks was seen as a detriment to a thriving business. The woman who owned the dry-cleaning shop across from the church was cautious. So we had a conversation. She listened to our passion; we listened to her concerns. By the time we were ready to leave, she was volunteering to help us stock the blessing box.

Hospitality and an openness to surprise work well together. For those of us who are privileged enough to give up gainful employment at a certain age, the privilege to practise hospitality—to hold space for others—can become our focus. And we get to choose what that looks like. For

Holding space for others is not unique to the older sector of our population, but it certainly can become the vocation of those seasoned by life.

some, it involves quilting with friends while preparing blankets for disaster response. For others, it includes holding infants in the hospital intensive care unit. For a group that calls itself Baby Boomers Plus, it involves a weekly get-together with exercise, coffee and stimulating, supportive conversation, and a monthly potluck.

Holding space for others is not unique to the older sector of our population but it certainly can become the vocation of those seasoned by life. In our imperfection, we can invite others into relationship, so that together we can visit healing upon each other. I am reminded of Leonard Cohen's lyrics in "Anthem": "Ring the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in."

By the time we get to the second half of life, there are bound to be a few cracks in the foundation, and maybe even in the siding and the roof. But be encouraged: the cracks are essential. That's how the light gets in. And that's where the creativity gets out. ❧



Claire Ewert Fisher is currently the interim pastor of Rosthern (Sask.) Mennonite Church. This is an adaptation of a sermon she preached at Wildwood Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, on Nov. 5, 2017.

❧ For discussion

1. What assumptions does our culture make about people with grey hair? How is grey hair perceived differently on men than on women? What message is being given when you prevent or allow your hair to appear grey?
2. Do you agree that maturity helps us embrace the unexpected in life? Does it give us openness and patience? How does maturity help us to pursue other people's ideas instead of our own? Is this what the Anabaptists meant by *gelassenheit* or "yieldedness"?
3. Claire Ewert Fisher writes that, "Hospitality is opening one's heart, one's time and one's presence to another person." Do you agree? Can you think of a time when you were offered this kind of hospitality in a surprising or extraordinary way?
4. Do you have dreams for your older years? What plans or expectations do you have for retirement? Do you know people who have made it their retirement vocation to practise hospitality and to hold space for others? Why is it important not to expect perfection of ourselves and others?

—By Barb Draper

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/// Readers write

✉ Carbon answers

Re: “Carbon questions” letter, April 29, page 8.

Carbon is created in stars and distributed through the universe as dust, which, in turn, forms the next generation of stars and their planets. Carbon is one of the most abundant elements in the universe and the 15th most abundant element in the Earth’s crust. It is also found in oceans and the atmosphere.

The amount of the Earth’s carbon is constant because, under the Earth’s conditions, conversion of one element to another is very rare. Just as there is a terrestrial water cycle, there is also a carbon cycle: from the atmosphere into organisms and the Earth, and then back into the atmosphere.

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere traps heat from the sun in what is known as the greenhouse effect. In a normal carbon cycle at equilibrium, the global temperature is also at equilibrium. In geological time, extreme climate changes (glaciations and interglacial warm periods) have occurred and can be attributed largely to the carbon cycle being thrown off balance by such things as extreme tectonic shifts, variations in the sun’s heat and changing ocean currents.

What is happening now is a slow-motion catastrophe, as our growing population’s demand for fossil energy is producing CO₂ and other greenhouse gases at an accelerating rate. It is our activity now that is upsetting the equilibrium and instigating a cataclysmic event. At a certain global-temperature tipping point, the balance will be irreversibly changed by runaway feedback mechanisms that will continue until a new level of equilibrium is reached.

I am fearful that the warnings sounded by scientists since the 1980s are falling worldwide on the deaf ears of politicians elected by a majority of the electorate who, themselves, are either immobilized by ignorance or confusion about this issue, are apathetic, or are motivated by greed. I fear for my grandchildren.

MICHAEL J. NEWARK, WELLESLEY, ONT.

The writer is a retired meteorologist.

The author of the “Carbon questions” letter poses a series of questions that many people are asking. We offer some responses as researchers in the environmental social sciences at the King’s University in Edmonton.

First, it is better to think in terms of broader global environmental change. Changes to the planet go beyond just the “global warming” of increasing atmospheric temperatures. Other planet-wide

changes include acidifying oceans, altered water availability and food production, more extreme-weather events, and degraded habitats for plants and animals, leading to growing rates of extinction. A reason to focus on climate issues is because they affect all these other pieces of creation.

Second, while global greenhouse-gas concentrations and atmospheric temperatures have indeed fluctuated over 50 million years, all of human civilization has developed and flourished in a period of very stable climate. The last 180 years have seen a more rapid increase in greenhouse gases than has happened in the last several million years. The steepness of that rate of change is not “natural.”

Third, scientists propose many hypotheses and test whether they can explain the evidence. But of all the hypotheses, only human action—fossil fuel emissions, and, to a lesser degree, land-use patterns—accounts for the global environmental changes we are seeing. Without exception, the scientific bodies of individual nations and transnational bodies like World Meteorological Organization agree.

Lastly, the science does conclude that change is needed, just as smelling smoke leads to calling the fire department. Researchers explain that, if we act now, we can reduce the worst effects of a changing climate, but it gets more difficult and more expensive the longer we wait to act. As Canadians have some of the highest per capita greenhouse-gas emissions in the world, we need to address this “plank” in our collective “eye.”

RANDY HALUZA-DELAY AND JOANNE MOYER,
EDMONTON

✉ ***The Bible Unwrapped* is informative, inspiring and scholarly**

Re: “Bible commentary geared for younger readers” book review of *The Bible Unwrapped: Making Sense of Scripture Today*, Feb. 18, page 11.

Despite 75-plus years of biblical exposure, I found this Herald Press book both informative and inspiring. Meghan Larissa Good presents this biblical overview and “how-to-read-the-Bible” in a refreshing manner. While scholarly, it is understandable to a 10th-grader. Her everyday, picturesque, non-religious vocabulary keeps one reading this compilation of biblical wisdom. Anyone struggling with the many complexities found in the Bible can find it helpful.

Throughout, the author keeps reminding us that Jesus reveals the nature and purposes of God, and that we, like the early Christians, must interpret all Scripture through the Jesus-lens.

The third section deals extensively with

discernment within the community of Jesus-followers. This, and more, is illustrated as she explores some of the challenging stories and passages of the Bible. Sometimes we, like Jacob wrestling the night-stranger (Genesis 32), will leave the struggle limping, but with a new vision of God and a new identity.

While I could not find any Mennonite school in her curriculum vitae, Good offers an excellent representation of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology. I place her writings alongside other renowned Mennonite authors who have taught and inspired me.

I place this book alongside my layman's guide to Anabaptist theology by Paul M. Lederach, *A Third Way*. I suggest that *The Bible Unwrapped* be compulsory reading as an introduction for biblical studies. IVAN UNGER, CAMBRIDGE, ONT.

✉ Who has the right to choose who lives?

Re: "Can we talk about abortion?" column, April 29, page 10.

Thank you to Melissa Miller for broaching this very timely, probably overdue, topic. I agree that our conversation shall be open, honest and gracious, even when we reference a procedure that is anything but.

The big question to me, "What is the 'thing' to be aborted?" It is very difficult to get around the fact that "it" is of human origin. Humans beget humans. At conception, a new life with its own unique DNA has begun. Psalm 139:13-16 is beautiful in its portrayal, and the Elizabeth and Mary story in the gospels assumes the humanity of the unborn children they are carrying.

None of us were aborted. Can we arrogate to ourselves who does and does not live? Are we playing God? This is a role I cannot assume! Abortion, after all, is the intentional termination of life—a human life.

Stories abound of people—even our people in our churches—who have consequent psychological and mental health issues having participated in or promoted this often-violent procedure. But our gracious God extends forgiveness to all who seek it, even in

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this matter.

Are sociological, economic and psychological considerations worthy in this discussion? Yes, they are. Do they rise to the level of denying life to innocent unborn humans? I think not. Do we, therefore, owe them an extension of grace, compassion and mercy? Yes.

DAVID FROESE, WINNIPEG

✉ Honouring family attachment lauded

Re: "Hold them close" column, April 29, page 11.

I thank Christina Bartel Barkman for sharing how she and her family honour and reinforce family attachment with their children.

I know many grown missionary kids who now carry deep wounds from their own experiences of not having their attachment needs met by their missionary parents, who left them for lengthy periods and pulled them in and out of environmental contexts without much discussion. They were undoubtedly loved by their parents, but often did not have an attachment relationship with them.

I'm glad we now know as a society to do things differently. Reiterating from her quotation from the book *Hold on to Your Kids*: "All the parenting skills in the world cannot compensate for a lack of attachment relationship."

NOREEN JANZEN, WINNIPEG

/// Milestones

Baptisms

Josh Reid—Vineland United Mennonite, Ont., May 12, 2019.

Deaths

Dettwiler—Mahlon, 90 (b. Feb. 23, 1929; d. May 13, 2019), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

Kathler—Walter, 87 (b. June 8, 1931; d. April 3, 2019), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Nafziger—Ken, 91 (b. May 26, 1927; d. March 29, 2019), Bethel Mennonite, Elora, Ont.

Roth,—Annie (nee Lichti), 98 (b. June 25, 1920; d. April 26, 2019), St. Agatha Mennonite, Ont.

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

FROM OUR LEADERS

Church relations on so many different levels

Janette Thiessen

You are what you eat, or can it be said you are who you work with? There's also the phrase, "two peas in a pod," but this time there's three of us.

On the surface, it could be said that Kevin Barkowsky, Garry Janzen and I are nothing alike, but, as Mennonite Church British Columbia staffers, we certainly can relate to each other in our personal lives.

All three of us have gone through a personal change of residency this year.

In February, my husband Ernie Thiessen and I made the move across town into downtown Chilliwack to live beside our daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter. We're very blessed to be in such close proximity to family.

Then, two months later, Kevin and Deborah Barkowsky experienced a move that brought them down from Kincolith to somewhere—they haven't quite decided yet: either the Fraser Valley or Kelowna. This brings them a smidge closer to their daughter, who is attending school in Victoria.

At the end of May, Garry and Diane Janzen vacated their townhouse and moved into a condo. Their townhouse is

now owned by their son and daughter-in-law and growing family. Garry and Diane have only moved a few minutes away, and all four of their families live within walking distance from each other.

The similarities go further back than this year. In 2014, Ernie and I were blessed with twin granddaughters, only to find that a year later, almost to the day, Garry and Diane were blessed with twin grandsons. This year, Garry and Diane welcomed another grandchild into their family, and we are awaiting the birth of another grandchild in June.

