

MCC in Ukraine

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EDITORIAL

Broad prayers in a time of fear

VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER



It has become a routine yet still shocking news report: another shooting in a quiet neighbour-

hood or at a shopping centre, nightclub, school or place of worship. Then come the familiar offers of “thoughts and prayers” for the victims and their loved ones. Sadly, there have been too many opportunities to pray these prayers recently.

As many have pointed out, thoughts and prayers are not enough—not nearly enough to erase the pain or to heal fearful and angry hearts. Kind thoughts alone will not repair relationships or mend broken systems of justice. All of us must move beyond empathetic feelings to make a difference in our communities and our world.

But there is also a real place for prayer, especially when fear and anxiety pervade our reality. As people of faith, we must remember that deep and broad prayer undergirds the steps we take to stand against systems of hatred and to build new realities of peace.

I confess that my own prayers have often been puny. Genuine, yes, but not expansive enough. It’s easy to pray for those who are most like me. At the same time, it’s easy to let contempt and anger creep into my heart, and to resort to ridiculing and shaming people with whom I disagree. I’m tempted to consider some people beyond the reach of God’s love.

In times of anxiety, let us broaden our prayers instead and let us envision God’s peace blossoming in the lives of everyone caught in the latest acts of violence.

So we pray for those directly affected by violence, the survivors and the

ones who love them. We pray for their communities, where fear and anxiety still linger. May God’s healing prevail.

We pray for the first responders, the medical caregivers, the counsellors and faith leaders who help bring healing into those communities. May the strength and wisdom of God be present in their actions.

We pray for the people working in law enforcement, that they will discern wisely how to protect public safety while respecting individual human rights. May God give them insight, patience and creativity when situations become intense.

Hard as it is, we must pray for those who caused the violence, and for those who are still plotting violent acts. We pray for individuals who are so troubled by fears that they want to hurt other people, even strangers. May God be present in their lives in ways you and I cannot even imagine.

We pray for their family members, co-workers and friends who might see signs that someone in their midst is considering violent actions. With God’s guidance, may they find the resources to help the troubled person.

We pray for our leaders, who have the influence to call forth good or to stir up hatred that leads to even more violence. May God give them ability to stand against the systems that support racism and injustice, and may they act for justice and mercy in the communities they lead.

We pray for legislators on a local and national scale, as they consider measures to quell easy access to weapons. May God give them wisdom and courage to take bold steps against violence.

We pray for our churches, that they may shine as beacons of hope in their own neighbourhoods, as places of refuge and healing. May God show us opportunities for living out peace among our neighbours, and may we respond with friendship and joy.

We pray for our own hearts, that we will remain tender toward both those who suffer and those who cause the suffering. May the Creator give us the ability to see each person as one loved by God, with the ability to change and grow, to make choices for life instead of destruction. May we not lose sight of God’s loving presence in the world and may we work to extend that love. We ask that God will help us discern places where the divine reign is already being lived out.

In these turbulent times, will you join me in broadening our prayers?

Gathering 2019 corrections

- It was **Doug Johnson Hatlem** who raised concerns about a draft policy for Mennonite Church Canada staff at the nationwide church’s Gathering 2019 at the end of June. He was incorrectly identified as Doug Johnson in “Nationwide church experiences modest surplus,” July 22, page 12.
- **Aaron Roorda**—not Roorca—was the MC B.C. delegate profiled in “Holding growth and the past in tension,” page 18.
- “**Kids make friends** at Gathering 2019,” on the back cover, was written by Barb Nickel, and the photos were all taken by Hilda Bergen.

Canadian Mennonite regrets the errors.



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PHOTO: PAUL SCHRAG, MENNONITE WORLD REVIEW

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MCC IN UKRAINE

MCC PHOTOS BY MATT SAWATZKY

Vladimir Kozlov of New Life, an MCC partner, distributes relief kits, school kits, comforters and canned meat in Nikopol, Ukraine, on June 21.

MCC celebrates, serves where its work began

A plea for help from Ukraine sparked the creation of MCC in 1920. Looking to the centennial, visitors observe partners giving food, making peace as MCC's founders did

By Paul Schrag
Mennonite World Review

MCC IN UKRAINE

Under shade trees in a city park on June 16, about 40 Anabaptists shared a picnic of corn grits, rye bread and warm cocoa.

The unusual menu held symbolic meaning. It was a “relief-kitchen dinner” like those that saved the lives of thousands of Mennonites and other Ukrainians on the brink of starvation in 1922 and ’23.

The picnickers were Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) board members from the United States and Canada. They had gathered in Zaporizhzhia, a city near the former Mennonite colonies, whose golden age of prosperity shattered amid civil war and famine in the late 1910s.

They came to remember MCC’s beginning a century ago and to see how its partners are continuing its mission to meet human need today.

By visiting Khortitsa, where MCC fulfilled its first errand of mercy, the board members got an early start on celebrating MCC’s centennial in 2020.

“I’m moved by the plight of the people,” said Gwen White of Philadelphia, who chairs the MCC U.S. board and represents the Brethren in Christ. “I love MCC, and this was the beginning of compassion that spreads around the world today.”

With no ancestral link to Ukraine, White’s connection to MCC’s Ukrainian roots is spiritual rather than personal. But for those whose family histories reach back to the region long ruled by the Russian and Soviet empires, emotions ran deep.

“This was definitely moving, because my grandparents lived through those years,” said Dan Siebert of Main Centre, Sask., a Mennonite Brethren member of MCC’s Canadian board, referring to the traumatic late 1910s and early ’20s. “This brought the whole story back. I am grateful they survived and were able to move to Canada.”

Not all of Siebert’s ancestors made it through Ukraine’s chaotic years immediately after the First World War. One of his great-grandfathers was beheaded by forces of the anarchist



MCC Ukraine staff Anna Proshak, left, and Olga Litvinenko serve corn grits, rye bread and warm cocoa—a 1920s MCC “relief-kitchen dinner”—at a symbolic picnic on June 16.

leader Nestor Makhno, who terrorized Mennonite villages, killing hundreds of people during the Bolshevik Revolution.

Although Siebert doesn’t know if his ancestors received MCC food aid, he feels a special connection to Ukraine’s historic Mennonite sites. In Khortitsa, the North American visitors stopped at the building that once housed the lumber mill of Jacob Dyck, where the first MCC food kitchen in Ukraine opened on March 16, 1922.

At the height of food distribution in June of that year, MCC served 25,000 meals a day in its kitchens, some in homes and schools, throughout the villages of the Mennonite colonies. In all, MCC served 75,000 people and saved an estimated 9,000 from starvation.

Not only Mennonites were fed, but also Russians and Ukrainians,

German-speaking Lutherans and Catholics, Jews and others. Feeding continued until the 1923 harvest.

In God’s name, bread!

At the picnic, tour participants read from firsthand accounts to bring the famine-relief experience of the 1920s to life.

In one of the quotes, American relief worker A.J. Miller wrote in 1922: “The moment the train halted, it was besieged by living skeletons. Not with a rush did they come, but slowly, weakly, too starved to hurry, too famished even to demand, piteously muttering the one sentence that was being wailed despairingly by millions in Russia: ‘Bread, in God’s name, bread!’”

In another, famine survivor Katarina
(Continued on page 6)

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MCC PHOTO BY MATT SAWATZKY

Mary Raber, left, a Mennonite Mission Network worker in Ukraine; Peter Wolfe of Langley, B.C.; Catherine Enns of Winnipeg; and J. Ron Byler, executive director of MCC U.S., read from 1920s testimonies of aid recipients and MCC workers at the picnic in Khortitsa on June 16. Behind them is a memorial to Mennonite victims of Stalin's repression.

(Continued from page 5)

Suprunova wrote: “We would have died, we would have starved to death. But then the Mennonites came, sent us people, sent us food. And in this way we stayed alive.”

Heightening the sense of a gathering in a sacred place, those gathered laid out their picnic blankets a few yards away from a monument dedicated in 2009 to the Mennonite victims of repression under Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. It is estimated that a third of the Mennonites remaining in the Soviet Union between the 1930s and 1943 disappeared, were exiled to Siberia or Central Asia, or killed.

Earlier in the day, as the group toured Khortitsa, the local guide pointed out numerous houses and buildings of former businesses constructed by Mennonites more than a century ago. Few residents know who built them.

“Occasionally we meet old women who remember, but not so often,” she said.

A beacon of light

But for the North American visitors, the memory of MCC’s beginning

was rekindled.

“MCC began by responding to a dark time, and it has brought so much light and hope, including to my own country,” said MCC U.S. board member Gabriela Ochoa of Essex, Vt., whose family joined a Mennonite church in Guatemala because her parents were impressed by MCC’s peacebuilding work during a civil war in the 1980s.

MCC dates its founding to a meeting in Elkhart, Ind., on July 27, 1920, when representatives of several branches of Mennonites formed a “central

committee” for Ukraine relief. They saw the wisdom in the Ukrainians’ request for a coordinated effort rather than having to work with several committees.

A hundred years later, what was originally assumed to be a temporary committee continues, White said, as “a beacon of light and a practical example of what it means to be a Christian.” ❧

All of the stories in this “MCC in Ukraine” feature package were written for Meetinghouse, an association of Anabaptist publications.

MWR PHOTO BY PAUL SCHRAG

In the former Mennonite village of Rückenau, Ukraine, sheep graze beside the first Mennonite Brethren church building, dedicated in 1883. It had 485 members in 1909. A tour guide said the building is now an oil press. A wall plaque commemorates the 150th anniversary of the 1860 founding of the MB denomination.



MCC IN UKRAINE

MCC boards approve five-year strategic plan

Caring for creation in the context of climate change is one of four priorities

Story and Photo by Paul Schrag

Mennonite World Review

ZAPORIZHZHIA, UKRAINE

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has a loyal constituency, but its leaders don't take the support for granted.

"We can no longer assume Mennonite churches are familiar with MCC," said board member Robert Enns of Calgary. "There are a lot of churches where MCC is just another organization out there."

To stand above the competition—and to safeguard MCC's special place in the hearts of many Anabaptists—agency leaders decided on June 20 to give more attention to increasing engagement with people "across the full range of Anabaptist churches and beyond."

This goal is part of a four-point strategic plan for 2020 to 2025 that the U.S. and Canadian MCC boards approved during joint meetings while on a learning tour in Ukraine.

The plan calls for renewing MCC's identity and mission, and deepening its spiritual grounding as a witness to God's love, as the agency begins its second century.

Financial support remains strong. Shared program contributions were US\$48.9 million in the fiscal year that ended March 31, up from US\$48.5 million the previous year.

Yet board members and staff said it was increasingly important to tell MCC's story in Anabaptist churches and to work at attracting support among young people and members of other faith traditions.

The plan mandates "an increased focus on audience-based communication, fundraising and strengthened recruitment efforts with a new generation."

The other three points call MCC to:

- "Increase the capacity of the church and other partners as they support and equip vulnerable people, especially people who

have been uprooted and displaced."

- "Increase peacebuilding as a key component of our relief and development work and expand our efforts for justice and peace."

- "Design and assess MCC's program and operations in light of our commitment to care for God's creation and accompany marginalized communities harmed by climate change."

Paying attention to climate change relates not only to programs in the field but also to building relationships with younger people.

"You have to include climate change, because that is what the younger generation is concerned about," said board member Gabriela Ochoa of Essex, Vt.

Others said the creation-care priority was important because climate change drives extreme weather that hinders development and is linked to an increase in natural disasters. All of this affects MCC's

international partners and programs.

"There are going to be more water crises," said board member Jill Schellenberg of Hillsboro, Kan. "We have to have [climate change] in our minds because it is in our future."

Members of both boards stood and applauded after getting the strategic plan done sooner than expected. They had planned to finalize it at their fall meetings.

Canadian board chair Paul Gilbert said the early completion showed a spirit of unity on both sides of the border.

U.S. board chair Gwen White noted the significance of adopting a strategic plan that will begin in MCC's centennial year.

"Our work has evolved over the century," she said, citing the addition of peacebuilding as a priority in the past and now moving creation care from the "the edges of our conversation" to a central place. "We are a part of this generational development of expanding how we do what we do, making it relevant now." ❧



Katie Geddert, right, MCC country co-representative in Ukraine, speaks at the joint meeting of the U.S. and Canadian MCC boards on June 19. At left are MCC Canada board chair Paul Gilbert and MCC U.S. board chair Gwen White.

MCC IN UKRAINE

'We became Mennonites'

Ukraine congregation has 'no born Mennonites among us'

Story and Photos by Paul Schrag

Mennonite World Review

NIKOLAIPOLYE, UKRAINE

Welcoming visitors from North America, Ivan Kapelushniy, pastor of Nikolaipolye Mennonite Church, led his congregation of about 15 people in singing "For God So Loved Us" in Russian.

"There are no born Mennonites among us," Kapelushniy said on June 16 as mission worker Mary Raber translated. "We became Mennonites."

Kapelushniy counts himself among the converts. "I became a believer in 2006," he said. "When I began to go to church, my co-workers laughed at me. They wondered what I had to do with those people. But now they understand."

Through the influence of Canadian mission workers, the congregation has revived a Mennonite presence in the town of about a thousand people surrounded by wheat fields.

They worship in a simple, bare-walled room, with an open window letting in a breeze on a summer morning. The 19th-century building is a former Mennonite school, restored in the 21st century by Canadian Mennonites.

It is a member of the Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ukraine.

The village was founded by Mennonites 150 years ago as Nikolaifeld. The original Mennonite presence continued until the Second World War, when the Mennonites fled with the retreating German army or were exiled as the Red Army retook the region from German occupation.

Today, the congregation serves its neighbours by helping the elderly and running a summer day camp for children.

"We do what we can to bring the word of God to the village,"

Kapelushniy said. But he described the villagers as "cautious toward us."

Raber explained, saying, "The culture is Orthodox, so Mennonites and Baptists would be regarded with a certain amount of suspicion no matter what you do."

Canadian visitors Peter Wolfe and Walter Thiessen, Mennonite Central Committee board members on a learning tour, spoke to the group.

Wolfe told of his mother-in-law's family being exiled from Ukraine to Tajikistan after the Second World War and eventually migrating to Canada in 1972. He said the family arrived in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, with nothing. Without food, they searched on the ground for bits of grain.

