

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

April 27, 2020 Volume 24 Number 9



## MCC set to address COVID-19 threats

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## EDITORIAL

# Testing the ties that bind

BY TOBI THIESSEN  
Publisher



**M**ore than a month into physical distancing in Canada, and the church seems to be flourishing.

Does it seem that way to you?

Having been forced to disrupt our usual worship traditions, many congregations have energetically jumped into trying new ways of being the church together. Mennonite Church Canada has been at the forefront to support this trend, promoting one service in a different province each week. (See “*Out of the boat*” on page 15.)

Churches that are newly conducting online Sunday worship services have seen high turnouts. People who have not attended in a while are joining. People who live far away are joining. People without internet access are also able to participate if the church uses a platform that allows a telephone dial-in connection. With many online options and no need to drive, some people are church-hopping to multiple services and sermons each week.

Many of us miss congregational singing, which is difficult with current technology, but people are offering musical gifts in other ways. Individual households are recording music to share with their congregations. Some people are mixing separate voices into virtual choirs to share hymns on YouTube.

The burgeoning interest in corporate worship is, of course, directly related to the isolation and boredom that people are feeling at home. A worship service offers a chance to connect with others. Our human desire to be part of a

community is a strong tie that continues to bind the church together.

In the well-known hymn, “Blessed Be the Tie that Binds,” by John Fawcett, Verse 3 says: “We share each other’s woes, each other’s burdens bear / and often for each other flows a sympathizing tear.” While many of us are excited to see each other’s faces in an online service, waving at one another on-screen or writing comments in the chat boxes, and while we are enjoying the new musical contributions, how are we doing at making sure the other ties that bind us don’t fray?

Are churches putting in place new supports to reach out to people in the congregation who may be struggling with mental health? How are we connecting with people who don’t have access to the internet?

For many households, financial losses are steep and mounting. We have a two-fold loss with the closure of camps, schools, choirs and other Mennonite agencies. These institutions cannot generate revenue without the programs they normally run, and society as a whole loses out when no one can participate in the vital programs they normally offer. Are churches talking about mutual aid funds to offer financial support to people who need it?

In places where there are COVID-19 cases, the rationale for self-isolation is obvious, but it feels less pressing for people who live in areas where there are no cases. There is a growing restlessness from some sectors that the economic losses are greater than the risk of contagion. As time passes and

economic pain grows, are we willing to continue bearing each other’s burdens?

Bryan Moyer Suderman is one of the artists who generously shares music online. He wrote on his website that the Facebook live singalongs he offers three times a week are “a way of expressing that, by doing this extraordinary thing of staying home, we are on an important mission together. While this is hard, it is a good thing to do. It is a way that we are actively showing love and care for our neighbours and others.”

The online worship services are great. Let us ensure that we bring as much energy to the deeper connections that will also be needed in the community in the coming weeks.

## How are you helping?

*Canadian Mennonite* wants to hear from you. Do you have any examples of “COVID kindnesses” to share with readers? Some people have been sewing masks and hospital gowns; others have been buying and delivering groceries for vulnerable seniors or dropping off meals for health-care workers. MennoMedia has made its Shine Sunday school curriculum available for free to people trying to do Christian education activities at home. Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary is offering free online resources “for living and worshipping through extraordinary times.” We’d like to hear about what you are doing to support your community through this pandemic. Photos are great too. Stories don’t have to be long. Please send them to us at [submit@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:submit@canadianmennonite.org) with the subject line: “COVID Kindness” or mail them to: *Canadian Mennonite*, 490 Dutton Drive, Unit C5, Waterloo, ON N2L 6H7. ☞



Funded by the  
Government  
of Canada

Canada

ISSN 1480-042X

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Thiciano Pareja Saucedo, 8, washes her hands at El Comedor de Niños, an after-school program for children in the Montero area of Bolivia, about an hour from Santa Cruz. One of its main goals is to improve nutrition and health outcomes in the community by teaching children about healthy eating, gardening and hygiene. (See story on page 16.)

PHOTO: MATTHEW SAWATZKY / MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

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General submission address: submit@canadianmennonite.org

Readers Write: letters@canadianmennonite.org

Milestones announcements: milestones@canadianmennonite.org

Calendar announcements: calendar@canadianmennonite.org

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40063104 REGISTRATION NO. 09613

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE ITEMS TO: Canadian Mennonite,  
490 Dutton Drive, Unit C5, Waterloo, ON, N2L 6H7

**Mission statement:** To educate, inspire, inform, and foster dialogue on issues facing Mennonites in Canada as it shares the good news of Jesus Christ from an Anabaptist perspective. We do this through an independent publication and other media, working with our church partners.

Published by Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service. Regional churches and MC Canada appoint directors to the board and support 38 percent of Canadian Mennonite's budget.