Garry and I were both born in the same year, and all three MC B.C. staffers have birthdays in consecutive months: Garry in July, me in August and Kevin in September. Kevin and Garry have both been pastors in MC B.C. congregations and presently both hold ministerial positions with the regional church. And all three of us love Vietnamese food.

Members of each family are musically gifted: Diane, Kevin, Deborah and Ernie. Kevin's daughters' names start with Janette's first and middle initials.

The above may sound silly, but if we look far enough we can all find

similarities among each other.

We are a symbol of what the kingdom of God is like: We are all Mennonite, yet we come with different perspectives; we have different opinions on issues that could be divisive, but we trust each other; we love each other; are curious about each other's opposing views and are willing to talk about it in constructive and loving ways, like the family we are.

Just like the similarities in our personal lives, the church needs to keep digging deeper to find more common ground in our purpose and mission in Christ. This is what Paul means in Ephesians 4:2-3, when he invites us to "*be completely humble and gentle*" as we "*make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.*" ❧



Janette Thiessen is Mennonite Church British Columbia's office administrator; Garry

Janzen is executive minister; and Kevin Barkowsky is communications coordinator and admin assistant of church engagement.

A moment from yesterday



A farmer cuts wheat on a farm in Namaka, Alta., in the 1920s. Food and its production continues to be a central driving force in society, affecting our health, quality of life and where we live. Forces such as mechanization, urbanization, and globalization have impacted the food matrix and our connection to the food we grow and eat. The environment, food distribution, food genetics, food safety and ownership of food are increasingly relevant issues. What connection do you have to the food you eat? How do you stay connected to food producers?

Text: Conrad Stoesz

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Archives



archives.mhsc.ca

IN THE IMAGE

No 'happy clappy Christians' for Blake

Ed Olfert

My friend Blake Rooks died in early May. He was large, unkempt, unhealthy, opinionated and occasionally rude. He was an atheist. His kidneys didn't work. He loved people. He carried a measure of English charm. All of these were qualities, along with others, that made him important in my life.

One of Blake's stories included being a young man with an engineering degree looking for adventure. This would have been around 1970, and his huge curiosity compelled him to head off to South Africa to begin his engineering life. He went there, in his words, as a nominal Anglican, as a mostly uninvolved political conservative. But his time there, in the days of brutal apartheid, brought him home some years later, in his words, as a raging atheist and as a raving socialist.

What Blake saw as the work of the church in South Africa was not only an excusing of racial intolerance. Instead, the church embraced it and wrote it into its understanding of God's perfect will. He was so offended, so angered, that he vowed never to be part of a spirituality that was so subverted, so self-serving, again. He remained true to that till his death.

And yet, Blake visited those in prison. He was part of a Circle of

Support and Accountability (CoSA) for released offenders. He supported the food bank. All of these are based on Christian understandings of relating to fellow humans.

In his retirement years, Blake ended up buying a house in Rosthern, Sask. There, he encountered Mennonites, something new to him. With his natural curiosity, he formed relationships and collected Mennonite history books. He observed neighbours and a son-in-law travelling to distant parts of the globe to do relief work. He learned about Mennonite Central Committee sending support to corners of the globe where people suffered. He learned about people sitting with First Nations folks, offering respect and dignity. He learned about restorative justice work, both in the prison and on the street.

Within a few years, he was reaching out. That included dropping awkwardly to his knees and crawling into a sweat lodge, and accompanying us to a funeral service for Les, a friend that our CoSA group had supported. Blake had never met Les but he came because I had mentioned to him that Les's widow was concerned that not many people would show up at the funeral of a sex offender.

Blake's history didn't allow him to give much respect to the work of Christian ministry. He called it "sky piloting," and

he couldn't make the bridge between "sky piloting" and the work of supporting marginalized people. His South African experience—and the passion and rage he brought home—simply didn't allow for that. A frequent derisive term was "happy clappy Christians."

But when Blake encountered a community that was doing church in a way that his intellect, compassion and curiosity told him were life-giving, he stepped forward. He could never acknowledge that these activities and ways of offering compassion were spiritually rooted, but rather he couched them in the language of practicality: "It's a better use of my time and tax dollar to be supporting, encouraging, befriending."

There were so many parts of Blake's life that didn't follow a Christian way of being and believing, but there were other parts that did. I'm glad he was my friend.

A thought that hangs in my office offers words I wish I had spoken to Blake, just to hear his loud indignation: "If something is true, no matter who said it, it is always from the Holy Spirit." ❧



Ed Olfert (p2ptheo@sasktel.net) is blessed by the variety of characters that colour his life.

Et cetera

World Refugee Day is June 20

In the 2018-19 fiscal year, Mennonite Central Committee Ontario's Refugee Resettlement program worked with 55 sponsoring groups and more than 250 volunteers, which resulted in 258 newcomer arrivals in Ontario; it also submitted applications for another 183 refugees. Praise be to God for the compassion that continues to define our constituencies.

Source: MCC Ontario



WOMEN WALKING TOGETHER IN FAITH

Layers of faithfulness

Story and Photo by Carmen Brubacher



A mentor once told me that, in her view, a female preacher should wear “straight lines” behind the pulpit. That is, a suit. Straight lines command greater authority, which means people are more likely to give your words credit. As someone who has never worn a suit in her life, this didn’t sit well with me and would make me feel like an imposter. Fortunately, I’ve generally felt listened to when I’ve been behind a pulpit—unless I’m making a poor attempt at a joke!

While I didn’t heed that advice, I fully appreciate that the first generation of Mennonite women pastors/leaders needed to do all they could to be taken seriously when they preached. Those of us in the present generation, with the way already paved for us, are free to wear something different as we seek to honour our foremothers by continuing to be faithful, creative leaders in our context. And it’s my deepest hope to model myself after women who came before me, even as I layer on sweaters and scarves.

So what do we carry forward from generation to generation and what do we release? What do we hold on to and what do we let go of in families, in church and in the world at large?

A couple of years ago, when the #MeToo movement was finding its voice, at times I found there was a painful back and forth between women of different generations. Some younger women seemed to be pointing out the weakness of the way older women spoke up and out, while some older women didn’t always agree with the actions of the younger ones. Yet both were, and are, working towards equality and justice for women, often in harmony. This signifies that there are multiple ways, or layers, to work towards the same goal.

My particular foremothers were, and are, women who lived out their faith in numerous ways within the home, church and wider community. One significant way was hospitality. They canned and froze food, and made everything from scratch. They were able to offer meals I wouldn’t dream of attempting, while I pull out a frozen store-bought pizza or lasagna to serve even to guests.

Still, I hope I’m following in their footsteps, honouring their legacy, by extending hospitality in my particular context, even if the menu is different. I’m also profoundly grateful for the times when we’ve canned and prepared peaches, applesauce or corn



Intergenerational hands are layered on a table at Waterloo North Mennonite Church.

together, to share on each other’s tables. Again, there are many ways, or layers, to extend hospitality.

At a recent Women of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada meeting, I was deeply moved by the respect and love for the legacy of the foremothers of our church that I sensed there. This legacy includes service, nurturing relationships and affirming each other’s gifts through women’s organizations such as ours. At that meeting there were laments that younger women have not chosen to continue this story in the same way.

Yet within that loss there was also a naming of hope: Mennonite women today, like generations of women before them who responded to God’s call, all the way back to Ruth, Naomi, Mary and Elizabeth, are continuing to keep the legacy of service and mutual support alive.

They are continuing to find creative and courageous ways to live out that call; adding to that layering of faithfulness, blessing and celebrating those who came before and after them; and valuing and honouring each generational story, layering on and interweaving new stories and new ways of being.

Like sedimentary rock, in which we can see all the layers, we give thanks for what each generation has done, continuing to hold tightly to following Jesus no matter what we wear. ❧



Carmen Brubacher delights in her role as a pastor at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Waterloo, Ont.

TRIBUTE TO RACHEL HELD EVANS

'Stirred by an invisible breeze'

Christina Entz Moss
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

Since the beloved Christian author Rachel Held Evans's sudden death on May 4, the internet has been filled with tributes to her and her work. For many, especially for those who grew up in conservative evangelical churches, her willingness to be honest about her faith journey left so many of us feeling less alone.

I have followed and loved her work for the better part of a decade, but her third book, *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving and Finding the Church*, especially influenced me. I first read it in the summer of 2016. I was fresh from a breakup with an evangelical church full of people I loved and who loved me, but where I no longer fit, and I was daunted by the process of finding a new church home. Her meditations on the church—full of honesty and hope—felt achingly familiar.

The same questions that had complicated Evans's relationship with the church of her youth and young adulthood had complicated mine, too. I found myself increasingly unsettled by rigid gender roles that prevented women from freely exercising their gifts in the church; by millstones placed around the necks of LGBTQ+ Christians by straight pastors and leaders, who never seemed to doubt that a happy marriage and family was God's will for their lives; and by an attitude to the biblical text that prized supposed doctrinal correctness over human flourishing.

In fact, Evans had already been a guide for years as I navigated these questions, through her books and through the space she cultivated on her blog. Her own writings, and the gay Christians whose voices she amplified, opened my eyes to the work of the Spirit in the lives of LGBTQ+ Christians and opened my heart to affirming



PHOTO BY JOHANNA HILTZ

Rachel Held Evans's second book, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, discussed the Hebrew words, *Eshet Chayil* (Woman of Valour), found in Proverbs 31, as a blessing for all that women already are rather than an impossible list of standards for women to meet. The phrase became a way for Evans and her readers to encourage women in their lives and in the world.

theology. She challenged me to look to the margins of the church, rather than the halls of power, to see God at work.

Yet, even as her work challenged me to broaden my theology and expand my definition of faithfulness, she also modelled what it looked like to have grace for the faith traditions and churches that had shaped her. She boldly called out harmful theology but she also reflected deeply on the gifts conservative evangelicals had given her personally and the church at large.

In *Searching for Sunday*, she likened the church to the Trembling Giant, a clonal colony of quaking aspens. What appears to be a forest of trees is, on closer examination, a single tree held together by a giant, interconnected, subterranean root system.

"Our differences matter," she wrote, "but, ultimately, the boundaries we build between one another are but accidental fences in the

endless continuum of God's grace. We are both a forest and a single tree, stirred by an invisible breeze."

I related particularly to her descriptions of her relationship with her parents—a relationship marked by love, grace and support despite significant theological differences.

In *Searching for Sunday*, and in all her writing, Evans cast a vision for what the church could be. It could be radically inclusive, secure in the knowledge that Jesus sets the table and none of us has the authority to turn others away from it. It could be committed to sitting alongside people in their pain and doubt instead of offering quick fixes or easy answers. Most of all, it could dare to hope for resurrection instead of clinging to the status quo at all costs.