When asked later how they kept their faith through such hard times, he said their faith was all they had left. "They saw the hand of God with them," Wolfe said. "Keep trusting in God. Jesus said, *'In this world you will have trouble, but I have overcome the world.'*" ❧



Ivan Kapelushniy, pastor of Nikolaipolye Mennonite Church, greets Mary Raber, who serves in Ukraine with Mennonite Mission Network.



Lydia Grigoryevna, second from left, gets a birthday hug after worship at Nikolaipolye Mennonite Church on June 16.

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MCC partner serves people 'society doesn't want'

For young mothers and people displaced by war, New Life offers compassion without judgment

Story and Photo by Paul Schrag

Mennonite World Review

NIKOPOL, UKRAINE

Natalia Mezentseva oversees a household of “women in difficult circumstances.”

With an affirming and instructive place to live, thanks to a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) partner, their circumstances are better already.

A group of visitors on an MCC learning tour heard their stories, cuddled a baby, applauded a child’s poetry recital and prayed with them on June 21.

Viktoria Mikitenko, a 22-year-old with a four-year-old son, said she had struggled with drug addiction. “I want my life to be changed,” she said. “I returned back to God.”

Viktoria Rabchenyuk, 23, holding a baby girl, said she had been “deprived of parental rights” to her older children. “I came here to restore my life,” she said.

The “adaptation house,” run by New Life, an MCC-supported ministry, offers compassion without judgment.

“We serve people our society doesn’t need, doesn’t want,” said Mezentseva, who directs the organization. “People say it’s their own fault, that they deserve it. But we know they want to get to a better place in life.”

In mid-June, six women and four children lived in the house; there’s another house for men.

New Life’s clients also include homeless people, ex-prisoners, people with HIV and people displaced by the war in eastern Ukraine. New Life distributes MCC material assistance: relief kits, school kits, comforters and canned meat.

“We give the canned meat to large families with many children in difficult life situations—and in Ukraine there are many such families, due to war and the collapse of the economy,” Mezentseva said.



Natalia Mezentseva, second from left, director of New Life, a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) partner in Ukraine, accepts an MCC centennial paperweight from North American visitors. Looking on are MCC board member Robert Enns of Calgary, left, and Viktoria Rabchenyuk, second from right, and Tatiana Yorzh, right, New Life women’s house residents.

A flight from war

The war in eastern Ukraine brought Pyotr Sidorovich to New Life. The 75-year-old fled Debaltsevo with his daughter, who has cerebral palsy, when clashes between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists ravaged the city.

He described hiding from the shelling in a cold, wet basement and emerging to find their house destroyed. Leaving everything behind, they drove to Nikopol, where they lived with his sister before finding an old house that at first had no heat.

Four-and-a-half years later, it’s “like a bad dream,” he said. “My wife cries. It feels like we are homeless. The hardest thing is that there is no light at the end of the tunnel.”

At New Life he receives material assistance and, also vitally important, moral support. Due to the responsibility of caring for his daughter, he doesn’t get out much. “I can ask for advice, and they never

refuse to help,” he said. “You can’t put a price on it.”

Mezentseva describes New Life’s ministries as material, spiritual and psychological. This includes advocacy for the disenfranchised—people who might not be treated fairly.

Some of those in need, such as ex-prisoners or people infected with HIV, lack the registration required for various services. They might be denied a hospital bed or discriminated against when looking for a job.

“If we go with them, they get a better response,” she said.

Five days a week they serve meals to about 70 people at the New Life office, which also runs a sewing business that provides jobs for several women.

“In each can of meat and each blanket, we see God’s love and your love,” she told the visitors. ❧

MCC IN UKRAINE

MB pastor shares love at war front

Story and Photo by Paul Schrag

Mennonite World Review

ZAPORIZHZHIA, UKRAINE

As the stalemated war in eastern Ukraine enters its sixth year, life goes on as normal in this city about 240 kilometres from the front.

People here would rather not think about the war, Sergey Panasovich says. To them, the shelling and sniper fire between government forces and pro-Russian separatists in the breakaway provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk might as well be foreign.

Panasovich rejects this indifference. The gospel compels him to act.

Twice a week, the Mennonite Brethren pastor drives four hours to the front-line city of Avdiivka to coordinate peacebuilding and material-aid programs supported by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

"The war is a big crisis, but it also brings opportunity," he said on June 18, talking with MCC visitors in the meeting place of his congregation, New Hope Mennonite Church. New Hope is one of MCC's partners.

"If it were not for the war, we would be concentrated on ourselves," he said. "God's plan is not understandable to all of us."

A new Christian world

Panasovich has seen God's mysterious ways unfold over the past decade, beginning with the life-changing ministry of John Wiens, a Canadian MB mission worker. As Panasovich sees it, Wiens brought a new understanding of Christian faith, and this revelation has led to the revival of a Mennonite presence in eastern Ukraine.

Ten years ago, on a church-planting mission, Wiens and his wife Evelyn arrived in Ukraine and founded the New Hope congregation.

To Panasovich, they were a different breed of Christian. "John Wiens showed us how to do good deeds, not as propaganda but because you love others," Panasovich said. "That changed us."

It was like discovering a "new Christian



Sergey Panasovich sees sharing the gospel of peace in Zaporizhzhia and Avdiivka as a new chapter in Ukraine's Mennonite history.

world," he said, to learn that sharing the gospel meant ministering to the whole person, physically and spiritually.

But the couple's mission was cut short when John died on Jan. 14, 2014, in British Columbia, at the age of 69, just six weeks after receiving a diagnosis of cancer. His example of sharing the gospel in practical ways remains New Hope's guiding light.

"What I saw in Mennonites touched me deeply," he said. "I was drawn to the holistic approach—social, economic and spiritual."

He would soon live out that way of faith on a larger scale.

Strong men cried

Three months after Wiens died, war broke out on Ukraine's eastern border.

Pro-Russian separatists gained control of parts of two provinces and declared the People's Republic of Donetsk and People's Republic of Luhansk.

Five years later, the war has left 13,000 dead and has driven 2.4 million people from their homes. Of these, 1.4 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine.

In 2014, the New Hope congregation made an evacuation plan in case the war came to Zaporizhzhia. The conflict remained distant, but New Hope members decided they must go to the front.

They launched war-relief ministries, including opening their doors to IDPs. Elderly women donated chickens for those in need. Members delivered food to the war zone. There they saw strong men cry, Panasovich said, "because there were people who didn't forget about them."

Devastated by war

Beyond meeting physical needs, New Hope does peacebuilding work in Avdiivka, about six kilometres from the major city of Donetsk and less than three kilometres from the front that divides Ukrainian-controlled territory from the region held by the separatists and their Russian allies. Wartime trauma touches all ages. During conflict-resolution classes, Panasovich said, teachers and students felt the walls shake due to shelling.

To work with schoolchildren, New Hope participates in the MCC partner organization Fire of Prometheus. Projects have included organizing trips to give kids a break from the conflict zone.

MCC supports two families who work with children in Avdiivka.

Building relationships in Avdiivka "has given us a chance to tell about the influence of Mennonites," Panasovich said.

The outbreak of war led the residents of Avdiivka to flee. Its population fell from 40,000 to 5,000, Panasovich said. Many who remained lived in basements to find

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safety from the shelling. When the situation stabilized, the population recovered to 25,000, although many returned to destroyed homes.

As unemployment spiked, casting families into poverty, canned meat from MCC has eased the strain. Pensioners who receive \$65 a month often must support younger family members who can't find work. The stipend doesn't leave much for food after utility bills and other expenses are paid.

An eastern settlement

The history of Mennonite influence in eastern Ukraine goes back to 1885, when the Mennonite settlement of Memrik was established about 20 miles from Donetsk. Initially settled by 1,300 people from the Molotschna colony, its population grew to 3,500 by the First World War. The 1918 revolution brought suffering, as Nestor Makhno's bands of anarchists murdered and pillaged. Food from the newly organized MCC saved many from starvation in 1922.

The next two decades held more tragedy. Thirty families were able to migrate to Canada in the 1920s. After many of those who remained were exiled to Siberia in the 1930s, followed by a final round of exiles to the east when the German army invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Russians claimed the empty homes. Only a handful of Mennonites remained in Memrik to flee with the retreating German army in 1943.

More than 70 years later, some Mennonite buildings that stood for more than a century were destroyed in the current war, Panasovich said.

He sees sharing the gospel of peace in Zaporizhzhia and Avdiivka as a new chapter in Ukraine's Mennonite history. "We tell people the Mennonites are not indifferent to the place where their ancestors came from," he said. "I don't know what God holds for us in the future, but we should be a source of healing. ✎



MCC PHOTO BY MATT SAWATZKY

MCC learning tour participants visit the Jacob Dyck lumber mill in Khortitsa, Ukraine, where the first MCC feeding kitchen opened in March 1922.

✎ For discussion

1. What involvement have you had with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), perhaps in serving, gathering material aid or fundraising? Have you ever visited an MCC project? What are some of the MCC projects of the last hundred years that you are aware of?
2. Did you ever consider serving with MCC? What factors motivated your decision? Do you know other people who have served for at least a year? Have you seen changes in how MCC operates over the years?
3. MCC works at relief, development and peacebuilding. Do you agree that these are the right priorities? What are the advantages of working with local partner organizations to distribute aid or to work at development and peacebuilding?
4. In the story about MCC's five-year strategic plan, Robert Enns comments, "We can no longer assume Mennonite churches are familiar with MCC." Is that true in your congregation? How could MCC increase its engagement in your church? What are some good ways for MCC to tell its stories?

—By Barb Draper

See related resources at
www.commonword.ca/go/1816

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OPINION

/// Readers write

✉ The message of Jesus is 'superior and important'

Re: "Reaching out requires letting in," June 24, page 13.

Troy Watson's column talks about "[t]his barrier is about our subtle . . . sense of superiority" in reaching out to people.

First, I think this misses an important command given by Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. Christians respond to this directive not because they feel superior to non-believers, but because the message they are to share is superior and important. This message is found in such passages as John 3:16-17, John 14:6, I Peter 1:18-21, I John 1:7-9, and Proverbs 11:30.

Second, for a modern thought on reaching out, I encourage reading *The Heavenly Man*, the remarkable true story of Brother Yun, a Chinese Christian.

Third, I am thankful for the Christian martyrs who have lived and shared the message of Christ down through the ages.

I agree with Watson that we need to be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we share the good news of Jesus Christ.

PAUL JANTZI, MILVERTON, ONT.

✉ Hymnal committee explains changes to 'revered hymn'

Re: "Voices Together should restore the words of revered hymn" letter, June 24, page 9.

Peter Voth writes about the words to the song "This Is My Father's World" and wonders why the Mennonite Worship and Song Committee working on the forthcoming *Voices Together* hymnal would change the words.

As the committee considers each song for possible inclusion in *Voices Together*, the process involves an analysis of the original text to study the songwriter's own words. In addition, the committee reviews other hymnals to see what versions have been published elsewhere.

We welcome your comments and publish most letters from subscribers. Letters, to be kept to 300 words or less, are the opinion of the writer only and are not to be taken as endorsed by this magazine or the church. Please address issues rather than individuals; personal attacks will not appear in print or online. All letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Send them to letters@canadianmennonite.org and include the author's contact information and mailing address. Preference is given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

In the summer issue of *Leader* magazine, the committee is testing out a number of songs and worship resources for possible inclusion in *Voices Together*. The version of the Maltbie Babcock song found in that *Leader* sampler draws heavily on a version published in 1996 in *Voices United*, a United Church of Canada hymnal.

The committee also wrestled with the title of the song, now titled "This Is God's Wondrous World." Rich hymns that use father language for God will remain in *Voices Together*. In this song, the committee noted that the father metaphor is not developed and therefore was not integral to a song that is mostly about God as creator. When a gendered metaphor for God is developed in a song—how God is like a father—the committee has seen this as a reason to retain gendered language. In this instance, the committee noted that the song focuses most on God's presence in creation rather than familial relationships.

We concur with Voth that this is a deep and lovely poem, and in this testing phase of assembling a new denominational collection we want to continue to hear feedback from congregations and individuals, at Mennomedia@voicestogetherhymnal.org.

AMY GINGERICH AND BRADLEY KAUFFMAN,
NEWTON, KAN.

Amy Gingerich is MennoMedia's executive director and Bradley Kauffman is Voices Together's general editor.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Gerber—Willow Mae (b. June 16, 2019), to Heather and Joel Gerber, Toronto United Mennonite.

Kroeger—Nora Mae (b. July 10, 2019), to Brenden and Katey Kroeger, Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Nafziger—Everly Ann (b. June 28, 2019), to Tom and Alycia Nafziger, Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

Deaths

Epp—Eileen (nee Friesen), 91 (b. May 19, 1928; d. July 12, 2019), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Erb—Elmer, 87 (b. Sept. 21, 1931; d. June 29, 2019), Maple View Mennonite, Wellesley, Ont.

Fast—Henry, 91 (b. Dec. 16, 1927; d. July 1, 2019), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Siemens—Paul Edward, 82 (b. June 2, 1937; d. June 12, 2019), Toronto United Mennonite.

FROM OUR LEADERS

The most important word

Garth Ewert Fisher

“With” may be the most important word in the Christian faith. So argues Sam Wells, an Anglican priest-theologian, in *Incarnational Ministry*, a book about being with the church.

In the chapter “Being with the afflicted,” Wells uses the children’s book, *Now One Foot, Now the Other*, that tells of Bobby, a toddler who is named after his beloved grandfather, Bob, who lives with the family. As Bobby grows, his grandfather patiently teaches him to walk, standing behind him and saying, “Now one foot, now the other,” hour after hour.

Then Bob has a stroke. Bobby has lost his best friend and he experiences a terrible ache and sadness. In a glorious reversal of the earlier scene, the story ends with Bobby saying to Bob the very words Bob had once so frequently repeated to his grandson: “Now one foot, now the other.”

The story eloquently states, “Being with the afflicted is primarily about accompanying a person through a process. The aspiration is not to fix a problem but to enter a mystery.

It’s for the person not simply to ‘get better’ but to more richly enter into an experience of God’s kingdom.”