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### One-Year Subscription Rates

Canada: \$46 + tax (depends on province where subscriber lives)

U.S.: \$68 International (outside U.S.): \$91.10

### Subscriptions/address changes

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## FEATURE

# Encounters with the church in Cuba

By Raylene Hinz-Penner

**S**ixteen Anabaptist Christians from Canada and the United States came to Cuba from Jan. 12 to 16 to learn about the church there. I was one of them.

Jack and Irene Suderman of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont., organized our travel experience through TourMagination. Longtime students of Cuban history, economics, culture and politics, the Sudermans are friends of the Cuban church as well as teachers in Anabaptist leadership for the Brethren in Christ (BIC) Church.

We on the tour recognized daily the distinctive and unique experiences we were having in Cuba because of their many previous trips and contacts, friendships, formal relationships, and the respect they have gained from the Cuban people, fostered over the past decades.

## Worship in El Cafetal

We rouse ourselves early to leave our Havana hotel and drive 30 minutes to the little village of El Cafetal to worship with a year-old BIC house church; we are accompanied on our bus by the BIC bishop and executive secretary.

We can hear the energetic singing of some 40 to 50 congregants, half of them children, as we arrive. They clear out of the already crowded space to make room for us and then cram back in to the back of the long narrow room.

Half the house is inhabited, the other half given over for church. The BIC model for evangelism is: Grow the church in a house until a thriving congregation needs to search for a church building. This group is beginning to look for a place after only a year.

Singing is at the heart of the service. Led by a praise team, the pastor's guitar and a tambourine, all of the songs are known to everyone in attendance, including small children.

Jack interprets the sermon delivered by the young pastor who, with his wife and three children, live in a neighbouring town and come to minister on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings, and on Sunday, conducting Bible studies, worship services and lay leadership training.



PHOTOS BY JACK SUDERMAN

*Irene Suderman, centre with the blue scarf, a co-leader of the learning tour with her husband Jack, is pictured with tour members at a Brethren in Christ house church in Cuba.*

His simple and direct message is from John 14: "Love God and your neighbour." Such a command is not so easy to do in this town, we learn, where there is violence over religious faith and for other reasons.

The pastor has been stabbed. He asks us to pray for the lessening of violence and for the growth of the church's witness.

We are all grateful for the chance to walk into the village to another home for the baptism and after-service meal. The baptismal service has been created just for this occasion, tin roofing having been removed from one of the congregant's homes and stood on end to create a kind of deep horse tank. The 1.5-metre deep tank is entered via a common metal step ladder.

We are witnesses as the first baptismal candidate, an older woman who uses crutches, is helped up the ladder and over the edge and into the water. She looks solemn as the bishop lowers her down into the water and then joyful as the pastor pulls her up from the water, saying *ven*, ("come" in English).

The young pastor says this to each of the six baptismal candidates, offering his hand: "Come into this Christian



*Bishop Luis Hernandez baptizes a member of a Brethren in Christ house church in El Cafetal, Cuba.*

fellowship.” The candidates all keenly want this immersion into Christian community.

More than one of us observers wipes a tear. Of course, we are moved. Fellow Christians from the U.S. and Canada also long for baptisms, to witness new life, to see the people “come.”

After the baptism, we enjoy a sumptuous special meal prepared for us at great cost, given the poverty of the average Cuban household. We sit where we can: on available chairs and on a concrete building foundation in the yard where the children sit. We use the Spanish we know to talk with the children; we use sign language and smiles and hugs and cameras.

Our farewell embraces feel real; we are friends. Such is the enveloping kindness, warmth and acceptance of the Cuban people, even toward some of us who are Americans, whose government has made their lives hard.

### **Multiple forms of the Cuban church**

At the heart of our visit is a series of encounters with the Christian church of Cuba.

Although everyone on our tour is

Mennonite or Mennonite-connected, we spend most of our time with the BIC church, for an important reason. When Fidel Castro’s Revolution succeeded in 1959, the BIC was registered, while the Mennonite church was not. Registered churches had advantages: land was allocated for church buildings, religious visas for visiting teachers and preachers were granted, and they had the right to import religious materials.

On what is Martin Luther King Day in the U.S., we visit the Martin Luther King (MLK) Center in Havana. The pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Amos Lopez, talks to us about violence in Cuba’s history and the church’s mission to promote peace. He openly discusses the role of the government in Cuba, the validity of cooperation with the government in its social role, and love of homeland versus the prophetic message of Christianity.

We feel lucky to meet Raul Suarez, now in his 80s, who is the founder of the MLK Center and a well-known Protestant leader in Cuba described as having “a mission to ‘Anabaptize’ Cuba.” He believed that the Anabaptist faith was missing in denominational Cuba and he sought to emphasize nonviolence,

women in leadership, and opposition to capital punishment. He became the first “evangelical” in the Cuban Assembly.