I kept this vision in mind as my husband and I began the search for a new church home, a search that brought us to Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont., in the fall of 2016. In that particular corner of the church universal, for the first time in a long time we found a place where our whole selves fit. We found a church committed to listening and learning from those on the margins of church and society. We found a church that wasn't afraid of our unanswered and unanswerable questions. We found a church that took the Bible seriously enough not to be satisfied with interpretations of it that did harm to others.

Rachel taught me, and all her readers, to love the church enough to fight for it and all that it could be. The church is poorer for her loss but immeasurably richer for her legacy. ❧



Christina Entz Moss recently completed a doctoral dissertation on Anabaptist history at the University of Waterloo, Ont. She lives in Kitchener with her husband Aaron.

REMEMBERING THE LIFE OF JEAN VANIER

A tender touch of gospel paradox

Will Braun
Senior Writer

Jean Vanier, who died on May 7 at age 90, was a spiritual leader who shared the gospel in a way few, if any, had before.

Born into near-aristocracy—his dad became Governor General of Canada—Vanier withdrew from a promising military career at age 23, shaken by the Holocaust and the bombing of Japan. A devout Catholic, his spiritual quest then took him to a centre for spiritual formation in France.

There, he met Father Thomas Philippe, who became his mentor. During that time, he also studied philosophy, obtaining a doctorate in 1962. In 1964, he returned to Canada to teach at the University of Toronto, where he quickly became a popular teacher.

But again he stepped off the ladder of success, after just one term, and returned to France, where Father Thomas had been appointed chaplain of a small institution for intellectually disabled people. Vanier helped him out. They visited other such institutions, where Vanier saw people warehoused, locked up. He felt their anguish and sense of abandonment. He heard the cry of these people, literally: “Will you come back?”

At 36, with the support of Father Thomas, Vanier did more than go back to visit. He bought a ramshackle house and invited Raphael Simi and Philippe Sieux, two men from one of the asylums, to live with him. One man had a vocabulary of only 20 words, the other seemed in a dream world, talking repeatedly about the same things. Vanier shared life with them.

“We did everything together—the shopping, the cooking, the gardening,” Vanier told journalist Maggie Fergusson in 2014, “but, above all, we had fun. We found we could really laugh together.”

“Before meeting [Raphael and



L'ARCHE CANADA PHOTO

The founders of L'Arche, from left to right: Rafael Simi, Jean Vanier and Philippe Sieux.

Philippe],” Vanier told Fergusson, “my life had been governed largely from my head and my sense of duty; [the men] brought out the child in me. I began to live from my heart.”

That is the simple essence of Vanier. He went to the margins. He heard the cry. He responded with integrity, love and great humility. His companions revealed the gospel to him, teaching him about vulnerability, love, belonging, his own brokenness and the tenderness of God.

In creating a holy, broken little family, these three men also ended up founding L'Arche, which now includes 154 communities in 38 countries, where people with disabilities (core members) and people without disabilities (assistants) live together.

Vanier wrote 40 books and received many honours.

I have never been part of L'Arche, but Vanier and L'Arche have shaped me like few other influences. One of my most valued documents is a stapled, tattered, stained and re-stapled set of speaking notes from talks Vanier gave at a retreat for L'Arche assistants in 1986 about how Jesus descends to “join the cry of the poor.” A friend in L'Arche gave it to me.

For Vanier's disabled teachers, this

cry was from a sense of abandonment: children who didn't understand “why Mama can't be here.” People who had “a sense of being a disappointment to their parents,” and the “impression that they always upset everything.”

The cry of the poor is most evident in the weakest members of society, but Vanier said that deep within each of us is the cry to be loved, to belong, to be healed of our brokenness.

Vanier speaks candidly about discovering his own woundedness. He speaks about Lucien needing his diaper changed, and how he touched a “weak spot” in Vanier. Lucien “screamed and screamed,” Vanier recalls, “and I was not able to do anything. I discovered in myself the power of fear, aggressivity, and the capability to hate. . . . I can really understand now the phenomenon of the battered child.”

This was part of discovering his own poverty but also his discovery of acceptance.

“We come to L'Arche to serve the poor,” Vanier told the assistants at the retreat. “We stay in L'Arche when we discover we are the poor. But also because in L'Arche I am loved.”

Vanier saw in the weakest not an opportunity to do something for them, but to enter into relationships of mutuality. His gift was to bring out the gifts of the most vulnerable and rejected people in society.

“To love someone is not first to serve him/her,” he said. “It is to reveal to him/her their own beauty.” It is to say to someone, “I am happy you are here because you yourself are a gift. . . . I am not here because I am able to do something for you.”

“The good news,” said Vanier, “is very simple: You are loved. You are not bad. I want to live with you. . . . I am happy to be with you.” ❧

NEWS

Church growth stretches Ethiopian resources

By Tim Huber
Mennonite World Review

Challenges accompany the joys of growth as tens of thousands of people new to Ethiopia's Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) swell the denomination.

Now with more than 600,000 participants, the world's largest Anabaptist conference struggles to train enough pastors, find adequate meeting spaces, and keep vehicles maintained for its teachers, who travel to distant outposts on rough roads.

According to its latest statistics, MKC added about 88,000 people to its faith

one for every 2,065 adults and children. The number of "gospel ministers," who are full-time but not yet ordained, grew from 536 in 2016 to 799.

Worship spaces present one of the biggest challenges. Land is owned by the government and difficult to acquire, driving up the price of properties.

In spite of this, the number of local churches—defined as at least 50 baptized members, three able leaders, one full-time minister, an owned or rented place of worship and financially self-sup-

widely shared, trained and qualified leaders must be continually added. Meserete Kristos College has 509 students enrolled in leadership and ministry programs at a main campus in Debre Zeit and extension campuses in Nazareth and Addis, along with distance education programs.

MK College student council president Feyera Hirko recounted in the December 2018 college newsletter how the dean and a group of students visited the Tsega congregation in Nazareth-Adama for two days of preaching.

On Nov. 3, the students shared about Christ with 1,080 people, 117 of whom confessed and received Jesus. Hirko said one woman had been an unbelieving spouse of a pastor "who notoriously challenged her husband." A Muslim man was on the verge of committing suicide before receiving a message in a dream to not do so.

While economic growth is happening in Ethiopia as government reforms fall into place, the church's growth has outpaced it, putting a strain on resources of both the churches and the college.

More than 1,600 graduates have come out of the college to serve among the church's pastors, evangelists, teachers, gospel ministers and missionaries, but this group does not represent even half of the need for trained leadership.

Teaching teachers

In addition to the college providing formal education to equip full-time ministers, the denomination offers regular teaching programs on spiritual formation, leadership and other matters for lay and other full-time ministers. A separate "key teachers" program trains people from churches to be prepared to teach in other churches. Those teachers have increased from 126 to 184.

But rapid growth presents challenges even here. Beyene said that when there



MESERETE KRISTOS COLLEGE PHOTO BY HENOK TAMIRAT

Students from Meserete Kristos College's entertainment art group lead worship music at a November 2018 outreach event. Over two days, they shared the gospel with 1,080 people, 117 of whom received Christ.

community in the past two years, growing from 295,607 baptized members in 2016 to 344,829 in September 2018. Including 58,158 people preparing to be baptized and 212,442 children, MKC counts 615,429 people in its churches, up from 527,851 two years earlier.

Growth is taking place in every aspect of MKC's evangelism-centric ethos. The number of pastors has nearly doubled in two years, from 160 to 298, or roughly

porting congregation—grew from 961 to 1,067. Infant churches, known as "planting centres," grew from 1,016 to 1,110.

"As long as we do evangelism, we will have more planting centres," said MKC president Tewodros Beyene by email. "We encourage every member to be an evangelist."

Student evangelism

While passion for sharing the gospel is

were only a few MKC regions, one or two “key teachers” programs could be held in every region.

“Now we have 39 regions, and to go to some regions it takes us two days to drive on terribly damaged roads,” he said. “Even if we have trainers, we don’t have many vehicles, and they are in poor condition after serving almost two decades on gravel roads.”

Reinforcing denominational links as MKC grows will help the church maintain

its identity, no matter the conditions of Ethiopia’s physical byways.

Beyene said mainline evangelical churches represent about 20 percent of Ethiopia’s population, and they have similar worship and biblical understandings to MKC’s. “But we keep the teaching of peace theology, and the church is kind of charismatic in its nature,” he said. “Though our background is Anabaptist/Mennonite, most of our members do not know these names—but the Anabaptist teachings are

there.

“The name *Meserete Kristos* [meaning ‘Church founded on Christ,’ derived from I Corinthians 3:11, one of Menno Simon’s key verses] helps our evangelistic strategy that it is a local church, not dependent on a foreign church.” ☞

Abridged from a longer Mennonite World Review article published Jan. 21, page 1. Reprinted with permission.

Muslims learn about Mennonites

Story and Photo by Barb Draper

Editorial Assistant
ST. JACOBS, ONT.

On April 30, several Muslim families from Waterloo Region toured The Mennonite Story in St. Jacobs, in order to understand more about Mennonites.

Leon Kehl of Floradale Mennonite Church extended the invitation as part of his effort to foster respect and mutual understanding between Mennonites and Muslims, something he has been working at over many years.

Del Gingrich, the director of this interpretive centre, explained that it was created 40 years ago to help tourists gain some perspective about Mennonite faith and life. Tourists had been lining up outside of local Old Order Mennonite meetinghouses with their cameras and sometimes bothering the horses tied up outside. Last year, The Mennonite Story had visitors from 90 countries.

During a time for questions, Kehl asked someone to translate into the Turkish language, since many of the Muslims were recent newcomers from Turkey. They were interested to hear that Mennonites first came to North America due to oppression in Europe. As followers of the Gülen movement who were forced to flee from their homeland in recent years, these Turkish Muslims were interested to hear that Mennonites also found refuge in Canada. As the group toured through the displays, smaller conversations between Muslims and Mennonites continued.



Over coffee and Turkish sweets at The Mennonite Story in St. Jacobs, Jim Loepp Thiessen, left, has an animated conversation with Faruk Ekinici and Mustafa Ustan while Mustafa Jr. listens in. These Turkish Muslims were interested to learn that many Mennonites also came to Canada as refugees.

This learning opportunity came a week before the beginning of Ramadan, the Muslim time of fasting during daylight hours. With some help from Kehl, the local Intercultural Dialogue Institute, which exists to promote interfaith and intercultural understanding through its office located at the Centre for Peace Advancement at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, hosted iftar meals, at which

Muslims and non-Muslims ate together after sundown and learned more about the Muslim faith.