Wells engages in a creative reading of *Burial Rites* by Hannah Kent in the chapter “Being with the troubled.” Set in Iceland in the 19th century, Kent’s novel tells the story of Agnes Magnúsdóttir, sentenced to die for murder. There are no prisons in Iceland in the 1820s, so Agnes is kept over the winter with a family at a local farm, awaiting execution. Toti, a young Lutheran pastor, is assigned to visit her and prepare her for death.

Wells insightfully traces the struggle of this young pastor as he enters a world with which he has no experience, but much fear and self-doubt. But as Toti opens himself to really hearing Agnes, laying aside set prayers and carefully rehearsed words, he grows in faith, and Agnes experiences a kind of salvation. She is not saved from the axe but she is saved from the misery of a world of deceit, bullying and violence, and finds, in her final weeks, a world of truth, integrity, kindness and trust.

In the chapter “Being with the

hurt,” Wells tackles the issue of peacemaking or reconciliation. Anabaptist Mennonites will resonate with his analysis of alternatives to peace: fantasy, oblivion, violence and his stout doctrine of the church.

He writes: “Wounded parties seek to tell a truthful story, make penance . . . and enter into repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, healing and resurrection. The word for that process is church.” Although the church often fails, its permanent obligation is to live out the truth of Ephesians 2:14-16, to be Christ’s agents in bringing about reconciliation in the church and world.

This exceptional book, imaginative and demanding, challenges us all by providing a fresh sense of things we thought we knew well, both old and new. ❧



Garth Ewert Fisher is the chair of MC Saskatchewan’s Pastoral Leadership Commission and the pastor of Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon.

A moment from yesterday



The Petitcodiac (N.B.) Mennonite Church Council is pictured during a meeting in 1996. Whether around a kitchen table or a purposely built boardroom, church councils are the administrative hub of most mainstream Mennonite congregations. But it was not always so. The rise of the church council as a lay decision-making body was achieved only in the last half-century in many congregations. How is the church council doing? What will be its future?

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing

Photo: Petitcodiac Mennonite Church / Mennonite Archives of Ontario



THIRD WAY FAMILY

Hope in the slow spreading of the kingdom

Christina Bartel Barkman

At the Mennonite Church Canada Gathering earlier this summer, my husband and I led a workshop on the theme of inspiring the imagination of the local church. While we invited sharing about the seeds of hope in our local congregations—the good stuff God is doing in our communities that interrupts the brokenness in the world—a friend shared about a wonderful initiative to financially support sending children of their South Sudanese congregants to summer camp.

Another participant then asked about the fruit that's come from this support and went on to share how, as an immigrant herself, MC Canada sponsored and supported her family years ago, and now her family is doing the same for new immigrants, offering the support they once received and welcoming them into the church.

Hearing these stories was incredibly uplifting and inspiring. It made me reflect on the slow infilling of the kingdom of God in our communities and around the world, and how the fruit of what we sow is often seen in the next generation. I have often thought back to our missionary friends who visited us in Manila during our second year; they told us about their trip back to Colombia some 20 years

after they served there and how they saw the incredible fruit of their work.

In times when I was impatient to see the impact of our work in the Philippines, with all the highs and lows the years held, my husband often reminded me about these dear friends and their wise advice of hope and patience in view of the way God moves, the way the church grows and the way the kingdom of God spreads.

We have a friend named Jeff in the Philippines, who is part of Peace Church, a church community in Manila that we led for six years. He is a caring, responsible and intelligent young man, and he has long had a dream of becoming a clinical counsellor and setting up a counselling centre in his community, a place where people carry a lot of trauma, largely due to violence and poverty.

MC Canada supported Jeff to go to college. He completed his bachelor's degree in psychology with top honours and he now works at a partner organization of Peace Church, the Lilok Foundation, as a coordinator of its youth-worker program. A couple weeks ago, Jeff called to share the exciting news that he was accepted into the master of psychology program at the University of the Philippines.

When I think of this new step towards Jeff's goal and the faithfulness of his commitment to serve God and those in need, I can see the fruit of MC Canada's involvement constantly being nurtured and growing. I am full of hope as I look at Jeff's future and the impact he has, and will continue to have, and the fruit his life and love will bear. I'm very thankful, as is he, for MC Canada's support in his education and our chance to walk alongside him as he serves in Manila.

The kingdom of God is spreading through the slow moving of the Spirit and the love each person shares, interrupting the brokenness in our world and bearing witness to their dedication to this beautiful journey of following Jesus. The examples of the infiltration of the Spirit into our lives and our communities are endless. I encourage you to share these stories of hope as we slowly but steadily witness and participate in the spreading of the kingdom of God. ☯



Christina Bartel Barkman, with her four little ones and her pastor husband, seeks to live out Jesus' creative and loving "third way" options.

Et cetera

Physicists organization honours Ontario professor

The Canadian Association of Physicists has awarded its 2019 Medal for Excellence in Teaching Undergraduate Physics to Robert Mann of the University of Waterloo, Ont. Mann is a member of Floradale Mennonite Church, where his wife Nancy served as a pastor until her retirement in 2018. He has been travelling and researching for the last several months.

Canadian Mennonite



Robert Mann

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

The divine flame

Troy Watson

The song “Wonderwall” by Oasis came on the radio. I was about to change the station when these lyrics hit me, “Backbeat, the word is on the street that the fire in your heart is out.”

There are many fires that burn in one’s heart over a lifetime:

- **The fire of** recognition that leaps within us when we get enough likes, shares, follows or retweets on social media, or we receive praise for something we said or did.
- **The fire of** excitement that flickers inside as we shop and hunt for bargains on clothing, a piece of furniture or an appliance.
- **The fire of** self-confidence that expands in our chests as we conquer our fears, accomplish a significant goal or overcome a major obstacle.
- **The fire of** curiosity that glows brighter when someone tells us they have big news or juicy gossip.
- **The fire of** adventure that kindles as we embark on a new chapter of life at university or a new job in a new city.
- **The fire of** anticipation as we head out on holidays to spend time at the beach, cottage or somewhere more exotic, ticking another dream destination off our bucket list.
- **The fire of** anger that explodes when someone does us wrong or hurts someone we love.
- **The fires of** jealousy, revenge, envy and greed that burn hot with the fuel of fixation, obsessing on what we think we deserve.
- **The fire of** self-righteous indignation that bursts into flames when we perceive a word, deed or attitude that fails to meet our criteria of what is right, fair or appropriate.
- **The fire of** *eros* that ignites passion, lust and enchanted adoration.
- **The fire of** creativity that engulfs us

as we immerse ourselves in the flow of conceiving or constructing something new.

- **The fire of** joy that erupts in our hearts when we look into the eyes of our child or our loving partner.
- **The fire of** fear that flares up when the thought of losing our child or loving partner crosses our mind without warning.

There are many different fires that burn within our hearts, yet there are periods in life when it feels like the fire in our heart has gone out. Nothing in

Sometimes only an all-consuming fire can create the conditions we need to experience the new growth of God in our lives.

life seems to ignite us, at least not like it used to. This, too, shall pass, but usually not until we glean what we need from this emptiness. There is a reason for every season in life, but we need ears to hear and eyes to see what it is.

When we experience the absence of feeling and passion, or when we experience more negative emotions than positive, this is often an indicator that we are disconnected from our true self. As philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said, “The most common form of despair is not being who you are.”

One of the gifts of darker seasons in life is that we have greater capacity to notice a different kind of fire deep within us, so deep it is often hidden from our awareness. This flame is “the true light that gives light to every human being” (John 1:9). This flame is the divine spark within that has a capacity to start internal forest fires. In fact, this is its intended purpose: to burn everything within us to the ground so we can begin our scorched earth rebuild (aka death and rebirth).

Sometimes only an all-consuming fire can create the conditions we need to experience the new growth of God in our lives. Dry and barren seasons are often ideal conditions for the divine flame to do its work of devouring all our attachments, desires, beliefs, theology, identity and sense of self, so that the new abundant life of Spirit can be birthed and blossom within us.

This is the baptism of fire John the Baptist warned us about when he introduced Jesus as the one who “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16. This

all-consuming fire of God strips us bare and grounds us in the joyful simplicity of pure being. In this place, we see the folly of all pursuits and desires apart from divine presence. The things of Earth grow strangely dim in the light of God’s glory and grace. Love is the only thing that makes sense in this space.

If the fire in your heart is out, pay attention to this deeper flame of God within you by spending lots of time in spacious prayer. There’s no other way. But be warned: It could set you completely on fire for God. ☿



Troy Watson is a pastor of Avon Mennonite Church in Stratford, Ont.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Glowriding in the kingdom of heaven

Caleb Ratzlaff

On a Friday evening in May, about 40 residents of the downtown St. Catharines, Ont., neighbourhood of Queenston, where Westview Christian Fellowship is located, participated in a community glowride. They decorated their bikes with glow sticks and battery-powered Christmas lights and cruised around their neighbourhood after dark. On the surface, glowrides are exactly what they sound like—quirky events specific to bike culture. As many a Mennonite will tell you, however, fun social events such as life-sized Dutch Blitz games, potlucks and *paska*-baking nights serve a larger purpose; they build trust, respect and a sense of belonging in our communities.

The glowride that happened in Queenston accomplished similar aims: it celebrated the one-year anniversary of a not-for-profit bike shop while bringing the community together around a fun event that promoted bike safety.

At Westview, bike safety, and pedestrian safety more generally, are not trivial matters. The majority of our parishioners cannot drive and so they must use the bus, walk or ride a scooter. Pedestrian safety is very important, whether going to do laundry at our church's women's centre, Westview Centre4Women, or picking up groceries at the corner store.

Community-building events create trust and understanding between residents that can lead to tangible change in a community. In our neighbourhood, for example, the group that organized the glowride—a dedicated association of residents, churches and services—have effectively mobilized to address complex social issues. We have worked to decrease the number of discarded needles in our parks and on our streets; we've discussed the problem of food security; and we've supported an overdose prevention site,



PHOTO BY CALEB RATZLAFF

Participants gather in a St. Catharines neighbourhood for a glowride to promote bike safety and to celebrate a not-for-profit bike shop.

the first of its kind in Niagara Region.

Mennonite Church Canada churches have a cultivated sense of what this kind of work requires. We've learned, for example, that refugee sponsorship, seniors care, and social enterprise require a strong sense of belonging among the collective of individuals that make these initiatives happen. But at church we often focus on our insular communities. We primarily view the church as a family that supports one another.

Indeed, the church should be a community of folks whose care for one another is modelled after healthy family supports. However, as I switched off my bike lights Friday night, I wondered if we're not called to do more.

The kingdom of heaven is bigger than the church. Like Christ, Old Testament prophets called on their society to organize help for the widow, the poor and the marginalized. The biblical message is not simply aimed

at our individual private lives. Rather, we are called to address structural issues such as pedestrian safety, food distribution networks, minimum wage, tax regimes and affordable housing. The way we organize our life together can serve to enable the most vulnerable or drive them off the road.

It should be possible to use the life we cultivate on a Sunday morning for more than supporting our insular communities. The association of residents who continually bring light to the Queenston neighbourhood confirms for me that churches can partner with neighbourhoods to enable collective action. Through working together we can slowly but sustainably begin to put the concerns and needs of the most vulnerable at the centre of our life together—as churches and as neighbourhoods.

And let me tell you, a glowride is a pretty good place to begin. ❧

PERSONAL REFLECTION

My biker friend

By Natasha Neustaedter Barg

It was Day 2 of orientation for Mennonite Central Committee's Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program. We were learning about managing our expectations, something that I learned but still hadn't fully come to internalize.

Looking down at my last remaining goal, I couldn't help but smile at the seemingly simple, unimpressive and unimportant goal that I had left—to smile at one person a day.

I lived in a studio apartment by myself during my term as an English teacher in Viet Tri, Vietnam. It was at the far end of a courtyard inside the school gates of Chuyen Hung Vuong, the school where my SALT friend Eva Rife taught. I taught at Van Lang Secondary School.

Every day, an old man would do laps on his bike around my courtyard. We would occasionally cross paths, and I decided that I was going to try to smile at him every day. When we crossed paths I would look up into his weathered and wise face, give my best Natasha smile, a bit of a head nod, a mumbled *xin chao* (hello), and keep walking. But instead of smiling back at my over-eager face, he would nod his head a bit and continue biking on. He would do laps for an hour or so and then disappear, only to return the next day, when we would do the same thing. I'd smile at him, he'd nod his head and keep pedalling on.

This happened day in and day out. Throughout the seasons, the good days and bad days, my biker friend, as I have come to call him, would bike, I would smile and we would go our separate ways.

Many times this year, I have felt like my biker friend, continuously going in circles, not really getting anywhere or feeling successful, as I had come to understand that word.

I didn't get a participation mark for every day that I sat in the staff room



Natasha Neustaedter Barg was a 2018-19 SALT participant in Vietnam.

surrounded by a spoken language that I did not understand. I didn't get a grade for noticing that the architecture was different, or for how many people would stare at me for myriad reasons as I walked down my street. I most definitely did not get a grade for every time that I would reach for something with my chopsticks, only for the food to splash in my bowl and stain yet another of my shirts.

This year, I have come to see the meaning of success not only through an academic lens but also through the lens of my biker friend. He showed me that success means showing up and being present. It means becoming part of someone's fabric, routine and life. It means acknowledging the anxiety and laughter, the homesickness and joy, the constant embarrassment and grace, and the continual perseverance.

It means noticing the unspoken languages of love, courage and hope amidst the spoken language of Vietnamese.

Two weeks before I left Viet Tri, I made my way back to my room bleary eyed, in desperate need of a nap. I had stayed up late planning lessons the day before, not so uncommon in my late nights of studying, and had two hours before I taught again. Through my narrowed eyes I saw my biker friend doing his laps and approaching me. I didn't want to smile at him. I was tired, and he hadn't smiled back at me for the last nine months, so I didn't have much hope that today would be the day.

But a goal was a goal, so I opened my eyes wide, gave my best tired Natasha smile, and was shocked when, instead of seeing a weathered face, I saw eyes that twinkled, lips that twitched into a smile, and a hand that was raised and waving at me.