Described as a kind of Billy Graham figure to Fidel Castro, Suarez served as an influencer on the Cuban revolutionary leader. His message to us: “The church’s temptation is to live for itself. Its mission is to confront the world with Jesus Christ. We need restoration and re-imagining of the roots of Christianity in our theological, biblical and liturgical practices. Christianity must evolve: for example, the church must recognize the wrongs of poverty.”

That same afternoon we meet with another amazing charismatic leader, Joel Ortega Dopico, executive secretary of the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC), a Presbyterian pastor with whom we have an amazing Q&A session. He tells us of the CCC’s sponsorship of a thousand volunteers showing Jesus through the unity of the church.

Offering background on the history of the church in revolutionary Cuba, he also reflects on why the Cuban church is growing today:

- **Church growth is** the work of the Holy Spirit, he says; there is no television evangelism or evangelistic campaigns. The church is growing in all of its varieties through the Spirit at work in individuals.
- **He also believes** that Cubans are inherently religious people by background and history, and that the church has a Cuban identity, not an imported one. The gospel is interpreted in a way that is Cuban by nature.
- **The people need** community. The Revolution has stressed a culture of solidarity, family and community—values that resonate with the message of Jesus. In Cuba, you can’t go it alone.
- **Today there is** new freedom of religion in Cuba, he says. The church was once vilified, but today people are discovering its power in their lives. People long for freedom in Cuba today, and the church represents that freedom.
- **Perhaps the shared** bond of slavery brings Cubans closer to one another in the church. The Anabaptist house-

church model works well in Cuba.

Because he knows we are Mennonites, Pastor Joel ends with a dramatic story. What is known as the Special Period—1989 to 1994—after the Soviet Union fell apart and discontinued its \$4 billion of support for Cuba, was a devastating time for the Cuban economy. People were literally starving in Cuba, he says. But Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) sent canned meat for pregnant women, to provide protein needed for the development of the babies they were carrying, which was distributed through the CCC.

Later, when John Lapp, the head of MCC during this time, came to visit Cuba—on a tour like we were experiencing—a young man who was one of those babies saved by the meat his mother received, came forward to thank Lapp, recognizing him from his picture, Pastor Joel tells us.

Our next gathering is with BIC presbyters at the BIC Training Center in Palmira, where Jack and Irene teach Anabaptist leadership courses. The presbyters are candid about their needs and wants: their desire to grow in 2020 from 100 churches to 150.

They discuss their very active prison ministries, noting that Cuba is second in the world, after the U.S., in per capita imprisonment. They testify to the fact that Cuban prisoners have become ministers in their church and they introduce one of them to us during our visit. More than 700 baptized members in prisons meet together in cell groups three times a week, we are told.

When asked about the unique contributions of the BIC Church in Cuba, they say that they preach peace, nonviolence, the importance of family life, pacifism and reconciliation. They are humble, readily admitting that peacemaking is a slow process.

Finally, the most visibly prosperous church institution we visit in Cuba is the Christian Center for Reflection and Dialogue, in Cardenas. Begun by a veteran of the Revolution, Raimundo Garcia, the Center is run today by his daughter Rita, who meets with us.

She personifies the strongest woman in leadership we see during our time in Cuba. Convincingly honest about the failures of the Cuban government and her own protests in Cuban politics, she argues for the human rights guaranteed by the Cuban Constitution. She laments the lack of opportunity for Cubans to thrive in the current system, and the departure from their homeland of the young, including her own child, who will leave Cuba for anywhere else in the world for a better life.

The Center tries to provide models and experiments that the Cuban people can imitate to improve their lives. These include fostering women's rights, family well-being, counselling for domestic abuse victims, agriculture, care for the elderly, water purification, simple organic farming and bio-gas production.

The Center receives global support and is clearly well managed. Theirs is the most direct voice we hear in Cuba on issues of human rights and the use of the Cuban Constitution.

## Lessons learned

During our stay, Jack emphasized again and again as we sought to understand Cuba, that the Revolution has been a “living experiment” for the past 60 years. All of us marvel at the resourcefulness of the Cuban people as they have lived out the experiment through its successes and failures.

We all agree that our time in Cuba was not just a life-changing learning experience, but also a powerful and moving emotional experience, people to people.