Because Floradale Mennonite has provided funds to help with expenses, the number of meals expanded this year. Four local Mennonite churches —Floradale, Breslau, Waterloo North, and Stirling Avenue in Kitchener—hosted iftar meals, as well as Trinity United in Kitchener. ☞

Rooted in community

Jubilee Mennonite Church celebrates launch of local resource centre

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

“If an alien ship were to come take our church away, would anyone notice?” This is the question that members of Jubilee Mennonite Church asked themselves more than a decade ago. When they realized the answer might be no, they dedicated themselves to being an active presence in their community.

Fast forward to today, and the rich connections the church has made over the years have culminated in the official launch of the Community Roots Resource Centre.

On May 22, more than a hundred people gathered at Jubilee, where the resource centre is located, to celebrate how much has already been done and the opportunities that still lie ahead. Face-painted children ran around the church, which had a long table laden with food and was filled with the energetic music of Motherfunk, a local band.

“Community Roots is Jubilee’s response to loving our neighbour, caring for the least of these, and being rooted in this

neighbourhood and grounded in God’s love,” says Anna Marie Geddert, community minister at Jubilee and one of the three provisional directors of Community

Roots.

Jubilee Mennonite is a congregation of about 80 members, located in Winnipeg’s North Kildonan neighbourhood. It is part of both the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba and Mennonite Church Manitoba.

For years, the church offered extensive community programming, but as it continued to introduce new initiatives and more people began participating in them, the church soon realized its small congregation didn’t have enough people or resources to run what was becoming



PHOTO BY DARRYL NEUSTAEDTER BARG

Anna Marie Geddert, community minister at Jubilee Mennonite Church, and Serena Traa emcee the launch of the Community Roots Resource Centre.



PHOTO BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

Mary Funk stands in the community garden at Jubilee Mennonite Church’s Community Roots Resource Centre.



PHOTO BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

More than a hundred people gathered at Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg for the launch of the Community Roots Resource Centre.

a full-fledged resource centre.

The City of Winnipeg, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Manitoba Housing, and members of the community, among others, have since joined this cooperative project. Community Roots became incorporated in January 2018 and is in the process of applying for charitable status.

"This community is the lowest-income community in all of North Kildonan," Geddert says. Newcomer, Indigenous and single-parent families make up the largest percentage of those who use the resource centre. Community Roots runs a community kitchen and nutrition education program, a clothing wardrobe, an emergency food pantry, sports activities with provided equipment, and a community garden, to name a few.

A survey the resource centre conducted found that even more than material resources, people in the community yearned for a place to belong, says Wally Hassenrueck, another provisional director of Community Roots, who has been involved in the centre for nine years.

J-Club, the family drop-in program that accommodates up to 40 children, and Neighbourhood Grounds, a time of coffee and conversation, give people safe places to spend time with others.

"We have noticed ties being made between people in the community because of coming to this," Hassenrueck says.

"I think the world would change if we could all just love our neighbor," Geddert says. "So I think community ministry is a way that we can be examples of love to our neighbours. . . . Relationship building is the most important thing, and sometimes I think we forget about that."

Mary Funk has been a member of Jubilee since its inception and has been involved in Community Roots since the beginning, when she and Geddert talked about starting a community kitchen.

"It just seems like the right thing to do," she says. "These are our neighbours, these are people that we see across our yard all the time."

Funk started organizing childcare for the parents who came to the community kitchen and she soon became more involved with cooking education. She also began teaching people to crochet and make crafts that they could then sell to buy toys for their children.

As she showed off the fire pit at the launch, where people from the area gather to hang out, the kids playing outside greeted her and she greeted them back by name.

Funk says that other churches sometimes ask how many members Jubilee has, or whether it's growing. "And I say, 'Well, do you mean how many come on Sunday morning or how many come through the building during the week?' They may not be regular baptized members that come to worship here . . . but you'd ask a lot of these people here and they would say this is their church."

Geddert emphasizes that Community Roots is not just Jubilee's project. It has volunteers from Douglas Mennonite Church, River East Church, North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren and others, and it is always looking for more churches and organizations to partner with.

"I think, when you look at Jesus, Jesus was out in the community, Jesus was walking in the neighbourhood, Jesus was getting to know the people who were outcasts," she says. "And so with community ministry it's about connecting with the neighbours." ❧

For more information, visit communityrootswpg.ca.



News brief

Rhythms of worship at junior-youth retreat



PHOTO BY JEAN LEHN EPP

At their retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp, junior youth make a video of a psalm that talks about worshipping God.

SAUBLE BEACH, ONT.—Forty-five junior youth and their sponsors from eight Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregations took part in a weekend retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp in Sauble Beach from May 10 to 12. Focused on the theme "Voices Together: Worship and music," they drummed, sang, danced, prayed, walked in nature and had some quiet time to reflect on their own rhythms of worshipping God. They noticed how worship feeds their relationships with God, themselves and others. Each participant received a sporf, a utensil that combines a fork, knife and spoon, to remind them of these three relationships. Resource leaders Sarah Johnson, Kim Rempel, Jonah Thiessen and Amanda Zehr led the youth in exploring a variety of styles, languages and traditions of worship in Mennonite churches in North America. They learned the origins of some songs that will be part of the new hymnal, *Voices Together*, due out in fall of 2020, and discovered something about the people who wrote them. They experienced a reflective Taizé worship time, and practised how to be quiet and listen to God. They also enjoyed traditional camp activities like canoeing, archery, wall climbing, gaga ball and group games.

—BY JANET BAUMAN

Resurrection hopes for a once-shared ministry

At 75, Voluntary Service seeks to bring Canadians back on board

By Laurie Oswald Robinson
Mennonite Mission Network

Kansas was not an exotic place to hold annual orientations for Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS). Yet when MVS was a shared U.S.-Canada program, Brad Reimer and Miles Reimer, two of its leaders living on opposite sides of the 49th parallel, considered the gathering a highlight.

Miles, MVS's director for the American side from 1996 through 2001, and Brad, associate director on the Canadian side during those same shared years, said that those orientations—and other joint gatherings in Canada—symbolized a rich and workable partnership in God's mission.

"I absolutely loved crossing the border and having the Canadian team come to Camp Mennoscah," Miles says. "There were so many gifts shared in those cross-cultural experiences. It was great to observe and reflect upon our differences and similarities. . . . When we got together, we shared a common passion, and in that there was very little difference between us."

Brad says, "There were some bumps in the road . . . but overall, our partnership worked very, very well. . . . Half of the volunteers in our Canadian sites were Americans, and many of our Canadian young people served in U.S. cities such as Chicago, San Francisco and New York."

However, in 2002, when the binational denominations—the former General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) and the Mennonite Church (MC)—merged, they also divided at the border to form two national churches: Mennonite Church Canada and MC U.S.A.

This sent especially big shock waves through MVS. Five years before the denominational merger, the GC's MVS program and the MC's VS program had merged in anticipation of the future change.



HISTORICAL PHOTO COURTESY OF
MC U.S.A. ARCHIVES

Ike Glick, area director of Alberta Voluntary Service, checks the oil of the Cessna One-Eighty plane before taking off at Anzac, one of five communities where VSers ministered in northern Alberta.

"We started the discussion about a merger of our service programs back in 1993, when discussion regarding a denominational merger first started," Miles says. "At the time, it seemed like a good decision, but then, after we split into two national churches, we had to divide our program again. . . . It was tumultuous, and there were a lot of losses in that process."

These losses brought a dissolution of MVS in MC Canada, although individual units supported by churches in Winnipeg, Edmonton and Lethbridge, Alta., are still in operation.

"In less than two years after [MC] Canada was established, the VS program in Canada was eliminated because of budgetary reasons," Brad says. "But those struggles weren't just financial. We also

lost communication and recruiting support from our former partner"

The burden of shutting down all the units in 2003 fell to Brad, who says he experienced both communal and personal grief over this shuttering of the once-vibrant service program. "[MC] Canada's schools and churches had relied on MVS to offer opportunities to our young adults for service," he says. "With the demise of the program . . . many young Canadian Mennonites are not accessing opportunities to both serve and learn about themselves in the process."

The losses triggered memories of the importance of his own MVS participation, he says: "I didn't fit into church jargon, and MVS took me anyway and gave me the opportunity to serve and to be involved with a local congregation. MVS provided an option for people like me on the fringes to find a place to fit in."

Despite the splintering almost two decades ago now, some hope is simmering for a renewed, though less formal, collaboration, says Del Hershberger, director of the Mennonite Mission Network (MMN) Christian Service department, which coordinates MVS and other service programs.

Here is why Hershberger is hopeful: This year, MVS is celebrating its 75th anniversary, a milestone made richer because of its former binational service program. The milestone commemorates how, even with all the myriad changes in its seven decades, MVS is still adapting and flexing.

He believes that MVS can again share the bounty of God's gifted young people on both sides of the border. "We still have MVS participants from Canada," he says. "We don't do formal recruitment there, but we do encourage participants to recruit friends in organic ways through relationships."

He says that MMN is currently in discussions with MC Canada about how MVS can share information in Canada about service and discipleship, so that both churches and their young adults can mutually benefit.

"We cannot undo the past but, because of our rich, shared history and legacy, we hope to find a path once again to provide opportunities for more young adults to serve," he says. ☸

Exploring 'flourishing congregations' in secular society

Family vital in influencing faith, sociologist says

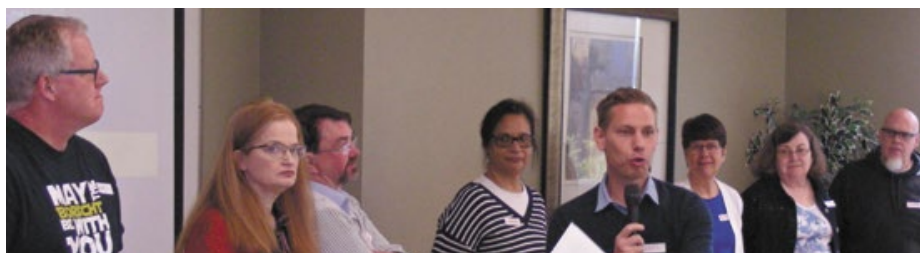
Story and Photo by Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

Key factors surrounding flourishing congregations in Canada, and how congregations can thrive and grow in an age of diminishing importance of the church in society, were the topics for a May 4 seminar entitled "Flourishing congregations: From understanding to practice."

Sociologist Joel Thiessen of Ambrose

resulted in faith and religion playing a much-less-dominant role in society than they once did. British Columbia has Canada's highest rate of what Thiessen called "religious nones"—those who claim no religious affiliation of any kind—at 44 percent. These people tend to define religion as the organized church, as opposed to



The Flourishing Congregations Institute's Joel Thiessen, holding the microphone, speaks at Columbia Bible College on May 4. The seminar was sponsored by the Mennonite Faith and Learning Society in conjunction with Columbia Bible College.