This past year has given me another perspective and lens through which to look at the world. I have come to act on the lessons that I learned through classes, conversations and friends. I have come to learn that the biggest challenge we face, wherever we are, is to show up, be present and keep smiling every day. ☘

Natasha Neustaedter Barg, 21, was a 2018-19 SALT participant. She is from Winnipeg and is a member of Douglas Mennonite Church. This blog was originally published online on the Canadian Mennonite University website (cmu.ca).



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CMU

Natasha Neustaedter Barg, 21, is pictured with one of her students at Van Lang Secondary School.

WOMEN WALKING TOGETHER IN FAITH

Igniting flames of hope in the midst of ending

By Elsie Rempel, MW Canada secretary, and Shirley Redekop, MW Canada president

On June 30, at our annual general meeting in Abbotsford, B.C., Mennonite Women Canada elected to dissolve our nationwide ministry for the purpose of releasing energy and assets to the regional churches so that they can grow stronger in their ministry with and through women within their contexts.

Does this mean that after 67 years of national connections, MW Canada just “packed it in” with a quick vote or show of hands and moved on from there? Not really.

Instead, we began our worship time by reflecting on the theme, “To everything there is a season,” and then celebrated our legacy through a litany that included historical vignettes about the “flame” in our mothers and grandmothers that helped them claim their voice and agency in a male-dominated church.

Flame centrepieces on each table prompted hotel staff to inquire if we had a licence for open fires! We had no such licence but we certainly wanted to ignite each other’s imaginations to what good energies and ministries could emerge through Mennonite women in our regional churches.



Shirley Redekop opened the gathering with a prayer, written by Carmen Brubacher, the Women of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada rep, which captured the essence of the meeting: “In God’s goodness, in God’s imagination, there is a time for everything, for every matter under heaven. This is our time to gather, a time to speak and to listen, a time to weep and to laugh, a time to hold on and to let go. God has made everything suitable for its time; God has put a sense of past and

future into our minds. In our end and in our beginning, it is always the season for God’s imagination.”

“As the seasons of our lives have changed, so have the projects of MW Canada,” noted Redekop. “It has been a time of growth—of spring and summer—and now, MW Canada has moved into its autumn and winter—a quieter season.”

Over the years, MW Canada has supported many young Mennonite women on their path to leadership within the Mennonite church. One such woman, Danielle Raimbault, presently a pastor at Listowel (Ont.) Mennonite Church, developed connections with a broader community of Mennonite women through the scholarship program. She was not able to be present at the final meeting, but she noted in writing that she sees hope in many of the stories she’s hearing of what is happening within the churches. She continues to believe that it is essential to have a support system in which women of all ages can dream and know that there is a group of people there to support them, whether through funds, bouncing ideas off them, or even reaching out for more volunteers who share the same passion.

A time of personal sharing highlighted national and international connections made over the years and the opportunities to develop leadership skills which resulted. Two senior retired missionaries reminded us of the ministries we supported in their mission placements. Susan Martens Kehler thanked MW Canada for supporting the training of nursing students in Taiwan at the Nurses Teaching School, where she taught for many years.

The closing song, “In the Bulb There is a Flower,” served both as lament and a calling to remain open to seek what God has in mind for Mennonite women in Canada. There can indeed be a beginning in this ending, but for now it is something God alone can see. ☸



**Susan
Martens Kehler**



PHOTOS BY JUNE MILLER

MW Canada members vote to dissolve the organization and turn the assets over to the five regional churches for future women’s ministries.



Elsie Rempel, left, and Shirley Redekop pack up MW Canada’s logo following the meeting to dissolve the organization at MC Canada’s Gathering 2019 in Abbotsford, B.C., on June 30.

Shackled together in perfect unity— 'Blame it on God'

By Paul Schrag
Mennonite World Review
KANSAS CITY, MO.

God's success is our problem. But it's a good problem. From these thoughts of Tom Yoder Neufeld came a catch phrase of MennoCon19: "The church is a mess. Thanks be to God!"

A professor emeritus of religious studies at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont., Yoder Neufeld led 495 Mennonite Church U.S.A. delegates in Bible studies on unity and diversity in Ephesians from July 3 to 5 at the Kansas City Convention Center.

The sessions featured verses like Ephesians 4:3: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

"Let's put the ceaseless struggle for unity at the core of our understanding of discipleship," Yoder Neufeld said.

Of his theme, "Gathered into one," he said, "This is a oneness that defies our imagination. It is nothing less than participating in the unity of God."

Because God is a successful gatherer, God's unity is full of diversity. "It takes every ounce of skill, patience and especially love to cope with the success of God's gathering," he said. "Unity is hard work. Blame it on God!"

Although "our world is torn by fear of what or who is strange or different," he said, "let's not point the finger too quickly at the world," because Anabaptists also participate in a culture of suspicion, shaming or shunning those whose views or behaviours we disdain.

Children of the wind

Emphasizing the definitions of Spirit as "wind" and "breath," he described God as bringing "unsettling, wind-driven" unity to the church. "What if we thought of the church as the children of the wind?" he asked. "One thing you can't do with wind is control it. . . .

"The unity of the Spirit is this turbulent storm within God's embrace. That's what peace looks like until we all see God face to face together. If Jesus is God's peace, then the peace we know today is the peace that is constantly being unsettled by its generosity toward enemies and strangers."

Yoder Neufeld encouraged the delegates to "rejoice in our awkwardness" as the body of Christ. "The body of Christ will never walk elegantly, but it will walk gracefully," he said. "That is its perfection."

Referring to the biblical image of the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, he asked, "What building materials would we use to build a home for God? He said the walls of God's temple are made up of things people have thrown away."

This can be a difficult idea for those in the Anabaptist tradition who want a disciplined community "without spot or wrinkle."

"We have a hard time following Jesus out to the garbage heap to find building materials, because that would unsettle the niceness of our building," he said, adding, "We should test whether we are a peace church by the hospitality we have toward each other."

Chain gang of peace

Yoder Neufeld compared the church to a chain gang.

"The body of Christ is not made up of those who are fleet of foot," he said. "It has some who want to run fast, but the

problem is they are shackled to those of us who can't run very well. They have to put others' needs before their own."

He suggested thinking of unity as the starting point rather than the goal. "That will help us reframe many of the struggles we have with each other," he said.

Delegates asked if unity has limits. One cited Ephesians 5:11: "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness."



PHOTO BY VADA SNIDER

'It takes every ounce of . . . love to cope with the success of God's gathering' Tom Yoder Neufeld told delegates at this year's MC U.S.A. conference in Kansas City, Mo.

"The unity of the Spirit is intended to be a transformative one," Yoder Neufeld answered. "When we are brought into the body of Christ, we are not simply included, we are included for transformation." ❧

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Grounded and shaken

Youth from across Canada gather to learn the radical ways of Jesus

By Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent
WALDHEIM, SASK.

“We want to be shaken not by what the world throws at us, but by what Jesus throws at us.”

With these words, Kirsten Hamm-Epp welcomed participants to Shake: Rattled by the Radical.

Hamm-Epp, regional church minister for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, partnered with Kathy Giesbrecht, associate director of leadership ministries for MC Manitoba, to plan the nationwide youth event, which took place from July 28 to Aug. 1 at the Shekinah Retreat Centre, north of Waldheim, Sask.

Eighty-seven youth, aged 12 to 18, attended Shake, accompanied by 22 sponsors and an additional 10 resource people and volunteers. They came from Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Over the four-day event they ate, worshipped, learned and played together.

Each day began with a worship time

called “Getting grounded.” Moses Falco, pastor of Sterling Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg, used texts from Jeremiah to ground the youth in what Scripture had to say about each day’s theme.

“The evenings were designed to shake us up a little more,” said Hamm-Epp. “They allowed us to dig into a topic in a way that would shake and rattle us a little bit.”

The July 29 theme was “Creation, creator, creating.” Teacher Lindsay Braul shared her passion for creation care. As a student at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Braul lived in a community where making good choices for the environment was the norm. When she transitioned back home to Regina, she felt frustrated when she tried to introduce recycling in a community that didn’t really seem to care. Braul challenged the youth to think of one thing they could do differently in order to care for the Earth.

“Reimagination, reconciliation, relationships” was the theme for July 30. Hamm-Epp said this day was about “looking at our relationships with our Indigenous neighbours through the lens of God’s love for us and for creation.” Lyndon Linklater, an



PHOTO BY DARRYL NEUSTAEDTER BARG

Shake participants gather for a photo on the Shekinah Retreat Centre deck.

Indigenous educator who sees himself as a “teacher of respect and reconciliation,” invited the youth to think about what reconciliation might look like from either Indigenous or settler perspectives. He taught participants some Cree words, helping them to understand that sharing language is an important part of working towards reconciliation.

The teaching came alive with a trip to nearby Stoney Knoll, former home of the Young Chippewyan First Nation and site of the 2006 gathering of reconciliation between the Young Chippewyan people and Lutheran and Mennonite farmers who now occupy the land.

Hoop dancer Lawrence Roy Junior offered a glimpse into Indigenous culture, while Harry Lafond, of the Office of the



PHOTO BY JUNE MILLER

The afternoon at Stoney Knoll, Sask., included a hoop dance presentation and instruction by Lawrence Roy Junior of Saskatoon.





PHOTO BY JUNE MILLER

Before departing Stoney Knoll, youth representatives from across Canada helped plant a tree as a sign of reconciliation between Mennonites and the Young Chippewyan First Nation.

Treaty Commissioner, taught the meaning of “treaty.” Gary LaPlante, representing the Young Chippewyan people, and Wilmer and Barb Froese, representing Mennonite farmers, shared their experiences of reconciliation.

“I was profoundly touched by how this group of youth were engaged with what was happening,” said Hamm-Epp. “They were there to build relationships.”

The youth planted a tree of reconciliation at Stoney Knoll.

“Representatives from each youth group helped to either pour water or shovel dirt,” said Hamm-Epp. “Thirty years from now they can go back and see this tree [and know that] we are now part of this land in a unique way,” she said.

“Hol(e)y, healthy, hopeful” was the Aug. 1 theme. The intentional spelling of the first word, with the “e” in parentheses,



PHOTO BY JUNE MILLER

Kirsten Hamm-Epp, left and Kathy Giesbrecht led in prayer for each regional church just before the end of Shake.

suggested that people are both full of holes (imperfect) and called by God to be holy. To explore this theme, Hamm-Epp invited a panel of six youth and sponsors to answer questions such as:

- **What do you do to stay healthy?**
- **Is it easy to think of yourself as a child of God?**
- **What makes you hopeful?**

Following the panel discussion, Giesbrecht affirmed God’s deep love for each participant through a service of anointing. “God wants to be your friend,” she said. “If there’s a place in the church for me, there’s a place in the church for you.” Volunteers anointed youth with oil, saying, “The God who gave you life calls you beloved.”

In addition to learning and worship, each day at Shake included outdoor activities: the Flying Fox zip line, the Shekinah climbing wall and various team initiatives. Participants also enjoyed free time to just



PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Youth sponsor Chad Miller, right, anoints Caleb Gartner with oil and the words, ‘The God who gave you life calls you beloved.’ Both are from Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary.



PHOTO BY JUNE MILLER

Comedian Matt Falk provided some ‘hol(e)y’ laughter for Shake participants.

hang out and make new friends.

Comedian Matt Falk entertained participants on their final evening together. Hamm-Epp described his performance as “fantastic,” saying, “He affirmed [the youth by telling them], ‘There’s no junior Holy Spirit; you have the fullness of the Holy Spirit now. You don’t have to turn 18 [to be] called, beloved, holy and accepted.’”

Hamm-Epp said she felt “beyond encouraged by this group [of youth] and their thoughts, energy, wisdom, [and] love for God.” ☞

To view Daryl Neustaeder Barg’s video summary of Shake, visit bit.ly/shake-2019.



PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Kirsten Hamm-Epp, far right, looks on as Andrea de Avila, holding the microphone, responds to a question during a panel discussion in response to the theme ‘Hol(e)y, healthy, hopeful.’ Also pictured, from left to right, are: Miriam Huebner, Phil Campbell Enns, Nathan Bartel, Zachary Stefaniuk and Madison Harms.



Crokinole boards sold for China mission

B.C. congregation crafts custom boards

Story and Photo by Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

Wooden game boards made in Yarrow, B.C., and a crokinole tournament at this summer's Mennonite Church Canada Gathering have made a connection with modern-day Chinese Christians and a 16th-century Dutch Anabaptist martyr.

Darnell Barkman, pastor of Yarrow United Mennonite Church, had received a crokinole board for his birthday last December, and after playing on it he thought it would be fun to try to build one. After consulting with church member Chris Epp of Yarrow Craftworks, Barkman realized that building several wouldn't be much more work than building one. He collaborated with Andrew Kornelson, another church member, on the project.

At the same time, B.C. Mennonites were preparing to host Gathering 2019 in Abbotsford. Several of the Yarrow church members were involved as volunteers in various capacities, including Heidi Epp, chief local planner and organizer. The idea for a crokinole tournament came up, and Epp suggested that the homemade crokinole boards could serve a double purpose: intergenerational fun and as a fundraiser for international missions.

Church members made eight boards with only the MC Canada logo and two championship prize boards with the MC Canada logo and the Ignite Gathering 2019 logo. They were pleased with the final products, a contrast of beautifully finished plywood for the playing surface with cedar for the rest of the board.

Yarrow United Mennonite had heard about a Mennonite pastor in China who had been inspired by the story of Dirk Willems, an early Anabaptist martyr whose compassion in rescuing his enemy from drowning did not save him from execution. This story had been transformational in the Chinese pastor's faith formation.



Sales of custom-made crokinole boards from Yarrow (B.C.) United Mennonite Church are helping support Mennonite Partners in China.

Mennonite Partners in China (MPC), based in Harrisonburg, Va., is in the process of translating that story into Chinese dialects, along with Bible study material, to share Jesus' message of loving enemies.

"After we made the boards, we decided to donate them to the assembly as support for [Mennonite Church Canada] Witness," says Barkman. "We wanted it to be something encouraging to Jeanette Hanson, since she works very closely with MPC. That's why we picked that project to support."

Hanson has been MPC's director and is now beginning as MC Canada's interim director of International Witness.