One of our group cited Luke 24:32 to sum up our time in Cuba: “*Were not our hearts burning within us?*” ❧



*Raylene Hinz-Penner is a retired English professor and writer (Bethel College and Washburn University, both in Kansas). She is a*

*member of Southern Hills Mennonite Church in Topeka, Kan. Excerpted from “Freedom in Christ” in the Feb. 24 issue of Mennonite World Review.*

## ❧ For discussion

1. What experiences have you had with Cuban people? What is the historic attitude of Canadians toward Cuba? How did the collapse of the Soviet Union affect Cuba? How have Canadian-Cuban relations been different from U.S.-Cuban relations?
2. After describing an outdoor baptism in Cuba, Raylene Hinz-Penner writes that the Cuban baptismal candidates “all keenly want this immersion into Christian community.” Why do you think these candidates are so keen for baptism? How is the worship experience she describes different from a typical worship service in your congregation?
3. Hinz-Penner says that in Cuba, “church growth is the work of the Holy Spirit.” What do you understand this to mean? Why do you think it is important that the church “has a Cuban identity, not an imported one”?
4. Hinz-Penner writes that Joel Ortega Dopico believes that Cubans are “inherently religious people by background and history.” What factors might make Cubans inclined to be religious?
5. Where do you find hope in this story? What can the church in Canada learn from Christians in Cuba?

—By Barb Draper



## /// Readers write

### ✉ **Let Wet'suwet'en exercise their right to self-determination**

**Re: "Who do you support when a community is divided?" Feb. 17, page 20.**

I appreciate *Canadian Mennonite* opening up the dialogue on the Wet'suwet'en and Coastal Gas issue from a variety of perspectives. This settler dialogue is long overdue, as Indigenous revitalization of identity, culture and the recognition of their inherent rights become stronger.

However, the historical evolution of their struggle for self-determination and self-sufficiency is often overlooked. This struggle reminds me of the parable of the widow and the unjust ruler in Luke 18: 1-8. The widow's resolute demand for justice is at first dismissed by the self-interested judge. When she refuses to let her case drop, the judge eventually gives her the justice she is entitled to.

Similarly, Indigenous persistence in their struggle for justice is finally acknowledged legally and in social policy. Indigenous identity and inherent rights, long shunted onto a neglected railway siding, have finally left the station and are making their way to your town and mine, inviting us to get on board the decolonizing and reconciliation train. This remains a work in progress that has many moving parts.

I am not surprised at the tension among the Wet'suwet'en over the proposed agreement with the B.C. and Canadian governments. It is incumbent on settler society, and especially Christian churches, to suspend judgment as the Wet'suwet'en exercise their right to self-determination affecting their traditional territory and its resources.

The critical questions for me are:

- **Will the church** fully embrace reconciliation with God, all our neighbours and the Earth, as the central point of the good news of the gospel?
  - **Will the church** harness its considerable privilege to decolonize itself by supporting the efforts of Indigenous people to achieve a measure of social, political and economic justice in Canadian society?
- JOHANN FUNK, SURREY, B.C.

### ✉ **God is also exclusive**

**Re: "God is inclusive, not exclusive!" March 2, page 9.**

I respect Donna Entz for pointing out that God's love reaches every person, including me. However, in his Word, God also tells us that he is holy. Jesus also

tells us that he is "*the Way, the Truth and the Life.*" And then Jesus promises his followers that he will send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

These characteristics of our Triune God reveal to us that God is also exclusive. I find it amazing how God applies his exclusivity to make us holy, to find the way, to experience the truth, to inherit life and to be comforted in our state of exclusion to be included in his kingdom.

It looks to me that God is exclusively inclusive, with his gracious, inclusive *agape* love.

ERWIN STREMPER, CALGARY

### ✉ **Will Braun 'nails it' with his Easter feature**

**Re: "Out of holy weakness, mysterious power arises," March 16, page 4.**

I appreciate Will Braun's creative way of interviewing pastors regarding the cross and resurrection as posed to 12-year-olds. Brilliant. Then, with all due respect to the interviewees, Braun the journalist himself nails it better than I have heard from any preacher in the near or distant past.

In these recent years of denominational reorganization and program cuts, he ventures straight into some urgent theology that is mostly being avoided these days! If pastors have problems with Jesus dying for our sins, and don't want to use traditional language, whatever is wrong with just stating it the way it's described in the Bible: "[Jesus] died not with a fist in the air, but with arms spread helpless. Out of holy weakness, mysterious power arises."

After hearing that I am so ready for resurrection! I know for a fact that no 12-year-old or senior citizen, whether devout Christian or agnostic, will take offence.

And I would recommend this writer as guest speaker for "deeper life" services in one of our churches somewhere.

JACOB FROESE, CALGARY

### ✉ **Messages to repent needed at this time**

**Re: "Love in the time of COVID-19" feature, March 30, page 4.**

My heart is warmed that Bibles are selling well right now at Walmart in the United States, where COVID-19 is rampant. No doubt the increased sales of Bibles is a response from people who are gripped with fear and uncertainty over the coronavirus. It is my prayer that they will find comfort, hope and light in the pages of God's Word.

I've been researching what is being taught from

“virtual pulpits” these days in the hope of finding many pastors demonstrating love to their people by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ with a strong message of repentance. Instead, I’ve found some pastors acknowledging their hearers’ anxiety with empathy, but without emphasizing trust in Jesus Christ through these uncertain times. Perhaps some uncertainties and fears were eased superficially for the moment, but I believe that more than that is needed—especially right now.