University in Calgary and president of the Flourishing Congregations Institute, led the seminar, sponsored by the Mennonite Faith and Learning Society (MFLS), and hosted by Columbia Bible College. The event drew 48 participants, among them pastors and laypeople.

The Flourishing Congregations Institute in Canada is currently conducting a comprehensive survey of Canadian churches—Catholic, mainline and conservative Protestant—on what makes a flourishing congregation.

David Leis, MFLS chair, said the idea for the seminar arose because the church is in a time of decline. "Our conference is really struggling; there is a major decline in membership and giving," he observed.

Thiessen spent the morning focusing on changes in society that have

personal belief. Some describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious."

Those figures sharply contrast with statistics from 1971, when only 1 percent claimed to be "nones." Thiessen cited social acceptance, apostasy, the rise of Christian fundamentalism and the religious right, and because people raised in the church have left it and then raise their children apart from the church, as reasons for the change. "Things we may have taken for granted a couple of generations ago, we can no longer," he said.

Understanding the "nones" and being in conversation with them are key to growing the church, Thiessen said. This group tends to be open-minded, and its members are searching for meaning and purpose in life, have an aversion to imposed beliefs, and span the range from theists and deists to

agnostics and atheists. Those who have left the church and later return tend to do so for reasons of marriage/children/death, a personal crisis, a personal invitation from someone, or because of parents who remain close and supportive even if the child remains apart from the church.

Today's parenting styles also differ from those of earlier eras, when families would expect to attend worship services together. Today's parents are more likely to give children a choice of activities instead of taking them to weekly church services.

In what he called "the most important takeaway of the day," Thiessen emphasized that "parents are the most important faith influencers," as they model their faith, instruct their children, and create space and a place for dialogue.

When asked to define characteristics of a flourishing congregation, participants suggested ideas such as:

- **The congregation** is growing.
- **People enjoy** being there.
- **Intimacy and** theological integrity.
- **A high level of deep relationships.**

Congregations cannot be all things to all people, so it helps for congregants to have a clear vision on equipping and training each other as leaders and disciples.

While religious "nones" tend to be mistrustful of evangelicals, evangelicals also tend to have negative feelings about the "nones," making bridging the gap between the two groups all the more difficult.

In the afternoon, a panel consisting of April Yamasaki, a writer and *Purpose* magazine editor; Tim Kuepfer, pastor of Chinatown Peace Church; James Nickel, former MFLS president; and Mark Birch, current director of Mennonite Brethren church planting in North America, were invited to comment on the Institute's findings and to share from their own experiences reaching out.

In referring to "the art of neighbouring," Birch said, "You can't control the role of the Holy Spirit in evangelism."

More practically, Yamasaki, the former pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite in Abbotsford, suggested sending postcards to homes in the neighbourhood surrounding a church's building. ☸

Coming in the front door

Accessibility a growing trend that churches need to pay attention to

By Donna Schulz

Saskatchewan Correspondent

SASKATOON, SASK.

Charles Olfert is enthusiastic about creating buildings that meet their users' needs. A principal architect with AODBT Architecture + Interior Design, he recently applied that passion to the study of accessibility.

Olfert attended the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification training program held in Calgary between April 24 and May 11. The course included simulation exercises to teach participants what it might be like to live with a particular limitation. In addition to the requirements of people with mobility challenges, it addressed the needs of those with hearing and visual impairments, as well as with anxiety and other mental-health issues.

"It's a more-positive approach to accessibility rather than [the] punitive approach [found in] building codes," he says.

It's an approach that Olfert, who attends Wildwood Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, thinks churches should pay attention to. In the past, many churches responded to a member becoming disabled with what he calls "back-door half-measures"—literally building a ramp on the back of the church building.

Olfert sees accessibility as a growing trend in architecture and design. "As baby boomers get older, they're going to be much more demanding," he says, so accessibility needs will increase and the church would do well to pay attention.

"One really important principle [in accessibility] is to [be able to] come in the front door," he says. "Maybe consider an outdoor lift or changing the landscaping," he adds. Other ideas for churches include putting up handrails, installing a bench partway to the door, having seating with armrests

available and having good lighting.

He advises churches to think about accessibility any time they look at making significant changes to their buildings. Always, he says, "think about sight, hearing and mental health."

People with visual impairments, for instance, benefit from having "a clear delineation between floor and wall" and "highlights in terms of colour," he says. Items in a room should be cane-detectable for those who are blind. It's a good idea to put a water fountain in an alcove, he says.

Absorbent materials are helpful in meeting the needs of those with hearing impairment, because echoes and background noise can make it harder to hear

conversation. It is also essential to have hearing assistance available. For the deaf, visual clues become particularly important, he says, adding, the ability to see movement is vital, and transparency can help with that.

"The mental-health [issue] was a big revelation to me," says Olfert. "It's particularly important with regard to orientation." He explains that entering an unfamiliar building may make a person with anxiety feel distressed. Being able to see where to park, where the entrance is and how to use the parking machine can all help to make an anxious person feel more comfortable.

For those with mobility challenges, a variety of seating is essential, as are wider doorways and corridors for wheelchair access.

"Washrooms are especially important," Olfert says. Even small details, such as easy-to-operate door locks, can make a big difference. A lock that indicates whether a washroom is vacant or in use is a good idea for those who are hearing impaired, he says.

More than just accessible churches

Olfert says a universal-design approach can make facilities accessible to everyone. This includes housing. "Most houses have steps," he says, "and a lot of spaces are wasted in drywall partitions." An accessible house might have hooks on the wall instead of a closet in the front entrance, for example. Being accessible could increase a home's value, he adds.

Although retrofitting can be more costly than building an accessible structure from scratch, there are easy ways to make existing buildings more accessible, he says. ☞



ABE FACTOR, INC. PHOTO BY SAMANTHA PROULX

Charles Olfert, with white cane, participates in a simulation exercise as part of the Rick Hansen Accessibility Certification Program. Pictured with Olfert is classmate Cal Schuler and his service dog, Sierra.

Extending the table

Hosting iftar meals provides a chance to 'see each other's humanity'

Story and Photo by Janet Bauman

Eastern Canada Correspondent
BRESLAU, ONT.

On May 14, Breslau Mennonite Church hosted an iftar meal after sunset, marking the end of the daily fast for Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan, a season of fasting, prayer, reflection and charity observed by millions of Muslims around the world.

Each week during Ramadan, a different church in Waterloo Region hosted an iftar meal as a way to nurture understanding and friendship between Christians and Muslims. Breslau and Waterloo North Mennonite got involved for the first time this year, while Floradale and Stirling Avenue Mennonite have participated before in hosting these bridgebuilding meals.

developed through participation in the Epp Peace Incubator in the Centre for Peace Advancement at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo.

Prior to the meal, Salih Kara, an Institute volunteer, took time to explain Ramadan and the practice of fasting in the Muslim tradition. This year, Ramadan stretched from May 6 to June 4. From dawn until sunset, healthy, adult Muslims are encouraged to fast—no eating, drinking (even water), smoking, foul language, gossiping or obscene conduct. Children are introduced to fasting in stages, until they participate fully in their early teens. Fasting is a way to “find freedom from the tyranny of carnal desire,” said Kara.

During Ramadan, Muslims spend more time in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, and reading and reflecting on the Qur'an. According to Kara, Ramadan is a time for Muslims to “draw closer to God by intensifying their faith.”

Ramadan also has a social aspect. It is a time for empathy and compassion for those who are poor or less

fortunate. Kara described it as “the month of overflowing with God's mercy.” During Ramadan, many Muslims prepare food hampers to be shared with those in need, as a tangible way to show gratitude for the “limitless bounties of God.”

Eleanor Epp-Stobbe, Breslau's pastor, offered words of welcome and led in a prayer of gratitude and blessing for the meal and the opportunity to share around

tables across cultures and religions.

Ali Ihsan Okan, president of K-W Institute, offered the Muslim call to prayer to break the fast at sunset. The lines between guest and host blurred, as both communities extended and received hospitality.

Kara told the group that Ramadan is a time to emphasize community. Iftar meals are not meant to be eaten alone. They are meant to be shared with family, neighbours, friends and strangers.

There was an intergenerational mix of around a hundred people gathered from the Muslim community, Breslau Mennonite, other nearby Mennonite churches and the town of Breslau.

Many, who had been fasting all day, chose dates as the first sweet bites to break the fast, as per tradition. The mood was celebratory, with a buzz of conversations around the tables, as people enjoyed the flavourful Turkish meal.

Leon Kehl, who has participated in a number of Muslim-Mennonite dialogue initiatives in Waterloo Region for well over a decade, sees hosting iftar meals as a way for Mennonite churches to demonstrate a commitment “in the public sphere . . . to build bridges of understanding.” It has an “outward focus” that helps neighbours get to know each other; and offers people a way to respond to a series of tragic events in the world, where people, in their places of worship, have been violently attacked and killed. It is a way of showing that “religion doesn't divide us.”

Kehl shared an email he received from a woman the day after Floradale Mennonite hosted an iftar meal. After expressing thanks for the meal, the warm welcome and the opportunity to learn about Muslims at “more than a superficial level,” she concluded by saying, “It is of the utmost importance these days that we see each other's humanity, and you provided me with the opportunity to do that, not only with Muslims but also with Christians (I am Buddhist).”

Epp-Stobbe wondered what positive effects might ripple out from hosting an iftar meal at Breslau. Some participants were seen exchanging phone numbers, looking for ways to extend the fellowship begun around a shared table. ☼



People from different cultural and religious backgrounds enjoy food and conversation around tables at the iftar meal hosted by Breslau Mennonite Church on May 14.

The meal at Breslau, featuring Turkish food, was prepared by volunteers from the Kitchener-Waterloo branch of the Intercultural Dialogue Institute, a non-profit organization that aims to promote respect and understanding among people of all cultures and faiths, and to reduce stereotypes, fears and prejudices. Formed in 2010, it has 11 chapters across five Canadian provinces. Its K-W branch was

A home for human-trafficking survivors

Transitional housing project hopes for more ongoing funding

By Joelle Kidd

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
TORONTO

“When God has a plan,” says Christine Langschmidt, “it just happens, despite us.”

Langschmidt is director and chair of Aurora House, which provides community-based housing for human-trafficking survivors.

The project began with a house owned by Toronto United Mennonite Church. The church wanted to find a way to use the property for good, and Langschmidt, who attends the church, felt it would be a perfect opportunity to help human-trafficking survivors. The church and the Toronto Mennonite New Life Centre, which share a building, decided to partner together to make Aurora House a reality.

Since opening its doors in 2016, Aurora House has housed about 14 adults, as well as several babies.