All but one of the crokinole boards were sold for between \$200 and \$300 each following the Gathering's June 28 tournament, raising a total of \$1,500. Initially, this was planned to be a one-time project, but more people have expressed interest in the boards across B.C. and the rest of Canada.

"If people are interested in boards from us they can send a message to Yarrow Craftworks on Facebook," says Barkman. "We'll make a note and keep them in the loop about when our next run of boards will be up for purchase." ❧

❧ New brief

Little Flowers celebrates a decade of ministry



2012 CANADIAN MENNONITE FILE PHOTO

Norm Voth, left, then director of evangelism and service for MC Manitoba, and Jamie Arpin-Ricci, pastor of Little Flowers Community Church, stand outside Chiara House.

WINNIPEG—Around 40 people gathered at Vimy Ridge Park in Winnipeg to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Little Flowers Community on July 7. The church and intentional living community is a partnership between Mennonite Church Manitoba and Youth With A Mission Urban Ministries Winnipeg, located in the heart of the city's West End neighbourhood. Little Flowers Community began in 2009, when asked by community members to start a church after several years of serving the area. The community now has about 15 to 25 people in its regular worshipping community but provides support and pastoral care to a much broader section of the neighbourhood and beyond. At the celebration, children chased soccer balls and Frisbees, and everyone shared food and memories. Don Rempel Boschman, senior pastor of Douglas Mennonite Church, prayed a blessing over the gathering. "It is important that Little Flowers Community celebrate this anniversary," says Jamie Arpin-Ricci, pastoral leader at Little Flowers. "When we first got started, we were part of a group of several other new congregations and programs, none of which remain. Too many new churches can't survive past the first three or four years. For many of us at Little Flowers, this community is our family, so the roots go deep."

—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

‘Won’t you be my neighbour?’

Story by Joanne De Jong
Alberta Correspondent
CALGARY

Presbyterian minister Fred Rogers asked the question, “Won’t you be my neighbour?” every day for almost 40 years on *Mr. Roger’s Neighbourhood*. In a 2018 documentary of his life, Rogers said that asking this question is “an invitation for someone to be close to you.”

Five years ago, Foothills Mennonite Church drew close to the Calgary Chin Christian Church by inviting it to participate in Foothills’ summer Vacation Bible School (VBS) program.

Over the years, this relationship between the two Mennonite Church Alberta congregations has blossomed, as Foothills has worked with its Chin neighbours on various projects. Brenda Tiessen-Wiens, a member of Foothills and moderator of MC Alberta, has been tutoring Chin church members in English for the past seven years. “This has resulted in being invited

to weddings, house warming parties and barbecues,” she said.

While many churches in MC Alberta no longer host VBS programs, due to a lack of volunteers, Foothills has a healthy program, as a third of the VBS leaders and kids now come from the Chin church. This year, the joint program was held from July 2 to 5. A third of the kids came from Foothills and the other third came from the local neighbourhood, with a total of 45 kids in attendance. The Chin church rents a bus each year to transport the kids across town.

Chad Miller, the Foothills pastor, said that, in the beginning of the friendship, Leng Nawn Thang, the Chin pastor, would attend planning meetings at Foothills. This year, Miller was invited to plan the program at Thang’s home, where they drank coffee and ate fried bread and sweets

together.

Thang said the VBS program is great to do together. “The kids are on summer holiday with nothing to do,” he said. “It’s a chance for Christians to get together, get to know each other, and get to know the Word of God together.”

In the past, the two churches used the Group curriculum, but this year they decided to try the VBS curriculum produced by MennoMedia. The theme was, “Who is my neighbour? Learning to love like Jesus.” Children and youth who attended the program got to see firsthand how two different cultures can live out their faith as neighbours who love and support each other.

Props included street signs; the Compassion café, where kids could get snacks; and a row of houses resembling a neighbourhood. Each day, someone would knock on a door and out would come a new neighbour to meet. One day it was Thang, who shared about having nice neighbours in India and then in Canada. On the last day, two refugees from the Calgary Newcomer Centre, which was started in 1988 by Mennonite churches in Calgary, answered the door and shared their stories. The Centre was presented with \$400, the total offering collected during the VBS program.

At the end of the week, after having tried the new MennoMedia VBS package, Miller said, “The Group VBS curriculum was appealing and more contemporary, but not quite as good theologically as the MennoMedia version.” The worship music had mixed reviews. Regardless, both churches are eager to work together again.

Now that the summer week of fun and faith has come to a close, the colourful props have been disassembled and donated to a local community dance studio. That means, as Mr. Rogers likes to say, “It’s a beautiful day in the neighbourhood!” ✎



PHOTO BY AINSLEY DUNN

Enjoying VBS craft time at Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary are, from left to right: Arianna Toews, Kaylynn Toews and Zoe Willms.

Teaching the tabernacle

Saskatoon woman uses a life-size model of the Old Testament tabernacle as an object lesson in God's love

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

Eleanor Funk has been teaching people about the tabernacle for almost 40 years. “The passion has never left,” she says.

Eleanor, who lives in Saskatoon with her husband Don, grew up in Aberdeen, Sask. After high school, she attended Swift Current Bible Institute and later worked as an interior decorator.

In the 1980s, when Eleanor had lots of time on her hands, a friend suggested that she accompany her to Israel. While there, the friend suggested that Eleanor study the Old Testament. “I thought the Old Testament was just the history of the Jews,” she says, “but, because I respected her, I studied.”

Eleanor became intrigued with the description of the tabernacle and wanted to buy a model of it. When she couldn't find one to purchase, she thought, “Okay, I'll make one.”

At that time, the Funks attended Circle Drive Alliance Church in Saskatoon. She displayed the model she'd created in the

church foyer and was surprised to discover that many adults in the congregation didn't know what it was.

So the Funks decided to build a life-size model that she could use to teach people about the tabernacle and its meaning for Christians today. The first model lasted 10 years before it disintegrated.

Meanwhile, Eleanor changed careers, taking a job in financial planning, and pursued seminary studies online. She eventually earned a doctorate in biblical studies from International Seminary in Florida.

When Don retired in 2016, the couple decided to build another life-size model of the tabernacle and take it on the road. They also own a gym-size model and a table-top model. Each model has been used as a teaching tool in Sunday schools and Vacation Bible Schools.

This summer, the life-size model is a special feature at Youth Farm Bible Camp, near Rosthern. Mark Wurtz, Youth Farm's executive director, says the tabernacle provides an opportunity to “share the story [of Christ] in a way that's new and engaging.”

This year's Bible theme is “Jesus: the way, the truth and the life.” Wurtz says that the Funks' tabernacle is a good fit with this theme, because “the tabernacle is pointing to Jesus.”

“We have kids here that don't have much idea of what it means to be a follower of Jesus,” he says. “This is one more way of showing them about God's love.”

He sees the tabernacle



Eleanor Funk uses a large red umbrella to illustrate how Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross covers the sins of those who put their trust in him.



Inside the tabernacle, the priest stands beside the altar of incense, in front of the curtain to the most holy place.



The bronze altar dominates the courtyard of Eleanor Funk's life-size model of the tabernacle. The model lamb sitting peacefully on the altar seems blissfully unaware of the fate that awaits it.



Model sheep graze peacefully in the courtyard of the life-size tabernacle built by Eleanor Funk and her husband Don.

as an object lesson, and describes it as “a way for unholy people to meet a holy God.”

Campers learn about the tabernacle as

part of skills time. They visit the structure three days in a row. “I don’t give it to them all at once,” says Eleanor. On the first day, they learn about the courtyard. They enter the holy place on the second day, and, on the third, they are allowed to see what’s in the most holy place.

There are many lessons to be learned. Just as it was a personal decision for the ancient Israelites to enter the tabernacle through its eastern gate, so each individual must make a personal decision to follow Jesus.

On the bronze altar, where a model lamb

sits placidly, lies a large, red umbrella. Eleanor teaches children that Jesus is the Lamb of God, slain for the sins of humanity. When an individual accepts Jesus, the blood of Jesus covers that individual’s sins and God no longer sees their sins, but only sees the blood of Jesus. She illustrates this teaching by opening the umbrella over her head.

The tabernacle is a testimony to her deep faith in Christ. “I have led my life to be searching for him,” she says. “I try to stick as close to Scripture as I can.”

Wurtz says the tabernacle will remain at Youth Farm throughout the fall corn-maze season, giving the public an opportunity to see it and learn its lessons as well. The corn maze opened on Aug. 17 and runs until mid-October. ☞



Along the north wall of the tabernacle stands the table of showbread.



Two seraphs guard the Ark of the Covenant inside the most holy place. The walls are lined with mirrors to simulate the polished gold that would have overlain the wooden walls of the original most holy place.



Eleanor Funk, wearing a blue jacket, teaches campers at Youth Farm Bible Camp about the tabernacle of ancient Israel and how it points the way to Jesus.

News brief

Cycling for affordable housing



Anna Reesor Rempel, the littlest rider, gets her helmet on for the MennoHomes bike-a-thon with her dad Steven Reesor Rempel.

ELMIRA, ONT.—The weather was perfect for MennoHomes’ ninth annual Out-Spok’n bike-a-thon for affordable housing on June 22, hosted by Elmira (Ont.) Mennonite Church. A group of 65 cyclists of all ages set out from the church along a section of the nearby Kissing Bridge Trail. Most riders completed 14 or 28 kilometres. More serious cyclists left early in the morning to complete extra kilometres. A team of cyclists from St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, calling themselves “The Oscars,” after their inspiring leader, 80-year-old Oscar Weber, again did their annual 75-km loop. All the riders were rewarded with a barbecue lunch back at the church. Dan Driedger, executive director of MennoHomes, expressed appreciation for all the sponsors and volunteers, so that “all donations from the bike-a-thon go directly towards construction of new, affordable housing.” Just over \$51,000 was raised this year. MennoHomes is a non-profit charitable organization that provides quality, affordable housing to households with low income throughout Waterloo Region. It currently owns or manages 105 rental housing units, with a mix of single unit apartments, family duplexes and multi-bedroom homes. It also provides ongoing support services for tenants through partner agencies.

—STORY AND PHOTO BY JANET BAUMAN

From Golgotha to the Pembina Valley

Manitoba's Passion Play celebrates 20 years

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

Manitoba Correspondent
LA RIVIÈRE, MAN.

Every summer, more than a hundred volunteers from across Manitoba gather in the rolling hills of the Pembina Valley to bring to life the most important event of the Christian faith: Jesus' death and resurrection.

Manitoba's Passion Play celebrated its 20th anniversary this year, welcoming around 2,000 audience members over the span of five shows at the beginning of July. Presented by Oak Valley Productions, the play is held at the stunning Oak Valley Outdoor Theatre in La Riviere, Man., a site that features meditation trails and concession stands, all completely run by volunteers.

Bill Tiessen has stepped out of the family bookkeeping business office and into the sandals of Jesus for the last 12 years, acting the role of Christ in the play. In fact, it's a full family affair for the Tiessen household, who attend Crystal City Mennonite Church.

Sheila Tiessen, Bill's wife, has been in charge of stage makeup for more than 15 years, and their children grew up being part of the action on stage. Zachary is now in the role of narrator and Rebecca

leads makeup.

"I like to be involved in things like that," says Sheila of her work with the Passion Play. "I feel I can have a positive influence in the community and on others, and I feel that the play definitely does that."

But just because they have more than a decade of experience under their belts doesn't mean they are simply going through the motions. When he first started playing Jesus, Bill says he mostly thought about what he had to say and where he had to go. "As the years have gone on, though, I can think more about how would Jesus have said this, how would he show compassion to children, what would he be thinking as he gazes out across the crowds at the Sermon on the Mount."

That scene is actually one of Bill's favourites, because the audience members become actors in the play. "I particularly



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANITOBA PASSION PLAY

Bill Tiessen, right, has played Jesus for 12 years in Manitoba's Passion Play.

like that scene because it's delivered from a rock up on the hillside, looking out over the cast who's gathered below, and then it just continues on into the crowd that's watching. . . . They're all part of the scene," he says.

The production is unique because the audience sits so close to the actors that they become immersed in the story. Bill says director Belita Sanders is careful to



Manitoba's Passion Play is set in the beautiful Pembina Valley at the Oak Valley Outdoor Theatre.



Around 65 people make up the cast of Manitoba's Passion Play. Pictured, the crowds welcome Jesus, played by Bill Tiessen, in the grey robe, as he enters Jerusalem.



Jesus, played by Bill Tiessen, right, is led before Pilate.

ensure that all 65 cast members are doing different things in every part of the set, and viewers return time and again, saying they see new things every time.

Sanders, who is part of the Roman Catholic church, has directed the play ever since its first year. In 2011, she added a half-hour of material on Jesus' birth and life before the week of Easter to the Manitoba-sourced script and musical score. Around the same time, the set was fully renovated and gained storage space and a roofed area behind the stage for the cast.

But one thing that hasn't changed much is the people. More than 80 percent of the actors come back every year, as well as other volunteers, according to Sanders. "The real heart of all of this is the volunteers," she says.

Individuals and families. Young and old. Catholic, Mennonite, Anglican, United and non-denominational. They all give up their weekends and evenings to share the common message that unites them: the Passion story.

"It's been just a beautiful experience," Sanders says. "It's a real privilege to be part of something like this."

"This is an ecumenical project, where we put aside our little, often small, differences, and we tell a story that we all aspire to follow," says Bill. "It's a great experience of teamwork, working together with a variety of people you wouldn't otherwise come into contact with necessarily."

The play gives people the opportunity to hear the Passion story with new ears and watch it come to life, strengthening faith for many or maybe even introducing it.

"Having spoken the words [of Jesus] in a theatre setting, it does kind of put a different twist on it," says Bill. "It draws people in in a different way than just sitting in a pew and hearing a sermon. . . . It becomes a little bit more real." ❧

News brief

Fort Garry church installs solar panels



PHOTO BY NOAH SCHLICHTING

Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg recently installed 56 solar panels on its building's roof.