On the upside, an unknown man said this about what we are doing right now: “God has eternity in mind. . . . God knocks hard on the doors of hard hearts. That’s one of the things God is doing here. This is not judgment on any particular people or country. It’s a wakeup call to all, whether you’ve known the gospel and turned aside, or never really heard. This is God knocking.”

I believe this man was speaking out of concern and love for others and I appreciate his candour. The vitally important message of repentance needs to be heard often.

ELAINE FEHR (ONLINE COMMENT)

## ✉ Coronavirus fear and suffering

### What if we saw our current pandemic situation from a different perspective? A blessing perhaps? That doesn’t make much sense at such a time.

A short while ago I had a dream. I was at a lecture and the speaker asked: “Enos, what does ‘con-blessing’ mean?” It was dark, and I saw and heard nothing else. What does “con-blessing” mean? The next day I began to search, and this is what I found. “Con,” as in “pro and con,” means “a disadvantage of, or argument against something.”

Could our current situation of isolation and fear be a “con-blessing” to help us become more understanding and caring of what many have and are experiencing:

- **Refugees in camps** or fleeing danger and leaving friends and relatives behind?
- **Homeless people** who have no home to isolate in?

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- **For those with little hope** of there ever being any change?

Perhaps in every contrary thing in our lives there lurks a hidden blessing.

ENOS KIPFER, LONDON, ONT.

## /// Milestones

### Births/Adoptions

**Good**—Madelyn May (b. March 12, 2020), to Daryl and Amy Good, Breslau Mennonite, Ont.

**Kirkaldy**—Georgia Elizabeth Taylor (b. March 4, 2020), to Jennifer and Owen Kirkaldy, First Mennonite, Edmonton.

**Muehling**—Elise Corinne (b. Jan. 22, 2020), to Melanie (Schellenberg) and Jonathan Muehling, Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

### Deaths

**Ens**—Irene (nee Peters), 88 (b. March 27, 1932; d. April 3, 2020), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

**Epp**—Alfred, 89 (b. Sept. 7, 1930; d. March 2, 2020), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

**Epp**—Irene (Tiessen), 88 (b. Oct. 6, 1931; d. March 23, 2020), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

**Falk**—Walter, 88 (b. June 6, 1931; d. March 18, 2020), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

**Fehr**—Archie, 84 (b. June 15, 1935; d. March 15, 2020), Lethbridge Mennonite, Alta.

**Hoepfner**—Peter Z., 83 (b. Jan. 26, 1937; d. April 5, 2020), Morden Mennonite, Man.

**Hooge**—Katherine (nee Hamm), 94 (b. Jan. 13, 1926; d. March 19, 2020), Rosthern Mennonite, Sask.

**Martin**—Carol (Shantz), 79 (b. Dec. 27, 1940; d. Feb. 16, 2020), Bethel Mennonite, Elora, Ont.

**Nafziger**—Lena (Horst), 90 (b. April 7, 1929; Oct. 9, 2019), Bethel Mennonite, Elora, Ont.

**Pries**—Jake, 93 (b. March 24, 1927; d. March 29, 2020), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

**Shoemaker**—Milt, 88 (b. Nov. 12, 1930; d. Oct. 17, 2020), Bethel Mennonite, Elora, Ont.

**Snyder**—Mabel (Yoder), 103 (b. May 12, 1916; d. Feb. 18, 2020), Shantz Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

**Wagler**—Donald Clare, 78 (b. Dec. 7, 1941; d. March 21, 2020), Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

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



## FROM OUR LEADERS

## 'Peace be with you'

Ken Warkentin

**T**here is a post-resurrection story that I find helpful this Easter as I contemplate the changing world around me.

It is found in the Gospel of John, where we read that Jesus encounters his closest friends in their hiding place where they are holed up and fearing for their lives. We are told they are in hiding because they are afraid of the religious authorities. I wonder if they were also ashamed that they had abandoned Jesus and were afraid to admit that they had followed another messiah wannabe.

I find it interesting that it is in this setting that the Risen One greets them with "Peace be with you," and not just once but twice, and then again when his friend Thomas joins them. Jesus' greeting is a beautiful beginning to building and repairing relationships that transcend fear, betrayal and anger.

"Peace be with you." These are not often the first words uttered when meeting someone who has wronged or betrayed us. A more natural response

would be punishment in the form of aggression or judgment. Because I am a Mennonite steeped in pacifism, my aggression usually takes a passive form, which is no less damaging to relationships. Many of us who have felt betrayed like to own the right to inflict hurt on those who have wronged us. Even if we don't act on that impulse, it makes us feel good to know we have that right.