“When it first started, we were getting a lot of referrals for expectant mothers and women with children,” she says. Having been forewarned about the difficulties of working with children, they had originally planned only to serve women, not families. “We did that for the first year but realized there was a real need we needed to meet.” Since opening the house up for families, three babies have been born at Aurora House.

“It’s been really wonderful to see the impact we’ve been able to make,” she says.

The house is divided into two units, each with three bedrooms. This offers some flexibility, as a unit could hold three single people, a mother with children, or a mixture of families while maintaining some privacy.

Aurora House serves women who are coming out of vulnerable situations: forced labour, forced crime, and sex trafficking. Some victims of sex trafficking have lost

children, or been forced to give them up, or have injuries that can prevent them from conceiving, Langschmidt notes. To avoid retriggering trauma, Aurora House is careful not to house women dealing with these traumas with families.

An independent intake panel assesses potential residents to determine whether Aurora House is positioned to help them and to make sure they won’t endanger others. The house is a transitional home, not an emergency-stage home, she says. “Sometimes we can’t take someone who really needs a safe place to live because, even though we have security cameras and a security system, we don’t have the funds for an onsite security person.”

Because it is a transitional house, residents are invited to stay for up to 12 months. (Until 2017, a year was the legal limit for transitional housing; it is now three years.)

“Most people who are committed to really applying themselves toward their goals can find housing” in that time, says Langschmidt. Some people move out earlier, some stay the full year. There is also opportunity for women to ask for an extension if they cannot find other housing.

Several women who have lived at Aurora House arrived in Canada as refugees. As each woman moves through her journey with a case manager, elements of her story will likely emerge, but Aurora House does not require her to share details of her trafficking. This can make it difficult to receive funding, she says, but is important for the women, who can be triggered by being forced to relive their trauma.

Ongoing funding is a struggle, she says, adding that the project currently has funding secured only for the next nine months. “We’re always sort of looking down the



AURORAHOUSE.CA PHOTO

Since opening in 2016, Aurora House has provided housing for about 14 adults and several babies.

barrel,” she says. Generosity from churches and individual families has been huge, she adds. Fortunately, this year a large walk for freedom organized in Toronto has committed to donating its proceeds to Aurora House. Still, Langschmidt says, Aurora House is still “really hoping for ongoing year-to-year funding.” Donors who can commit a certain amount per month or year can help keep it from “scrambling.”

The community is also able to get involved through donating Christmas presents and participating in drives for baby clothes and necessities. “One of the women shared that she had never received a gift before,” Langschmidt says. “She was overwhelmed. It’s been fun to have those moments where you’re really making someone know that they’re loved.”

The whole model is based on an “anti-oppression framework,” she says. “There’s no evangelism. We meet people where they’re at.” The aim is to help the women reach their goals, whatever those goals may be.

The work done at Aurora House is difficult, she says, and the staff are prepared when stories don’t have a happy ending.

“But to know that we, for a short period of time, and for some cases life-changing and significant, we let people know that we love and care for them, not because we want anything from them,” Langschmidt says. “That’s been the most powerful thing. Everyone should feel love, just for being them[selves].” ❧

To learn more or take a virtual tour of the house, visit aurorahouse.ca.



Worshipping across cultures

By Rachel Bergen
Contributing Editor

Every year, Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ont., facilitates worship services at churches in the area, to build bridges between the school and its constituency.

This year, the senior choir students had a particularly moving experience when they sang and led worship at Kitchener's Chin Christian Church, a member congregation of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, on April 28.

Maya Morton Ninomiya was among them. The 18-year-old Grade 12 student, who normally attends St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, led children's story at the Chin church that Sunday and sang in the choir.

"It was a lot of fun," she says. "The people at Chin Christian were very welcoming. As soon as we came in, people were shaking our hands and getting to know each one of us."

Marlys Neufeldt is the head of Rockway's music department and conducts the senior choir. She says that services like these are an opportunity for students to gain skills in leadership.

"The people who spoke [and] gave music, their gifts have been growing through high school and through the progression of the year in senior choir, and it's really marvellous as we come close to the end of the year to see how their confidence and abilities have grown," she says.

Neufeldt also thinks that opportunities to participate in worship services that involve people of different cultures is

valuable. The Chin church is made up of people from the Chin ethnic group who came to Canada as refugees from Myanmar, via Malaysia and India, over the last decade.

"I think it's really important for Canadian Rockway students to be exposed to a different kind of worship, and for them to notice the

differences but also some similarities, and for them to see there are many different ways of worshipping, praising and making music," she says. "It's a more genuine mutual relationship when there's giving and receiving both ways."

During the service, the students got to sit in the pews and listen to the Chin worship band. They also experienced how congregants pray out loud at the same time, which Neufeldt says was a moving experience. "The people who were around me, I could hear them praying out loud in Chin, and once in a while I could hear the words 'Rockway Mennonite,'" she says.

Morton Ninomiya says the experience was impactful for her and her peers.

"I think it's good to go to churches that worship differently and in a different language, to see that even though we have



Rockway Mennonite Collegiate students, from left to right, Ramtha Lensung, Jennifer Dawthleipar, Naomi Joy and Rachel Weber visit after a church service at the Kitchener, Ont., Chin Christian Church on April 28.

very different ways of praising, worshipping, singing and leading the service, we're all doing a similar thing and have a similar passion for music and for worship," she says. "It's great to see the diversity of the ways different Christians worship in our community."

Neufeldt says that such events are also a way to introduce the youth at Chin Christian Church to Rockway, to see if they might be interested in becoming students there.

Luther Tin Hre, the church secretary, served as a translator for the service and says the church loves to host the students from Rockway. "It is a great opportunity for us, and a privilege for us, to connect to that school," he says. "We feel they are our friends, and last year the students came to our church and this year they also came to our church."

So far, four students from Chin Christian Church attend Rockway, made possible in part through tuition assistance from Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and other school donors. Next year, Rockway hopes to welcome two more students from newcomer communities.

"Many of our parents are happy to send their children to that school," Tin Hre says. "We hope many more of our children will go to that school." ❧



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARLYS NEUFELDT

Rockway Mennonite Collegiate's senior choir performs at the Kitchener, Ont., Chin Christian Church on April 28.

Giving back

A former refugee cites gratitude to Mennonites as a motivator for generosity

Story and Photo by Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent
ROSTHERN, SASK.

“We’ve experienced a lot of humbling stories,” says Phyllis Roth of her participation in the Saskatchewan Valley Hospital home-building project, but one story in particular stands out.

When Roth and a group of friends began building a home as a fundraiser for the new Saskatchewan Valley Hospital Foundation in Rosthern, they hoped local businesses would be generous. And they have been.

“Many companies contributed materials at cost or at a discount, and many have given their labour for free,” she says.

But one generous gift and the story behind it touched Roth’s heart.

The group approached Calsask Granite in Saskatoon to install quartz countertops in the high-end home. Calsask replied that it would donate the countertops and the cost of installation—a \$9,000 contribution.

Roth met Thang Dinh when he arrived to take measurements for the countertops. When she learned he owned Calsask, she asked him what motivated his generosity. He told her of his gratitude to Canada and to the Mennonites for giving him a second chance at life.

Roth, who attends Eigenheim Mennonite, near Rosthern, told Dinh that she herself is Mennonite. And that’s when Dinh told her his story.

Born in Laos to Vietnamese parents, he was 17 when he defied his parents’ wishes and fled to Thailand. He felt there was no future for him in Laos. Food was scarce, as were jobs. He saw bodies of people killed by the communists floating down the Mekong River every day. He knew he was taking a huge risk but says he felt “it was so crucial” that he get out of Laos.

In Thailand, Dinh ended up in a camp with 50,000 other refugees. Here, too, food was scarce, and there wasn’t much to do. He wrote to his family in Laos, telling



Thang Dinh, owner of Calsask Granite in Saskatoon, cites gratitude to the Mennonites who sponsored him 40 years ago as one of the reasons he likes to give back to his community.

them never to come to the refugee camp. But that didn’t deter his older sister and younger brother, who eventually joined him in Thailand.

After a year, he got into a smaller camp exclusively for Vietnamese refugees. Although less crowded, with only 2,000 refugees, there still wasn’t enough food. It was a former Second World War prisoner-of-war camp with barbed wire everywhere, and refugees had to be in their rooms by 7 every evening, he recalls.

Dinh got a job teaching French in the camp, thinking it would be easier than the work his fellow refugees were made to do. One of his French pupils was a girl his age who had come to the camp with her two younger sisters. They were orphans.

He remembers attending Christian

services offered by Seventh Day Adventist missionaries. As a Buddhist, he knew nothing about Christianity, but the promise of better food enticed him and he joined a committee to help with these services.

The missionaries introduced him to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Through MCC, Dinh and his siblings applied for sponsorship, along with their three “cousins,” the orphan girls who were in the camp with them. These girls, Dinh knew, wouldn’t be accepted for sponsorship without family.

They arrived in Saskatoon on Sept. 27, 1979. Nutana Park Mennonite Church sponsored them. Dinh fondly remembers his sponsors: Bruno and Elsie Neufeldt, John and Edna Peters, and Jake Sawatzky. He became especially close to the Neufeldts, saying, “They were just like my parents.”

He was 19 when they came to Canada, his older sister, 23, and his younger brother, 17. He would later confess to his sponsors that the three “cousins” weren’t really cousins, when it became apparent that he and the oldest girl were romantically attached. She would eventually become his wife.

Dinh started working almost immediately. His first job was cleaning bottles in a soft-drink plant. As soon as he could, he sent money to his 21-year-old sister and her husband, who were also in a Thai refugee camp with their child.

In 1980, he apprenticed as an electrician at the University of Saskatchewan and continued working there until 1996.

Meanwhile, Dinh and his wife had three daughters. Together, they operated a Vietnamese restaurant in downtown Saskatoon for 20 years.

In 2010, he and a daughter purchased Calsask Granite and ran the business

together. Sadly, two years later, that daughter died of cancer.

Dinh says he doesn't need to work anymore. "Working is my therapy." He currently employs nine people and is very conscious of his responsibility to them. "I

do not want to lay any of them off," he says.

"I'm always proud to talk about the people who helped me," he says. He remains deeply grateful to MCC and Nutana Park Mennonite Church for sponsoring him 40 years ago.

And it's this gratitude, in part, that motivates him to give back to his community. "I will forever be grateful to the Mennonites for changing our lives," he told Roth. ❧

GATHERING AROUND THE TABLE

Vegan Mennos

By Jan Carrie Steven

Type the words "Mennonite vegans" into your search engine and you likely won't come up with much. But being a Mennonite vegan is very doable, whether you are culturally Mennonite or not. And with a birth name of Carrie and a married name of Steven, I am clearly not culturally Mennonite.