WINNIPEG—Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship recently took a big leap in its creation-care plan, installing 56 solar panels on the church building's roof at the end of July. "On Sunday morning, people came to church, and it was quite a sight, all those panels on our church roof," says Peter Sawatzky, chair of the solar committee and the driving force behind the project. "It was very interesting and also, for me at least, very exciting." Sawatzky, who is also the congregation's representative on the Mennonite Creation Care Network, brought forward the idea after seeing it done at a church in Lancaster, Pa. The project was expensive and no small undertaking, but it became clear that everyone was onboard, feeling it was the right thing to do. "I told the contractor we weren't interested in saving money, we're interested in saving the planet," he says. The \$60,000 the full project would have cost is subsidized by Manitoba Hydro, which will rebate about a third of the cost. The rest will come from the congregation's reserve budget until the cost is recovered, which Sawatzky says will probably take about 12 to 15 years. Fort Garry has also installed a bike rack, a high-efficiency furnace and high-efficiency light bulbs; invested in an electric lawnmower and more blue boxes; and planted a garden.

—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

Who was Mary Magdalene?

A dedicated apostle in the very early church

Story and Photo by Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondent
NEW HAMBURG, ONT.

Who was Mary of Magdala? What impressions do people have of her, and where do those impressions come from?

With these questions, Amanda Witmer, an instructor in religious studies at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont., opened her lecture, “Mary Magdalene: The dedicated apostle in the very early church.” Aptly held on July 22, the Feast Day of Mary Magdalene, the afternoon event, planned by Martha Smith Good and hosted at Wilmot Mennonite Church, was an opportunity for some 30 women to explore Mary Magdalene in her historical context.

Sins. Since then, she has been labelled a prostitute, even though there is no textual evidence for that in the gospels.

In providing context for Mary, Witmer said that she lived in a “highly politically charged context,” coming from Magdala, situated between the Roman city of Tiberias and Capernaum, where Jesus based his Galilean ministry. She was also caught in the tension between a conservative society that excluded women from the public realm, and the reality that some women became financially independent and supported various religious and civic movements.

Witmer also provided an introduction

Nag Hammadi, including the gospels of Thomas, Philip and Mary.

Witmer invited the women to explore in table groups the primary-source textual references to Mary of Magdala—first in the canonical gospels, and then in the Gnostic gospels—and make observations. There were lively conversations, especially about the less-familiar Gnostic texts with their references to Mary’s special relationship with Jesus and her leadership after his death.

What observations did they make?

- **Mary of Magdala** was present from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and she was loyal to the end.
- **Jesus showed** her grace, acceptance and love.
- **She travelled** with, and was taught by, Jesus, along with the male disciples.
- **She was** courageous, facing rejection and stigma for her choices.
- **She was** the first to encounter the risen Jesus, and sent to tell the other disciples.
- **She was** a leader in the early Christian movement, but she faced resistance about her right to proclaim the gospel.

Witmer said that Mary’s story was important enough to preserve in the early church, but later texts tried to subordinate her presence in the Jesus movement. “The Christian movement became more conservative and conventional over time, to avoid persecution,” Witmer said, and had a “tendency to limit women’s participation,” as a more hierarchical church structure took shape, as evidenced in First and Second Timothy.

Women left the lecture pondering how the church can make Mary’s story more credible once again. ❧



Organizer Martha Smith Good, left, chats with Amanda Witmer, instructor and lecturer who led a group of women in exploring biblical and Gnostic references to Mary Magdalene, at an event held at Wilmot Mennonite Church on July 22.

First, it was important to clear up some misconceptions about her, said Witmer, noting that she is often confused with other Marys in the gospels. She is also associated with the so-called “sinful woman” who bathed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, in Luke 7.

Witmer said that this association arose when Pope Gregory, in the sixth century, identified Mary Magdalene as the “sinful woman,” and described the seven demons Jesus cast out of her as the Seven Deadly

to Gnosticism, a movement that impacted early Christianity. It was based on the Platonic philosophy of radical dualism that separated the physical realm, assumed to be corrupt, inferior and evil, from the spiritual realm, considered to be ideal, good and perfect. Salvation meant release from the physical world by achieving a secret, mystical *gnosis* (knowledge) of Jesus and his teachings.

In 1945, many scrolls of Gnostic scripture were found in the hills in Egypt near

Fairy tales at the Fringe

Play puts Mennonite twist on traditional stories

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

Hansel and Gretel—I mean Peter and Tina—enter the woods and end up at a house made entirely of waffles and white sauce, where they are led by their evil stepmother to pick rhubarb. And when they need to find their way home, they follow Peter's trail of *knaczot* (sunflower seeds).

This is *The Mennonite Fairytale*, Alan

Fehr's newest theatre creation. The play's five-member cast performed nine shows in just over a week at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival at the end of July and four shows over the August long weekend at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Man.

The production began when the museum asked Fehr and his team to put on a play for its Pioneer Days Festival. "I thought it would be easy enough to just find a script that is Mennonite pioneer-based, but there were just no scripts available that we could find," says

Fehr. So he decided to write one himself.

Fehr, who wrote and directed the play, put on his first fringe show 11 years ago. He now runs Real Live Entertainment, the production company with which he puts on plays when he's not working his day job and which produced *The Mennonite Fairytale*. A theatre creator by night, he works by day with Summer Bounce Entertainment, an interactive entertainment company in Steinbach.

But this new script was not without its challenges, especially when it got accepted into the Kids Fringe program at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival. Fehr quickly realized a show for a broad Winnipeg audience and a show for the largely Mennonite audience in Steinbach "is a really different kettle of fish altogether."



PHOTO COURTESY OF REAL LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

The play's five-member cast performed *The Mennonite Fairytale* 13 times in under three weeks.

"So then I had to write a show that would then explain the cultural cues of our local Manitoba Mennonite experience, but a lot of those cultural cues are tied to their faith, and their faith is tied to persecution and death, and this is supposed to be a show that is approachable by daycares," he says.

The ambitious end product needed to boil down Mennonite history to a few minutes and make it accessible to kids. It

also addressed church and baptism, a potentially risky thing to do in a public space of a diverse city. He needed to present it in a friendly, approachable and culturally appropriate way, without seeming like a play meant to proselytize young children, something he was actively trying to avoid.

It's no wonder it was his most challenging production to date. "It's weird to think that this was the edgiest, but of all the shows I've ever put on, this one certainly had the most landmines in it to dance around," he says. "It's so interesting to say, 'What is a Mennonite?' because it's such an in-depth question, because it means so many different things to so many different people."

Fehr is proud of how his actors were able to rise to the challenge and tackle the complexity, saying, "I feel like we did a really great job of coordinating and choreographing our steps to make sure it went off really well, and it really paid off."

"I found it exciting to be able to bring this kind of culture to a public audience," says Akecia Peters, who played the roles of Narrator, Rempelstiltskin and Tante Tina. "It was nice to be able to talk to the audience after and see some of the comments they were putting on the fringe website. We got just positive feedback. . . . It really was a great experience." Peters is entering her fifth year at the University of Winnipeg, double-majoring in theatre and psychology.

The play parodies numerous classic fairy tales by giving them a Mennonite makeover. They speed through centuries of Mennonite history in the first 10 minutes, enough to make the jokes understood.

Then the cast takes the audience through new versions of Little Red Riding Hood and Jack and the Bean Stalk, to name a few. Rumpelstiltskin becomes Rempelstiltskin and Aladdin's genie emerges from the tub of bacon drippings that every *oma* inevitably has in her fridge.

"It's one story that just kind of weaves its way through these different parodies, always with a thick layer of *schmaunfat* (cream gravy) over top of it," Fehr says.

Seeing the full theatres day after day and hearing appreciative feedback from audience members made the hard work worth it for Fehr and his team: "It's been so well-received. It's really gratifying." ❧

PEOPLE

Learning from the wisdom of children

Patricia Erb 'ignited' by childhood poverty she had formerly been sheltered from

By Joelle Kidd

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

I've had many teachers, most of them children," says Patricia Erb. "The best ones."

It could be seen as a surprising assertion from Erb, who, at 63, has been involved in human-rights work since her early teens. She has three decades under her belt at Save the Children Canada—the Canadian arm of the development organization focused on reaching vulnerable children, active in 120 countries—including the most recent eight of those years as chief executive officer.

As of 2018, she has transitioned into a consulting practice with development organizations and hopes to mentor young people who are just starting out in the field. And, in early June, the member of Toronto Mennonite New Life Church travelled to Nanaimo, B.C., to collect her honorary doctorate of law degree from Vancouver Island University for her commitment to social justice, particularly "defending the rights of women, children and other vulnerable groups such as Indigenous peoples."

Yet speak to Erb for any length of time and it becomes clear that this wisdom is central to all of her work, and is deeply held.

Part of Save the Children's work included child participation through promoting meetings of child leaders, she recounts. "The children had to choose who the leaders were going to be that travelled . . . to represent their country, and they always picked the shy children," she says.

"So one day I sat with one boy who was one of the outspoken ones, and I said, 'What do you do to pick the one that's going to be the leader?'"

"This was a peasant boy in Bolivia, maybe about 12, big brown eyes. He said, 'You know, our parents pick leaders based on who speaks best, because they want that leader to represent them. But many



PHOTO COURTESY OF PATRICIA ERB

Patricia Erb received an honorary doctorate in June from Vancouver Island University for her social justice and development work.

times, that is wrong, because the leaders kind of go off on their own and forget about the rest of the community. So we decided we would pick the ones with the best heart. Because they're always watching for everybody."

Recalling the memory, Erb breaks into a smile of amazement. "I had goosebumps when he said that."

When asked if she had always wanted to work with children, Erb draws on her first experiences with poverty. On a furlough with her parents, who were missionaries in Argentina, travelling through Bolivia was the first time she saw poverty firsthand, and she saw it in the lives of children.

"I saw children dying from measles, they had no water," she says. This type of poverty, which she had previously been sheltered from, "ignited" her, she says.

Returning to Argentina, then-14-year-old Erb threw herself into volunteer work, helping tuberculosis patients and later volunteering in daycares. This soon blossomed into activism. It was her involvement with these activities that put Erb among the ranks of the "disappeared."

Five years later, on Sept. 13, 1976, she was captured and taken from her home. She was taken to Campo de Mayo, a

detention camp where, during Argentina's military junta, tens of thousands were held, tortured for information, and, in most cases, killed.

"There was about 30,000 that disappeared, and many more that were killed," she says. "And of those 30,000, half—a little over half—were below 25 years old. So that gives an idea of how young that movement was."

Erb was imprisoned and tortured at the camp for four weeks. However, because of her American citizenship, she, unlike many, was spared.

"That was a period filled with terror, because they were killing people. Nobody really wanted to speak up. It was a time of a lot of fear," she says. But years later, Argentina became the first country in the world to undertake a truth and reconciliation commission.

The process began with an inquiry, producing a final report called *Nunca Más* ("Never again"). But, Erb says, the public's response was that, although the truth may have begun to come out, reconciliation was still far off.

"They dropped the word 'reconciliation.' . . . They started a really long, long process of building truth and memory, and trials are still going on."

There have been more than 240 trials, Erb says. She is a part of those trials, having recently appeared via a video call in court.

Erb believes Canada can learn a lot from Argentina's truth and reconciliation process, and she hopes she can do some work connecting these two things as she moves into her next phase of work as a consultant.

"What I learned with the Argentine process was that it's very long, and it's important to involve all of society," she says. Reconciliation is a messy process, she says, and communities that were wronged

may feel a lot of anger.

“Anger is natural, and it’s the honest response,” she says. “When something wasn’t right, even Jesus got angry and turned the tables, right? The point is what we’re doing, and we need to find a way to give that process of reconciliation a lot of energy.

“I think part of it is sharing the positive stories that some places have figured out, and making them more heard. . . . In some schools, some kids have come up with some creative ways of what they’re doing in the reconciliation process. So I want to spend a bit of my time on that piece, with organizations, with churches, with schools, with whoever is trying to engage,” she says.

This passion has always driven Erb’s work. While working with Save the Children, Erb visited the organization’s projects around the globe, working with Indigenous groups in South America, refugees in Syria and people experiencing famine in Somalia, and fundraising with the public and government. She has seen the horrors of war and famine as well as the pure joy and hope of children.

Despite facing some of the worst of what humanity is capable of, Erb’s work is suffused with hope. “I’ve been through horrible things, and I’ve seen horrible things,” she says. “But what I’ve seen of the good is many, many times larger and more common than the bad. . . . People are, generally, beautiful. When tried, they’re caring. It fills me with energy.”

Erb’s faith has been “a backbone” for her, although at times she says she has struggled with it. “I’m a person filled with questions,” she admits. “I have a hard time, now, when the church is splitting on issues of non-acceptance. . . . I struggle with the concept of me having the truth and you not having it. I can’t believe it’s that way.”

Yet, this is part of being human, Erb says. “Just as we’re beautiful, we also have our flaws.” ❧

/// Staff changes

Pastoral transitions in Ontario



• **Chris Hutton** was installed as pastor of youth and young adult ministries at Niagara United Mennonite Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake, in April. He gained previous pastoral and related experiences working at The First Mennonite Church in Vineland (2015-18), River City Church in Cambridge, (2014-15), The Meeting House (2007-13) and the Navigators of Canada (2002-07). He has both graduate and post-graduate degrees in English language and literature from the University of Waterloo. Currently, he is pursuing a master’s degree in theological studies at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont.



• **Glenda Ribey** began as interim chaplain in May at Parkwood Mennonite Seniors Community in Waterloo. Prior to that, she worked at Erb Street Mennonite Church in Waterloo as the Christian education coordinator. She is currently pursuing her master of theological studies degree at Grebel. As part of her course requirements she did a supervised experience in ministry placement at Parkwood, discovering a new calling for working with seniors. She also has a bachelor of arts degree in religion and culture from Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo. She attends Knox Presbyterian Church in Waterloo, and has enjoyed being part of its 10-year Vacation Bible Camp partnership with Waterloo North and Erb Street Mennonite churches.



• **Jessica Reesor Rempel** was ordained with Pastors in Exile (PiE), an Anabaptist-rooted movement that connects young people in Waterloo Region with vibrant faith experiences outside and inside church walls, on June 9 in Kitchener. She graduated from the University of Waterloo with a bachelor of arts degree in peace and conflict studies in 2011. She also completed a master of divinity degree at Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto in 2016. During that time she did a chaplaincy internship at Parkwood Seniors Community and co-founded PiE, where she has been serving as a pastor since 2014.