But the disciples may have been feeling anger toward Jesus. Just days earlier they had witnessed Jesus' power over death with the resurrection of Lazarus. They likely trusted him to carry that power into their lives and the lives of their community. Then they watched Jesus squander that opportunity and let himself be crucified in a terrifying way. Perhaps they felt betrayed as well. When you consider the complicated relationship between Jesus and his disciples, you begin to realize that there was enough disappointment to be shared by everyone.

The world around us is changing dramatically, just as it was for the

disciples. The novel coronavirus has halted the frenetic pace of our world and has very quickly seeped into our psyche. This sickness has touched millions of lives and has caused fear, anxiety and anger in billions more. In this state we can so quickly assign responsibility for failure to keep us safe from all harm. We blame governments, foreigners, the rich who can afford to travel, or the poor who can't afford to stay at home or wash as frequently as recommended. Again, there is plenty of disappointment to go around.

As I anticipate significant changes in our economy, health system, educational institutions, governments and churches, I read this story as a template for an adequate Christian response to massive shifts. Jesus' prayer still works God's grace into difficult and changing times: "Peace be with you." ❧



*Ken Warkentin is the executive minister of Mennonite Church Manitoba. His hair is getting long because of*

*social isolation so he is sending an old photo to keep his mother happy.*

## A moment from yesterday



**Conscientious objectors (COs) played an important role on the Canadian volunteer scene during the Second World War. Among the assignments was work in the forests around Banff, Alta., clearing trees. Surprisingly, much of the parks system in Canada was established by these people, some of whom were less than willing to be there or do the work. Among them were the unemployed, prisoners of war and Mennonite COs. Pictured, from left to right: Bill Elias, David T. Wall and John Knelsen stand on a hillside in the wintertime in Banff National Park cutting trees as a part of their CO work.**

Text: Robb Nickel, Mennonite Heritage Archives volunteer  
Photo: David T. Wall Collection / Mennonite Heritage Archives



## THIRD WAY FAMILY

## Work-play-rest

Christina Bartel Barkman

As our life has quite abruptly and drastically shifted, along with everyone's around the globe, I have been reflecting on our daily rhythm and working at reorganizing our schedule into a work-play-rest rhythm.

We used to really enjoy a lazy Saturday with no plans or structure. The kids would play, my husband and I would chat and sip coffee in our pyjamas, and we'd maybe go for a walk or bike ride if everyone was up for it. After a full week of school, work and other after-school activities, it felt really good to rest on a Saturday. It was part of our rhythm.

But then COVID-19 shocked us into a new reality, and suddenly every day was a Saturday for us and not so special anymore.

Once spring break was over, I knew we needed some structure to our days at home. I started developing a schedule with my kids, brainstorming what we wanted these home-school days to look like and trying out our new daily rhythm.

I wanted to be intentional with our time, yet not rigid with it. What I've come up with is a simple work-play-rest rhythm to our day. We start our day with reading and school work, then playtime (usually outside), and then rest, which means my toddler has a nap

and the other three kids have independent quiet time in their room or outside. We loosely follow this rhythm again, with another block of school, often followed by a bike ride, then settling down in the evening and reading before going to bed.

I know many people aren't at home with kids all day, and those who live alone, for example, are in a completely

different situation than I am. But I do think this rhythm of work-play-rest can be helpful for anyone.

My kids have a Winnie-the-Pooh book called *Pooh Helps Out* where Pooh wants to "do nothing," but finds it quite boring, so he asks Piglet if he wants to do nothing with him. As the story unfolds, Pooh ends up helping each of his friends in different ways, and at the end of the story Pooh says, "Whew, it feels good to rest. Doing nothing is much more fun after a busy day of helping." I think we all know this feeling. If we are working or helping and keeping busy, then rest is all that sweeter—not boring at all!

Choosing to be intentional with our

time, and making a plan for when to work, when to play and when to rest, is a great way to stay physically and emotionally healthy. Try brainstorming ideas of what you consider work, play and rest, then set goals and make a schedule. For those working full time, it might be the play and rest that's the harder part to identify and prioritize, and with the new limits to our lives we

### I wanted to be intentional with our time, yet not rigid with it.

might need to get extra creative!

While making a schedule for my kids wasn't so difficult, prioritizing all three aspects for my own life has not been so easy. I have had to get creative with my own rest, but within my busy days I do make it a priority to fit in quiet walks at the river, prayer time in the evening and phone calls with family.