Why did we go vegan? Initially, I just couldn't decide which animals I could eat and which ones I couldn't. For my husband Laurence (Laur), it was a case of having 10 kilograms to lose. And when he went plant-based, the weight came off very simply.

But I cannot be fundamentalist about it. Jesus never said his followers could not eat meat. We know that Jesus ate fish and even cooked them. And he attended gatherings where meat would have been enjoyed.

Nor is there a credible New Testament guideline that condemns being vegan or plant-based. As Paul says in Romans: "The one who eats everything must not belittle the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted him."

Although Mennos love their meat, being vegan does not complicate our church and community life in the least. Laur and I refer to ourselves as 95-percent vegan when we are not at home. When dining out with friends and family, we can always find an item that is vegan enough, even at a steakhouse. Every restaurant has "sides" we can order, and most offer a veggie option these days.

If we go to a potluck—and we Mennos

love our potlucks—we bring a pot of homemade beans and an offering of seasoned rice. We can normally eat the salads and cooked veggies, the bread and desserts because we don't worry if there is a minute amount of animal products in there somewhere. Nothing is gained by being difficult,

woman well in hand. She is a positive terror to hostesses and servants. She is always turning from what has been offered her to say with a demure little sigh and a smile, 'Oh please, please . . . all I want is a cup of tea, weak but not too weak, and the teeniest weeniest bit of really crisp toast.' You see?

Because what she wants is smaller and less costly than what has been set before her, she never recognizes as gluttony her determination to get what she wants, however troublesome it may be to others."

My husband and I hope others see us as joyful, helpful Christians who happen to be vegan—rather than querulous, selfish vegans who happen to be Christians.

There are plenty of free resources if you are thinking of adopting a more plant-centred life:

- **My Vegan Seniors** website—at veganseniors.weebly.com/—will link you to other excellent resources.

- **I also have** a Facebook site where I weekly post joyful, healthful Vegan News to encourage people along, at facebook.com/veganseniors/. ❧



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAN CARRIE STEVEN

Jan Carrie Steven, centre, and her husband Laur, right pose with their pastor, David Brubacher, during a 2016 Ride for Refuge event.

and lots can be lost. People who might otherwise pursue a more plant-based diet could easily be discouraged.

I love C. S. Lewis's book *The Screwtape Letters: Letters from a Senior to a Junior Devil* in which Wormwood explains to a junior tempter that delicacy has become the new gluttony: "But what do quantities matter, provided we can use a human belly and palate to produce querulousness, impatience, uncharitableness and self-concern? Glucose [another senior devil] has this old

Jan Carrie Steven and her husband Laur are members of Grace Mennonite Church, St. Catharines, Ont. She is a community volunteer and a pastoral-care visitor. Her hobbies include biking and hiking.

Jan Steven's recipe for Easy Beans is available online at candianmennonite.org/easy-beans.



/// News brief

Youth take on leadership of Charleswood kids club

WINNIPEG—When Alayna Smith and Miriam Huebner, pictured left and right, respectively, noticed the Venture Clubs program at Charleswood Mennonite Church hadn't been running for the last two years, because it had no volunteers to lead it, they decided to revive it. Smith, 16, and Huebner, 17, are co-leaders of the group, which runs events about once a month for children in grades 2 to 6. Venture Clubs had previously been led by middle-aged adults. "I just thought it would be a fun thing to do and that it was a need that I could help fill in the church," Smith says. A scavenger hunt in the park, making cookies for a church meeting, and an Easter egg hunt are just some of the many events the new group has done. "I like getting to know the kids better. That's really fun," Huebner says. "And having more of a leadership role in the church, it's nice to feel more involved and lead something like that." Huebner is in Grade 12 at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate and Smith is in Grade 10 at Kelvin High School. Both will return as summer staffers at Camps with Meaning, Mennonite Church Manitoba's camping ministry.



—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

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FOCUS ON

Seniors

REFLECTION

An indoor yard sale says a lot about St. Clair O'Connor

Carolyn Murray

It's the morning of May 10 at about 11 a.m., and in the large meeting room of the St. Clair O'Connor Community in Toronto there are about 10 residents examining a myriad of cardboard boxes containing both "gently used items" and others that could charitably be called junk. The former are being placed on sale tables and the latter are being disposed of as quickly as possible.

What makes this scene so remarkable is that the average age of the volunteers is about 85, and the bustle and buzz of conversation appears to be that of much younger people.

These spring yard sales have been going on at St. Clair O'Connor for the past 20 years or so and they require long hours of dedicated effort on the days around the sale. But each year a valiant crew is assembled and the donations of all manner of strange and wonderful paraphernalia are gathered without fail.

Some volunteers remain in their kitchens baking their favourite cakes and



ST. CLAIR O'CONNOR COMMUNITY PHOTO

Volunteers get ready for the annual indoor yard sale at the St. Clair O'Connor Community in Toronto

cookies for the bake sale. And at the end, they succeed in raising more than \$1,000 for the residents council to earmark for expenditures that will enhance the life of all residents. This year, some of the money raised is going to improve the back patio and the gardens around the building at the corner of St. Clair Avenue East and O'Connor Drive in East York.

As the average age of the population has

increased over the years, the residents have invited some of their children or grandchildren to help them. This has given their families a chance to get a sense of the vigour and determination of the residents to carry on significant fundraising endeavours and also to become a part of the latest project.

On the morning that we worked on setting up the sale, I talked to Ben, the son of a new resident, Bob, who is 85 and suffering from some significant health problems. Bob was elected to the council in April and he volunteered to deliver the notices of the yard sale to 130 apartments, in spite of the fact that he uses a walker. ❧

Carolyn Murray has lived in the St. Clair O'Connor Community for nearly 34 years. She currently serves on the residents council as past president.

In sickness and in health

By Sharon Simpson

Menno Place
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

When Bill and Ena married, it was the obvious next step for two best friends. Working together as teachers, they saw their love blossom. After retirement, Bill and Ena headed to China to bring their teaching skills to a new set of students.

It was in China that Bill began to notice a decline in Ena's memory. She retired from teaching and they began an adjustment in their marriage as dementia became a third

partner in their day-to-day life. Practical and prepared, Bill took the steps to move to Menno Place, a campus-of-care for seniors in Abbotsford, anticipating that one day he would no longer be able to care for his wife without assistance.

It was at Menno Place that Bill and Ena's life opened up to new friendships and new supports. Other men who were providing care for their wives became a community of support for Bill, as he kept his wedding

vow "to love you . . . in sickness and in health."

The spiritual life at Menno Place became a source of spiritual care for Bill, including the weekly prayer time with the staff leadership. Within a few years, Bill made the difficult decision for Ena to move into Menno Home in residential care. It was there that caregivers, housekeepers and others became an expanded circle of support for Bill and Ena.

FOCUS ON SENIORS

Each day, Bill walked from his apartment suite to visit Ena in her home in residential care. He was the key advocate and voice for Ena in order to ensure that she was cared for in the personal way that made her happy. Bill experienced the transitions through Ena's care as a thoughtful, engaged husband.

As dementia is a terminal diagnosis, Bill was prepared for her stages of decline. When she became palliative, Bill began his final vigil with Ena. Many of his friends who work at Menno Place joined him in



MENNO PLACE PHOTO BY KAREN BAILLIE

Bill and Ena Van Dam take a walk on the Menno Place campus.

his loving goodbye.

Bill reflects with tenderness and joy on the 25 years that Ena lived with dementia. He made hard decisions, supported her, accepted the course of her illness, advocated for her choices, and found a depth of friendship and care at every stage of her journey.

He says of his decision to move to a campus of care, "Menno Place is not just a good place to live, it's a really special place to die." ❧

Making every day matter

Tri-County Mennonite Homes
NEW HAMBURG, ONT.

Santa Claus came to Nithview Community one Christmas Day. This may not seem like a big deal since Santa goes to lots of places at Christmas. But this Santa did not fit the usual stereotype. He was short, clean-shaven and not overweight. He was also known as Owen and was only five years old.

Owen was accompanied by an elf, his eight-year old sister, Sadie. Owen and Sadie came with their grandmother Wendy, one of Nithview's housekeepers, to give candy canes to the residents. It was truly inspiring to see the pure joy on the faces of the residents as Santa and his helper handed out their small gifts.

The best part of the day was hearing Owen and Sadie say to their grandmother: "This was fun. Let's do this again next year!"

An ordinary day

LB really loved raisin pies. He wanted them on the menu at least once a week and tried to convince the other Nithview residents to support this request. But they would not agree.

LB confided to Judy, the housekeeper on his floor, how disappointed he was. A few days later, LB found a fresh raisin pie in his room. At first, he was surprised, but then he remembered Judy's reputation for acts of kindness.



NITHVIEW COMMUNITY PHOTO

Nithview housekeepers Donna, Judy, Debbie and Wendy have fun as they make every day matter for Nithview residents.

A not-so-ordinary day

BK lived at Nithview Community for many years. His health declined to the point that he had lost all mobility and he was no longer able to communicate. He depended on staff for all his daily needs and wishes.

One morning after breakfast, BK was relaxing in his chair. Debbie, the housekeeper, noticed that he did not have his earphones and iPod. Debbie asked if he wanted to listen to music, and he nodded. He helped Debbie select some gospel music, and later that morning the nursing staff found BK in his chair smiling

peacefully. The music was still playing, but BK's soul had moved on.

Making every day matter

Who receives the greater gift: the resident or the staff? Why does it feel so good to make someone else's day matter?

Jesus said it best: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40).

We matter when we make someone else's day matter. It is in giving that we find meaning and purpose for our lives. ❧

FOCUS ON SENIORS

Learning from her elders

By Rachel Bergen
Contributing Editor

For Lacey MacKenzie, working with seniors is a faith calling.

The 33-year-old attends Osler Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan and has worked as the activities coordinator for Bethany Manor’s personal-care home in Saskatoon since December 2017.

Staff members clean suites, help residents bathe and take medicine, and make sure all their basic needs are met. Some of the residents have dementia but are still mobile.

MacKenzie helps keep the residents occupied during the day. Together, the residents do everything from baking and arts to crafts and devotionals.

“I come up with things for them to do during the day to keep their time and their life meaningful,” she says. “I hit on things like social, emotional, physical and spiritual needs that our seniors have.”

MacKenzie says she thinks people have misconceptions about seniors, but she’s learned a great deal working with the residents of Bethany Manor. “I’ve had really wonderful conversations about the past,” she says. “They’re a wealth of knowledge and stories.”

She worries that people overlook seniors. “I think a lot of people think seniors don’t have as much to offer the world as people who are more mobile and mentally with it,” she says, “but I’ve learned that seniors really have a wonderful voice and I’ve just learned so much from them about perseverance.”