• **Anita Schroeder Kipfer** was installed as a pastor at Floradale Mennonite Church on June 9. She graduated in 1994 from Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg with a bachelor of theology degree, from the University of Waterloo in 1996 with a BA in English literature, and from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 1998 with a master of divinity degree. She previously served as a pastor at Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener (1998-2003) and a chaplain at Parkwood Seniors Community (1998-2000), and she continues her role as chaplain at St. Jacobs Place, a seniors assisted-living residence in St. Jacobs (2018-present).



• **Taucha Inrig** was installed as pastor of Wideman Mennonite Church in Markham in July. She has spent the past 14 years volunteering in the community with the Markham Inter-Church Committee for Affordable Housing and the Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold program. She has a bachelor of science degree in nursing from Ryerson Polytechnic University in Toronto and a master of divinity degree in intercultural relations (missions) from Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto.

—BY JANET BAUMAN

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Canoe trip deepens pastoral connections

By Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondent

For three days and two nights in June, six Mennonite Church Eastern Canada pastors journeyed by canoe and camped in the wilderness of Massasauga Provincial Park, near Parry Sound, Ont.

Two of them were experienced in the backcountry. But the other four—pastors belonging to the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Ministerial, a group of pastors in Kitchener, Ont., who meet monthly for friendship, support, inspiration and prayer—tried this traditional Canadian adventure for the first time. Most of them had never been in a canoe until their practice day at a local conservation area two weeks before the trip.

Yoel Masyawong, who pastors Grace Lao Mennonite Church and chairs MC Eastern Canada's Mission Council, had the idea for the trip and he persuaded Joseph Raltong, pastor of Chin Christian Church; Chung Vang, pastor of First Hmong Mennonite Church; and Yared Demissie Seretse, pastor of Meheret Evangelical Ethiopian Church, to come along.

Masyawong sought the expertise of

Mark Diller Harder, a pastor of St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, with backcountry canoeing experience. Their churches share a partnership based on a history of the St. Jacobs congregation supporting refugees from Laos.

With support from René Baergen, a pastor of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Diller Harder served as trip and spiritual guide, using the themes of pilgrimage, wilderness and solitude. Both morning and evening the men gathered to reflect and share.

There were fears and discomforts to address. Mosquitoes swarmed and they had a couple of close encounters with snapping turtles! Emergency services seemed far away and the distance across the lake was daunting. There were new things to learn, like how to portage a canoe and hang food away from bears for the night.

Along with paddling and portaging, they swam and jumped off the rocks. They fished and roasted their catch whole over the fire. And they marvelled at the beauty of God's creation in the peace and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF YOEL MASYAWONG.

The pastor-canoeists take a break on a rocky outcropping in Massasauga Provincial Park. Pictured from left to right: Mark Diller Harder, Yoel Masyawong, Yared Demissie Seretse, Chung Vang, René Baergen and Joseph Raltong.

quiet and in the full moon shining over the water at night from a sky full of stars.

They intended to take a break from their digital technologies, but soon the cell phones came out to take pictures, post videos and share the adventure through social media.

They laughed a lot at the way Masyawong's canoe zigzagged and bumped into the others, and there was good-natured teasing about how the instant rice Diller Harder provided was disappointing!

But there were also opportunities for more serious conversations. The experience brought back sobering reminders of how their people have suffered: memories of traumatic escapes across a river under gunfire, walking for days through the jungle with little food and living in refugee camps. Masyawong commented that they had to face those difficult memories before they could experience the joy of camping in the Canadian woods.

For all of the men, connecting around



Six pastors relax at camp during their canoe trip in Massasauga Provincial Park. Pictured from left to right: Yared Demissie Seretse, Chung Vang, Yoel Masyawong, Mark Diller Harder, René Baergen and Joseph Raltong.

the campfire circle in the evening was a highlight. They shared deeply about their experiences as pastors: the joys, challenges, common concerns and different styles. Diller Harder described living together in the wilderness as a time of “mutual learning,” as they were able to share wisdom from their own settings.

Benefits are already rippling out from their wilderness adventure. They deepened their friendships and sense of trust in each other. Vang found it to be a refreshing time away from the city. Raltong wants to expand the multicultural connections beyond the pastors and he dreams of a sports day for the youth of their congregations.

They expressed gratitude to MC Eastern Canada for providing some financial support to make this possible. Would they do it again? The answer was a hearty “yes,” but maybe not in mosquito season!

The Ministerial’s churches also gather once a year for a festival of worship. These personal and congregational connections are important for the pastors, who sometimes feel isolated because they are so busy caring for the spiritual needs of their churches as well as supporting newcomers in all kinds of ways. ❧

❧ Staff changes

Pastoral, staff transitions in British Columbia



• **Aaron Roorda** will be assuming duties as senior pastor at Eden Mennonite Church in Chilliwack, succeeding Rob Brown, who will be assuming a new career in education. Roorda was formerly Eden’s associate/youth pastor.



• **Kevin Barkowsky**, currently administrative assistant and communications coordinator for Mennonite Church British Columbia, will become half-time interim pastor at Sherbrooke Mennonite Church in Vancouver for the next three months. Yohan Sanchez continues as community pastor. Sherbrooke is moving into the process of searching for its next interim pastor following the end of Phil Routly’s term as transitional pastor.



• **Rita Ewert** will be filling in as MC B.C.’s communications coordinator/administrative assistant during Barkowsky’s absence.

—BY AMY RINNER WADDELL

❧ Staff changes

Pastoral transitions in Manitoba



• **Phil Campbell-Enns** began as co-pastor of Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg on Aug. 12, joining Judith Friesen Epp, the other co-pastor already working at Home Street. He finished as associate pastor of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg on June 16. After graduating from Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg (now Canadian Mennonite University) with a bachelor of theology degree in the late 1980s, Campbell-Enns dedicated a large part of his life’s work to youth ministry, supporting young people on their faith journeys and building relationships.



• **Kelvin Dyck** formally retired from pastoral ministry on June 30, finishing his role as pastor at Covenant Mennonite Church in Winkler, Man., after 22 years of service. Before that, he worked as an instructor and dean of students at the Winkler Bible Institute for seven years. Dyck spent a significant period of time in theological studies, completing a master of Christian studies degree at Regent College in Vancouver and beginning a doctorate in theology at Oxford University in England. He is looking forward to the rest and time for other activities that retirement will bring. “It has been a privilege and a blessing to serve God and God’s church in this way,” he says.

—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

❧ News brief

Martin Buhr inducted into Waterloo Region Hall of Fame

KITCHENER, ONT.—Martin Buhr, a member of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener, was inducted into the Waterloo Region Hall of Fame on April 28. The Hall of Fame, located at the Ken Seiling Waterloo Region Museum, honours those who make a significant difference in the community. Born in Altona, Man., Buhr moved to Ontario for university and stayed to play an important role in building community services for those in need. He served as executive director of Kitchener’s House of Friendship for 20 years, from 1978 to 1998, expanding it from a men’s shelter to an agency with a wide range of services. In 1984, he co-founded the local food bank and helped establish St. John’s Kitchen. After his retirement in 2001, Buhr co-founded MennoHomes, a non-profit organization that provides affordable housing in Waterloo Region. Under his leadership, MennoHomes helped create more than 105 rental housing units. By participating in annual bike-a-thons, Buhr has raised about \$500,000 for MennoHomes and House of Friendship.

—BY BARB DRAPER



Peacebuilding beyond borders

Young Canadian Mennonites share their ideas on peace and justice in the Netherlands

By Rachel Bergen
Contributing Editor

Pacebuilding doesn't stop at the door of your church, the boundary of your province or even the border of your country.

The second annual Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference and Festival took place in Elspeet, the Netherlands, between June 27 and 30. It brought people together with the aim of reflecting on Mennonite peacebuilding accomplishments, failures, opportunities and challenges in various settings.

A number of Canadian Mennonite young adults took part in the conference, including Silvie Kroeker, who is a member of Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg but currently lives in Germany and works at Friedenshaus (Peace House).

Together with her father, Gordon Zerbe, a professor of New Testament at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, she spoke on how hospitality to foreign migrants presents one of the crucial challenges for peacebuilding in the world today.

Friedenshaus was started in 2016 as a joint venture between Mennonite Church Canada International Witness workers, the Mennonite church in Ludwigshafen and the regional Mennonite conference, Kroeker explained. She is currently the coordinator there.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THEATRE OF THE BEAT
Theatre of the Beat actor Lindsey Middleton performs at the Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference in the Netherlands.

"At this time [2016] there were many refugees, especially from Syria, looking for places to learn the German language," she said at the conference. "Since then, the Friedenshaus has offered informal German classes, as well as community events, as a way to bring people of different cultures together and to foster peace in the community. Language and discrimination are still huge barriers for all kinds of migrants who come to Germany."

Her experience at Friedenshaus contributed a great deal to her theology of hospitality as peacebuilding. "I think the church and Christians have a responsibility to be hospitable and work for peace, just like Jesus did," she said. "Jesus welcomed all kinds of people; therefore, we should not be discriminatory in our hospitality."

She hopes to continue learning from the people she works with at Friedenshaus, in order to practise radical hospitality daily. "I hope to take everything that I have learned in the last year and really work on making the Friedenshaus a place where people want to be, and that has an impact on the community," she said. "I met a lot of people at the conference, and networking is an important aspect of my work, so I hope that I can use and grow my connections with people doing similar work in Europe and around the world."

Peacebuilding through theatre

Kroeker and Zerbe weren't the only Canadian Mennonites who spoke at the conference.

Ontario's Theatre of the Beat performed its acclaimed play, *#ChurchToo*, which includes seven vignettes showing the traumatic experiences of assault and abuse within church communities.

From the secret relationship between a woman and her pastor, and discriminatory church policies, to coming forward with allegations of impropriety by people in



PHOTO COURTESY OF SILVIE KROEKER

Silvie Kroeker speaks at the Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference in the Netherlands with her father, Gordon Zerbe.

power, the play looks at the dynamics of power and sexual abuse in what is supposed to be a safe place.

Artistic director Johnny Wideman said the play was an exercise in holding a door open to talk about an issue that causes division in the Mennonite church. He noted that conflict is sometimes avoided, as it's seen as breaking the peace.

"Hurts need healing, and sometimes conflict is the only way to bring about a truly restorative justice," he said. "Right now, that conflict is acknowledging that abuse has been allowed and sometimes permitted to exist within our church communities, communities where we were told we could be safe and trust each other."

Wideman said the play was well received by its audience, which was striking.

"It's powerful, and somewhat disheartening, to know that the themes of gender and power and abuse ring true across the globe," he said. "Many shared their own stories of abuse with us, and expressed sincere gratitude for the difficult and often emotionally draining work of putting on such a play. We hope to return to Europe, and hopefully abroad, in order to continue sharing *#ChurchToo* with anyone who will host it." ❧

Queer hymns now online

By Rachel Bergen
Contributing Editor

Growing up, Cedar Klassen loved singing hymns.

Klassen's family would gather around the dinner table singing verses from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, and later *Sing the Journey* and *Sing the Story*, in four-part harmony. After taking a course in hymnology at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont., Klassen chose to write a thesis on hymns but wasn't sure what to focus on. That is, until coming across an article in *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* that focused on queer hymns, or hymns by and for people from the LGBTQ+ community.

Klassen ended up compiling more than 100 worship songs that were already published on a website called queerhymns.org as part of the thesis. Somehow it didn't seem like enough, though.

"I wanted to do more with that," Klassen said. "I wanted to get queer hymns into more people's hands."

Two years ago, Klassen, who is a *Canadian Mennonite* board member, attended a Hymn Society conference, at which an idea for a hymn collection representing the LGBTQ+ community sprang to mind. However, it just stayed an idea at that point.

The next year, that idea came to fruition. A group of eight people came together to produce *Songs for the Holy Other: Hymns Affirming the LGBTQIA2S+ Community*, with Klassen serving as coordinator of the volunteer-run working group.

Individuals, groups and churches are now able to download the collection from The Hymn Society website, with the opportunity to use it freely for 60 days. After that, if they want to continue using the music, they have to buy it.

Klassen said the collection is made up of hymns celebrating the LGBTQ+ community within the church and lamenting harms done against its members in the name of Christ. Simply put, "Songs for the Holy Other is exclusively content that speaks to our community," Klassen said.

The hymns also avoid using pronouns for God and binary language for humans like "he" and "her," and they avoid "kingdom" and "Lord" language.

Klassen believes these hymns are an important way to embrace LGBTQ+ people in the church: "To fully include any group in the full life of a church, they need to be represented in the songs we sing. Hymns shape our faith, they shape our theology; singing together builds community. If we're not represented in the hymns we sing, then we're not represented in the full life of the church."

Klassen said that being a part of the hymnal group was a natural decision: "For me, it brings together my love of hymns, which has always been an important part of my faith as a Mennonite, with my queer identity, which is an important part of my life, my identity, my journey. Queerness shapes how I see my faith and how I see God. That's also hugely shaped by hymns."

SONGS FOR THE HOLY OTHER

HYMNS AFFIRMING THE
LGBTQIA2S+ COMMUNITY



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE HYMN SOCIETY

Songs for the Holy Other is a project of The Hymn Society.

So being able to bring those together is extremely important for me."

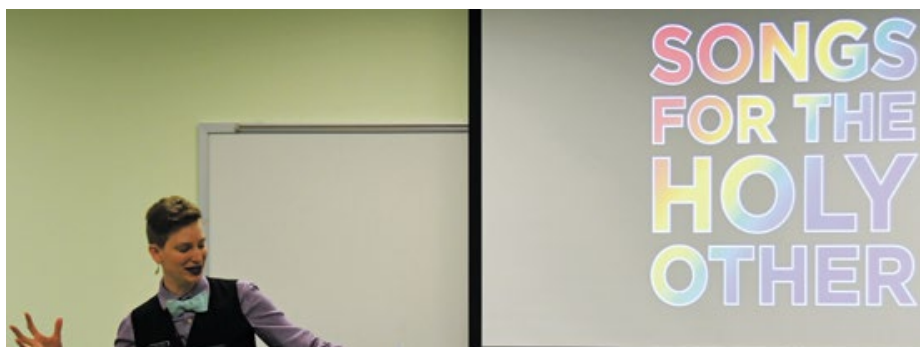
But it was also a deeply personal decision. "It's the collection I need personally," Klassen said. "I needed it five years ago as I was navigating my identity. It's what I need now as I continue to advocate for change in the church."