I hope you can also find a healthy work-play-rest balance! ☺



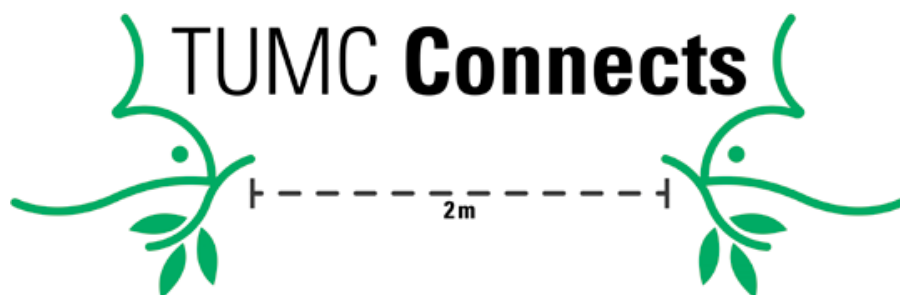
*Christina Bartel Barkman, with her four little ones and her pastor husband, seeks to live out Jesus' creative and loving "third way" options.*

## Et cetera

### Design responds to COVID-19

Congregants of Toronto United Mennonite Church used their creative skills to communicate about the coronavirus pandemic. Cedric Martin and designer Jon Owen, with input from the church's pastors, used the logo of Mennonite Church Canada and added a measurement arrow to remind their community of the recommended minimal physical distancing between individuals. The church has been meeting weekly via teleconferencing.

Source: Virginia A. Hostetler



## THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

## Salt for the earth

Arli Klassen

These weeks of physical distancing, including Easter, have forced us to think more about what it means to be the church. We appreciate the phrase “the church has left the building!” We identify with Jesus’s disciples on Easter, huddled behind locked doors, filled with fear and despair. I have begun thinking about the church in these days using two more images from Jesus.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his followers that in building the Kingdom of God we are to be like salt, where a little salt sprinkled through some other food makes it all taste better. But we don’t want any lumps of salt in the bread or in our meat dish! Sometimes I wonder if our congregations seem more like lumps of salt, or whether we really are sprinkles of salt throughout our communities and neighbourhoods.

Similarly, Jesus compared building the Kingdom of God to a little bit of yeast that is sprinkled throughout a whole lot of flour. No lumps are wanted here either! Certainly not in the Easter bread (paska) that I was happy to make a few days ago.

Sometimes we long for the nurturing community of our own congregation. Like everyone else, I love seeing everyone’s faces on Zoom when we

connect together these days. We are hungry to be gathered together.

And yet we are forced to be a scattered church, sprinkled here and there like salt and yeast.

I am reminded of the stories I hear from Ethiopia, about how they grew from 5,000 to 34,000 members in the days and years of persecution in the 1980s. They were not allowed to meet in groups larger than five people, so they met in very small cell groups in homes for Bible study and prayer. They emerged stronger than before these rules limiting religion were enforced, even with their leaders jailed for years. The principles of church growth that stood them well in those days continue to mean they are one of the fastest growing Anabaptist churches in the world today. They are salt; they are yeast.

I also love to hear the stories about how different church leaders are responding to needs around them in these days of lockdowns around the world.

Luis Hernandez, leader of the Brethren in Christ Church in Cuba, has been sending me pictures of how he and his wife cook huge pots of food in their home kitchen and share it with hungry people around them. They are salt; they

are yeast.

In Ohio, a local business has turned to the Amish community to sew thousands of pieces of personal protective equipment for its medical frontline workers. In Kitchener, Ont., I have joined a Facebook group that is also sewing for medical workers, a group that started by connecting church-based sewing groups with a local fabric store. There are groups of people like this sewing in most communities across Canada and the United States. They are salt; they are yeast.

The church is the church, whether gathered or scattered. Being scattered sometimes makes it more possible to be salt and to be yeast. These are hard times but, just like in Ethiopia, my prayer is that the church will emerge stronger and saltier than we were before: “You are salt for the earth, O people / Salt for the Kingdom of God / Share the flavour of life, O people / Life in the Kingdom of God!” ☞



*Arli Klassen is working from home in Kitchener, Ont., for Mennonite World Conference, baking with yeast whenever a good source is found.*

## Et cetera



## MCC ploughs for peace in South Korea

Pax participant Alan Litwiller ploughs a local farmer’s rice paddy with a new garden tractor, in this 1963 photo. Litwiller was serving at the Mennonite Vocational School near Kyung San, South Korea, which was started in 1952 to provide vocational training for orphaned boys. The garden tractor was an attempt at limited mechanization by Mennonite Central Committee, in which a keen interest was shown by Korean farmers of the surrounding community.

Source: MCC / Photo by John Zook





## LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

# The power of paradox

Troy Watson

Christianity is rooted in paradox. A paradox is when two or more incompatible truths are held together to reveal a deeper hidden truth. An example of a paradox in Christianity is that the Kingdom of God is both already here and still coming in the future. Other examples include:

- **God is three** and one.
- **The first will** be last.
- **You must die** to live.
- **Jesus was born** of a virgin.
- **Jesus is 100 percent** God and 100 percent human.
- **Jesus is the** Lion of Judah and the Lamb who was slain.