Above all, MacKenzie says she feels called to her role there. “As followers of Christ, we’re called to be with the people who are on the outskirts, and often seniors are on the outside,” she says. “They need to be heard and feel like they’re valued.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF LACEY MACKENZIE
Lacey MacKenzie works as the activities coordinator at Bethany Manor’s personal-care home in Saskatoon.

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Kuri talks *No Village*

B.C. musician Scott Currie, who performs under the name Kuri, discusses his debut full-length album in this new, web-only interview. canadianmennonite.org/kuridebut



A small congregation with a big heart

"God brought me to the Mennonite church." Read the story behind Refuge de Paix, a Hispanic congregation in Sherbrooke, Que., belonging to Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. canadianmennonite.org/refugedepaix



Mennonite writes history of Abbotsford Community Services

Walter Paetkau talks about his book, *It Takes Raindrops to Fill a Lake*. The book details the history of Abbotsford Community Services, which is the largest community services organization in B.C. canadianmennonite.org/acsbook



Watch: Foothills bids Doug Klassen farewell

Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary says goodbye to Pastor Doug Klassen in this short video. Doug now works in Winnipeg as the executive minister of Mennonite Church Canada. canadianmennonite.org/video/klassefmc



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NEW FROM
Canadian Mennonite
digital issues for the summer slowdown

The magazine will print one issue in July and one in August during our annual summer slowdown, but subscribers are eligible to receive a digital issue by email in two-week intervals.

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CANADIAN MENNONITE



explore

Explore: A Theological Program for High School Youth allows young people (grades 10 to 12) to engage their faith questions, develop their passion for ministry and test their leadership gifts.

The program includes:

- 16-day group experience in Elkhart, Indiana, in July
- 100-hour congregational experience with a mentoring pastor

FIND OUT MORE:
Visit ambs.ca/explore

Calendar

British Columbia

Oct. 5: Mennonite Historical Society of B.C. fundraiser, with comedian Matt Falk, at the Mennonite Heritage Museum, Abbotsford, at 7 p.m.

Nov. 8-9: Mennonite Historical Society of B.C. genealogy workshops, at the Mennonite Heritage Museum, Abbotsford.

Nov. 18-22: Annual Christmas market, at the Mennonite Heritage Museum, Abbotsford.

Alberta

Nov. 1-2: "Vision 20/20 Phase IV: Incarnating God's call," at Calgary First Mennonite.

Saskatchewan

Aug. 19-23: Shekinah music camp, for campers aged 12 to 17. For more information, or to register, visit shekinahretreatcentre.org.

Sept. 15: Langham Mennonite Fellowship (formerly Zoar Mennonite Church) hosts an

open house of its new building in Langham, from 2 to 4 p.m.

Manitoba

June 23: Dedication of the new picnic shelter and maintenance shop, at Camp Assiniboia, at 4 p.m.

July 10: MCC Manitoba fundraising golf tournament, at Bridges Golf Course, Starbuck.

For more information, or to register, visit mccb.ca/golf.

July 25: *Discovery: A Comic Lament*, a play about Indigenous/settler issues and moving forward together," at the CMU chapel, Winnipeg, at 7:30 p.m. Tickets available at Eventbright.com.

July 25-28: "Toward a just peace: Indigenous-settler reconciliation through friendship," the annual Bridgefolk conference for Mennonites and Roman Catholics, at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg. The focus will be on church and social relationships with First Nations peoples. Keynote speakers: Steve Heinrichs of MC Canada, and Sister Eva Solomon, and Ojibwe elder. For more information, visit Bridgefolk.net.

Ontario

Until Oct. 25: "New Fraktur," featuring recent works by Meg Harder, at the Grebel Gallery at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo.

Until May 2021: "Growing family: Design and desire in Mennonite genealogy" exhibit showcases family trees, hand-drawn charts and other ways Mennonites have remembered family; at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Waterloo. For more information, visit uwaterloo.ca/grebel/growingfamily.

June 22: Crosshill Mennonite Church road hockey challenge

fundraiser, beginning at 9 a.m., at the church. For more information, visit crosshillmennonite.ca.

June 22: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario spring meeting, at Elmira Mennonite Church, at 2 p.m. Topic: "The Elmira Life and Work School: An innovative collaboration between public secondary schooling and Conservative Mennonites. For more information, visit mhso.org.

June 22: Annual Nithview Community strawberry social, New Hamburg, from 2 to 4 p.m., and 6:30 to 8 p.m.

June 22: MennoHomes Out-Spok'n for Affordable Housing Bike-a-thon, at Elmira Mennonite Church. Options for hikers, recreational bikers and avid cyclists. For more information, visit mennohomes.com.

June 28-30: Family camping weekend at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. For more information, or to book a space, call 519-625-8602.

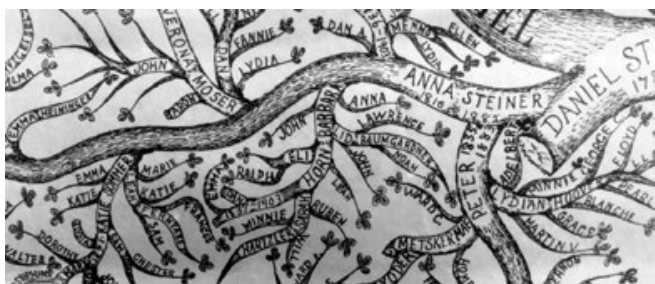
Sept. 13-16: Anabaptist Learning Workshop canoe trip ("Canoe tripping as a spiritual practice: Deepening the waters of faith"), at Massasauga Provincial Park, with guides Tanya Dyck Steinmann and Mark Diller Harder. For more information, visit uwaterloo.ca/anabaptist-learning-workshop/.

To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send Calendar announcements eight weeks in advance of the event date by email to calendar@canadianmennonite.org. For more Calendar listings online, visit canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.



OnGoing

New exhibit features the art of Mennonite family trees



MENNONITE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO PHOTO

The Daniel and Maria (Suter) Steiner family tree by Sam Geiger, 1906 (detail).

WATERLOO, ONT.—"Growing family: Design and desire in Mennonite genealogy," a new exhibit at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, showcases painted family trees, hand-drawn charts and other ways Mennonites have visually remembered family. The inspiration for the exhibit came to archivist Laureen Harder-Gissing as she observed reactions to a large hand-drawn family tree that hung outside her office for years. "People would come by and stare at it, absolutely fascinated," she recalls. "Most had no connection to the family, but there's something about these works that has universal appeal." Combing through the Archives in search of family trees for the exhibit, she was struck by their complexity. "These are not simple drawings. Genealogists don't just uncover the past, they have a hand in shaping it. Designing a family tree requires choices and reflects deep desires for connection and identity." From this realization came the exhibit's joint themes of "design and desire." "Growing family" runs until May 2021 at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario at Conrad Grebel University College.

—MENNONITE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

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New Steve Bell book series is released

Pilgrim Year, a collection by author and musician Steve Bell, a Winnipeg-based Christian singer/songwriter, Juno Award winner and modern-day troubadour, has been published by Novalis Press. The boxed set, comprised of seven books and CDs by Bell, spans the liturgical church calendar from the time of Advent to what is called “Ordinary Time,” touching on all the major movements of the liturgical year. “I grew up in a Christian tradition that was largely suspicious of the liturgical and traditional,” says Bell. “And yet, an adult deepening of my own faith has come precisely as I’ve discovered and attended to the rooted wisdom and knowledge of the past, which is lovingly embedded in these rich traditions.” Bell says he wanted to write these books “in a manner that would refresh the weary, and incline the way to a heritage that is evergreen and fruitful, one that rises above tides and trends, and which fortifies God’s people to be a gift both to and for the world he so loves. . . . I hope readers will regain a deep confidence in ‘the story’ that we have been charged to tend and keep for the sake of the world.”

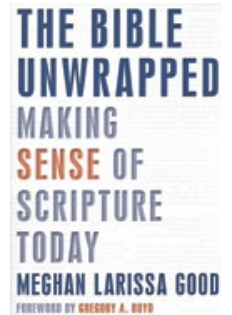
—NOVALIS PRESS



The Bible Unwrapped selected as a top resource for 2019

Outreach magazine annually lists some of the best new outreach-oriented books and curricula for church leaders by honoring them as Outreach Resources of the Year. Out of 170 resources in consideration, *The Bible Unwrapped: Making Sense of Scripture Today*, by Meghan Larissa Good and published by Herald Press, was named one of the two top books in the “theology/biblical studies” category. The other book named to that category was *How to Read Theology* by Uche Anizor (Baker Academic). *Outreach* magazine offers ideas, insights, and stories of and for today’s outreach-oriented, Bible-based churches. The complete list can be found at OutreachMagazine.com in the “resources” section.

—MENNOMEDIA



Summer reading

Two new study books ready for congregations

Two new short study books for Christian education classes and small groups will help Christians looking for guidance on two urgent areas: parenting and prayer. Herald Press launched the Upside-Down Living series in early 2017 to accompany the release of *The Upside-Down Kingdom: Anniversary Edition* by Donald B. Kraybill. The eight booklets in the Bible study series engage participants with questions about how to follow Jesus in ways that seem upside down in today’s culture. Each guide includes six sessions. *Upside-Down Living: Parenting* authors Katherine and Peter Goerzen tackle the topic of parenting in the way of Christ. In addition to diapers and discipline, raising children to heed Jesus’ upside-down call away from status and power, and toward service and sharing, can seem almost impossible. How can Christian parents model countercultural choices? What does success mean in raising your children? The study offers Scriptures and discussion starters geared to parents. In the second booklet, *Upside-Down Living: Prayer*, writer Kelly Chripczuk looks at how to make prayer more than just a hasty sentence or laundry list of the things we want. What does it mean to pray that the kingdom would come here and now as it is in heaven? Prayer can be a time to find out what God wants for us—and for the world.

—MENNOMEDIA



A dispatch from the wreckage of U.S. Christianity

Disillusioned with an American Christianity that loves political power, promises prosperity and feeds on fear, author Stephen Mattson offers a clear-eyed yet tender critique of where the church has gone wrong, in *The Great Reckoning: Surviving a Christianity that Looks Nothing like Christ*, released by Herald Press. Tired of rationalizing how a loving God can be connected to unloving churches, institutions and people, Mattson calls the church to critical self-examination through a “Jesus lens.” Instead of doom-saying or casting aspersions, he offers hope for seekers looking to move away from the culture wars and toward a Jesus-centred faith. “Similar to the Great Awakening, a series of revivals that permanently affected the Christian faith for years to come, I believe that we are living in what we could call the Great Reckoning: a time of soul-searching and truth-seeking and candid reflection on what we, as Christians, have allowed Christianity to become,” writes Mattson, who offers hope-filled examples of how Jesus followers can embody their faith in authentic ways.

—MENNOMEDIA