This is the first collection of its kind from The Hymn Society, which aims to encourage, promote and enliven congregational singing in Canada and the United States.

Moving forward, Klassen said the group is interested in making more collections of LGBTQ+ hymns rather than something bigger, like a hymnal: "We're thinking smaller collections that can be turned around faster might be better."

"The terminology we use for our community changes so fast," Klassen said. "Hymns that feel really great and relevant for our community one year, might not in five years." ❧

To download *Songs for the Holy Other* for a 60-day free trial, visit bit.ly/songs-for-the-holy-other.



Cedar Klassen presents the new collection of LGBTQ+ hymns to The Hymn Society.

A journey from fundamentalism to freedom

New intentional transitional pastor hopes to help Foothills Mennonite 'see who they really are and who they want to be'

By Joanne De Jong
Alberta Correspondent
CALGARY

Donna Dinsmore never felt she fit into church life.

"I wanted to serve in the church and I loved God, but I didn't feel called to work with small children and I didn't make casseroles," she says. "Becoming an adult single woman in the church was difficult. I was a third-class citizen. Women were treated as second-class citizens, and if you were unmarried, you were considered third-class."

Today, she is serving at Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary as intentional transitional pastor, following on the heels of Doug Klassen, who served as senior pastor for 20 years before accepting the call to serve as executive minister of Mennonite Church Canada.

Dinsmore loves her new role, but her journey to ordination and interim pastoral work has been long and difficult. It was only a little over five years ago that she had to ask herself, "Am I really going to move into ordained ministry and shame my family?" She expressed the joy of being affirmed by God for this special ministry, and in 2013 she was ordained by the United Church of Canada.

Her Christian roots go deep into the rocky soil of what became American fundamentalism in the early 1900s. When she was 18 years old, she left Maine for South Carolina, where both the religious and secular cultures were quite conservative. Since there was really no opportunity to serve in a leadership capacity in the church, she poured herself into her career as a high-school music teacher for 17 years. Given a place to express her gifts, she received the District Teacher of the Year Award in 1995 and, in addition to directing and competing with multiple choirs over the years, she has personally



performed at New York's Carnegie Hall on two occasions.

"Mennonites love me because I get people singing in harmony," she says. "Some say I love four-part harmony more than the Mennos; this is my bread and butter, my heart and soul. The challenge is to keep it from becoming an idol."

How did she escape fundamentalism into a "life of freedom"?

Dinsmore talks about a friend who invited her to L'Abri in Massachusetts, a community that has been welcoming those who are seeking answers to life's many questions since 1979. "It was here that I



Donna Dinsmore served from 2015 to 2017 as minister of the Bella Coola Pastoral Charge while living on the Nuxalk Nation in British Columbia.

met my very first feminist—and it was a man," she says.

Her life started to turn in a new direction as she was treated with dignity and her questions were taken seriously. After two years, someone asked, "If you could do anything you'd like in the world, what would you do?" To her own surprise, she found herself answering, "I would go to seminary."

Next thing she knew, she was selling her home and packing up her Honda Civic as she drove across the continent to Vancouver, where she earned a master of Christian studies degree at Regent College.

Since graduation in 2003, she has been involved in a wide range of ministries, including a pastoral charge in Bella Coola, B.C., where she lived on the Nuxalk Nation from 2015 to 2017. This position dramatically changed her. Being white, and in light of all the residential school abuse, she had to repeatedly remind herself she was representing Jesus and not the church. It was a challenging call, with hours of waiting, listening and crying.

Over two years, she conducted 26 funerals that were often tragedies. All she knew was to love her congregants, and when her term ended, she was strengthened in a way that could never be taken away.

Her next charge was Edmonton First Mennonite Church, where she served for two years as interim pastor from 2017 to 2019. It was in this place that her passion and gifting really became evident.

Ev Buhr, church member for almost 30 years, describes how much she appreciated Dinsmore's approach: "Donna came to us as an unknown. Her background wasn't Mennonite. . . . Her questions about traditions and 'the way we've always done things' called us to examine what

our Mennonite traditions and practices were, and what traditions were unique to our congregation.”

Of her experience at First Mennonite, Dinsmore says: “Mennonites have a keen interest and awareness of their heritage. They know their family stories but are very stoic about their pain.”

As far as beliefs go, she says Mennonites share common values but different understandings of what those values mean. Part of the challenge at First was to get people to shift from being entrenched in their personal viewpoints to talking and listening to each other.

Dinsmore is now a month into her new role at Foothills Mennonite as intentional transitional pastor. “This is not normal pastoring,” she says. “It can’t be rushed. Because I come from the outside, I can help [congregants and church leaders] see who they really are and who they want to be. I can offer them what I never received in my fundamentalist upbringing.” ❧



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Anna Wiebe challenges herself

The New Hamburg, Ont.-raised singer-songwriter talks about her new album, *All I Do Is Move*.

canadianmennonite.org/wiebechallenges



Swiss forgive, don't forget

A surprise apology for the persecution of Anabaptists in Switzerland prompted a ceremony of reconciliation.

canadianmennonite.org/swissforgive



Watch: Mailboxes and church membership

Pastor Kyle Penner talks about church membership and voluntary service in a humorous, 10-minute talk.

canadianmennonite.org/video/membership



Summer vacation

On the blog: “Just because we take a vacation from ordinary life does not mean that the events of ordinary daily life vacate us.”

canadianmennonite.org/blog/gb-vacation



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Calendar

Nationwide

Oct. 5: Ride for Refuge in support of MC Canada's International Witness workers who serve around the world. Bikers and walkers welcome to participate. For more information, or to register, visit home.mennonitechurch.ca/Ride2019.

British Columbia

Sept. 13-14: MCC Festival for World Relief at Tradex in Abbotsford. For more information contact bcoffice@mccbca.ca or call 604-850-6639.

Sept. 21: Camp Squeah Paddle-a-thon down the Harrison River. For more information contact info@squeah.com.

Sept. 21: Mennonite Heritage Museum, Abbotsford, hosts the launch of *Refugees and Ambassadors: Mennonite Missions in Brazil*, by Victor Wiens, at 2 p.m.

Saskatchewan

Sept. 5-Nov. 28: MC Saskatchewan and CMU present the course "Peace, violence and the atonement," each Thursday from 6 to 8:45 p.m. at the MCC Centre in Saskatoon. Instructor: Susanne Guenther Loewen. For more information, visit mcsask.ca/peace-violence-the-atonement-course/.

Sept. 14: Shekinah bike-paddle-hike-a-thon, at 9 a.m. Bike from Saskatoon, canoe from Petrofka or hike at Shekinah. For more information, visit www.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

Until Sept. 14: Manitoba Society of Artists' 87th annual juried exhibition, at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg.

Sept. 28: 35th annual Brandon MCC Relief Sale, at the Keystone Centre, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Includes a noon meal of perogies and farmer sausage, children's hands-on activities, and a sale of meats and garden produce.

Ontario

Until Oct. 25: "New Fraktur," featuring recent works by Meg Harder,

at the Grebel Gallery at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo.

Sept. 6-8: "Building community" retreat at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. Speakers: Scott Robertson and Katie Gingerich. Theme: "The theory of conflict and resolution." For more information, call 519-625-8602.

Sept. 13, 15: "Training active bystanders," a program by MCC Ontario and Quabbin Mediation to help participants intervene when they witness abusive, isolating or stigmatizing behaviour; at 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener; (13) at 8:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., (15) at 2 p.m. For more information or to register, visit mcco.ca/events.

Sept. 13-16: Anabaptist Learning Workshop canoe trip ("Canoe tripping as a spiritual practice:

ServiceLinks

Advertisers on this page may designate a 1/6 page ad to a charity of their choice. To learn more: advert@canadianmennonite.org

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- Short-term (1-3 weeks): 1-800-241-8111
- Long-term (1 month+): 1-866-261-1274
- RV Program volunteers
- Youth volunteers

Volunteers needed for Spring 2019

- Grand Forks, B.C.
- Westport, N.L.
- Pine Ridge, S.D.
- Conway, S.C.

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MDS values partnering with the local community. This summer we are blessed by the enthusiasm of Cariboo Bethel Church (Mennonite Brethren) as they host our volunteers in BC.



mds.mennonite.net

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/.

Sept. 21: Doors Open Waterloo Region, a day of architecture, heritage and tech events, including at MCC Ontario’s headquarters at 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener.

For more information, email doorsopen@regionofwaterloo.ca.

Sept. 21: Toronto Mennonite Festival to support MCC, at Black Creek Pioneer Village, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information visit torontomennonitefestival.ca.

Sept. 23: MCC Ontario annual general meeting, at 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener. Light supper

buffet begins at 6 p.m., with meeting to follow at 6:20. For more information, visit mcco.ca/agm.

Sept. 28: Breakfast celebrating 40 years of The Mennonite Story at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, 8:30 a.m. with John Ruth as guest speaker. Tickets at mennonitestorybreakfast.eventbrite.ca.

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.



UpComing

Canadian delegates sought for GYS 2021

Applications for young adult representatives to the Global Youth Summit (GYS), to be held from July 2 to 5, 2021, in Salatiga, Indonesia, are being sought by Mennonite Church Canada’s Joint Council. The theme of GYS 2021 is “Life in the Spirit: Learn, serve, worship.” MC Canada is looking for one young adult from each of the five regional churches—one of whom will be the official delegate—to represent the nationwide church at GYS 2021, and also to attend the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) assembly a few days later. The five representatives will all work together on a GYS 2021 project that will be assigned prior to the Summit. They will also travel and attend the MWC assembly together and will write a report to MC Canada and their regional churches after their travels. MC Canada asks that the person chosen as official delegate commit to a three-year term as representative to the network of Young Anabaptists (YABs) after GYS 2021. As they will be representatives of the five regional churches, the costs of the application to GYS 2021, the MWC assembly, vaccinations and travel will be covered through MC Canada, up to \$5,000 per person. The age requirement is 18 to 30 as of July 2, 2021. Applicants must have a valid passport at the time of travel and be members of an affiliated congregation of MC Canada. For more information and to apply, visit home.mennonitechurch.ca/GYS2021. For a helpful video from Larissa Schwartz, the North American YABs representative, visit bit.ly/gys-2021-invitation. Applicants can email Joint Council member Andrea de Avila (andreadevila@mymts.net) or their regional communicator with any questions.

—MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA



Classifieds

Employment Opportunities

ABNER MARTIN MUSIC SCHOLARSHIP

This annual scholarship is awarded by Menno Singers to a student who is affiliated with a Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregation and is, or will be, in a full-time program of music study, graduate or undergraduate, during 2019-20.

Applications must be mailed by Sept. 16, 2019. For application documents or further information, contact Lewis Brubacher at phone: 519-884-3072 email: lbrubacher@sympatico.ca



Pastor (Full time)
Start Date: January 1, 2021
Winnipeg, Manitoba

For more information, to express interest, or to apply, contact Rick Neufeld at:

204-896-1616 Ext. 257 or
rneufeld@mennonitechurch.mb.ca



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Upcoming Advertising Dates

| Issue Date | Ads Due |
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| <i>Focus on Money</i> | |
| Sept. 16 | Aug. 30 |
| <i>Focus on Education</i> | |
| Sept. 30 | Sept. 16 |
| Oct. 14 | Sept. 30 |
| <i>Focus on Books & Resources</i> | |
| Oct. 28 | Oct. 14 |
| Nov. 11 | Oct. 28 |



PHOTO BY RYAN DUECK / TEXT BY JOANNE DE JONG

Members of Lethbridge (Alta.) Mennonite Church meet at the farm of Edgar and Ruth Dueck after church on June 23 to watch the immersion baptisms of Claire Dueck, 18, and Jonathan Wiebe, 22, for whom the ritual was a marker on their personal journey of faith; they chose immersion because of the symbolism of dying and rising to new life in Christ. During the service at the church earlier in the day, 79-year-old Adele Short chose to be baptized by pouring, in part because it was less physically demanding; she saw baptism as a formalization of her commitment to the Lethbridge church community.



LEAMINGTON MENNONITE HOME PHOTO

The 17th annual Leamington (Ont.) Mennonite Home golf tournament, held on June 15, raised \$65,000 for renovations to the retirement residence's dining room and servery. The tournament has become the largest in the Leamington area, and over the past 17 years it has raised a total of \$667,000. Pictured are the winners of the putting contest: Bobby Dick, Dan Dawson, Joe Friesen and Chris Guenther. Leamington Mennonite Home has served the needs of seniors in Leamington for 54 years and is the only not-for-profit charitable seniors home in the region.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GERALD AND RIE NEUFELD
/ TEXT BY AMY RINNER WADDELL

Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship of Surrey, B.C., recently participated in SurreyFest, a city festival held in a park. Pastor Gerald Neufeld, pictured at right with his wife Rie, played the koto, a Japanese harp, and shared tracts and information with people who came by. 'It was good to connect with other community organizations,' says Neufeld. 'We hope to make more connections so that our Japanese congregation can become more well-known.'



Photo finish



LEFT PHOTO BY DEBORAH GROVE-ZIGLER

Joseph Grove of Hanover (Ont.) Mennonite Fellowship, stands beside his 1000th comforter top to be donated to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). With him is his wife, Betty, who passed away after this photo was taken. After he sews the pieces together to form the tops, the sewing group from his church does the knotting and finishing of the blankets. His stockpile of donated fabric is now depleted and he hopes for more donations so he can keep going. In the last 25 years, he has made an average of 40 comforter tops each year.

RIGHT PHOTO BY HELENA BALL

Pastor Werner De Jong of Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton, carries Purity Kumba Favour Bundor around the sanctuary to introduce her to the congregation on the occasion of her baby dedication on June 2. The congregation was doubled in number that day, as many from the Liberian and Sierra Leonean communities came to celebrate. A huge lunch followed the service.