These paradoxes turn out to be keys that unlock doors to the hidden deeper truth of Spirit. The door to deeper truth isn't opened by solving the logical contradiction of paradox though. It's opened by allowing paradox to break through our current patterns of thinking and create space in us for new ways of thinking.

Jesus says to his disciples in Luke 8:10: *"The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."* Jesus intentionally teaches people so they will not understand what he is saying. Why? Because you can't put new wine into old wineskins. Because we prefer the taste of the old wine.

Human beings naturally resist and reject "truth" that doesn't fit their worldview, their current way of thinking. Our minds react to foreign "truths" like the body's immune system reacts to foreign bodies such as viruses. Our immune system perceives them to be a threat and instinctively rejects and resists them. We don't consciously choose to fight off viruses and bacteria.

It's a default response.

So it is with the mind. We don't consciously choose to reject and resist ideas that pose a threat to our current worldview and understanding of reality. It's a default response of the mind in order to preserve stability and sanity. It's how we maintain meaning in life. Jesus understands this. This is why he doesn't just tell people truth directly. He tells them a parable they won't understand, inviting them into a riddle, a puzzle, a mystery.

Most of us are helpless against the lure of puzzles, riddles and mysteries. We are naturally drawn to them, like moths to a flame. Jesus understands this

to elevate one side of the paradox at the expense of the other. We solve the God-man paradox by making Jesus a human being with a dash of divinity, a divine anointing perhaps. Or we inflate Jesus' divinity and diminish his humanity to the point where the idea of Jesus defecating seem blasphemous.

G.K. Chesterton— an English writer, philosopher, lay theologian, and literary and art critic, who has been referred to as the "prince of paradox"—says that whenever the church moves towards one side of the paradox at the expense of the other, she falls into heresy. He writes: "Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious oppo-

**'Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious. (G.K. Chesterton)**

and he teaches in a way that captures people's imaginations. People are drawn to Jesus not because they understand his message but because they don't.

As drawn as we are to riddles and mysteries, our compulsion is to figure them out. It's difficult to let a paradox remain a paradox. Our inclination is to solve it. One of the most common ways to solve a paradox is to cut both sides down to size so they are no longer incompatible.

For example, if we make Jesus half God and half human this resolves the God-man paradox. A centaur, who is half man and half horse, is strange and mythical, but at least we can picture it in our minds. But not so a creature that's 100 percent horse and 100 percent human. A Jesus who is half God and half human might be strange and mythical, but he's no longer a paradox.

The second way we solve a paradox is

sites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious."

The early church recognized the tension of its paradoxical beliefs and learned it was essential to embrace this tension. For it was in this tension that the transformative power of the gospel resided.

Paradox dismantles our attachment to dualistic thinking. It emancipates us from intellectual slavery. It awakens us from dogmatic slumber and opens our inner beings to the deeper transformative truth of Spirit. That's the power of paradox. And it begins by inviting us to hold two seemingly contradictory truths at the same time. ☸



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

## VIEWPOINT

## A fool's errand?

Ryan Dueck

I've been out in Winnipeg attending a pastors conference on faith formation in a secular age.

At one point during the proceedings, the keynote speaker, Andrew Root, asked a couple of gut-level questions:

- **Why does faith** formation seem so hard in this time and place?
- **Why does it** feel so hard to be a pastor in this time and place?

The answer to both, according to Root, is that in a relatively short period of time (historically speaking), faith in the West has been almost completely dislodged from the taken-for-granted bedrock of almost everyone's experiences and assumptions. Now, where



church looking for a bit of inspiration, therapy, distraction or connection with friends. We come because it's one of the last places people sing or eat together. We come out of habit or duty, because we want to get out of the house for a few hours or because we like to feel "spiritual."

- **We may even** come because we are curious about God. But, of course, we take what the preacher says with a grain of salt. We're not idiots, after all! We are rational, modern, enlightened human beings.

I was speaking about some of these matters with my host at the bed and breakfast where I stayed during the conference. Once he heard about the topic, the floodgates were opened.

## What will become of our institutions? How will faith be formed in our young if the elders die?

faith exists at all, it is mostly private; mostly practical; and often individualistic, consumeristic and therapeutic. Faith is far from the response to questions of existential life and death that it once was. It is now almost fully tailored to the felt needs of the self and its projects and ambitions.

This does make forming faith in people hard. It does make being a pastor hard. Few pastors need to look far to see evidence of this. The secular age is where we live and move and have our being:

- **Churches are shrinking**, obviously. And even those who are in church often treat it as one more thing to do with their discretionary time.
- **Few people come** to church agonizing over the state of their souls, as they might have centuries ago. We come to

He began to essentially narrate the "view from the pew" of the decline of the church in a secular age. He was part of a massive and influential church that had contributed to the founding of schools, parachurch ministries, programs and cultural events in the city, that now finds its pews emptier, its budgets smaller, its congregants older.

He spoke of empty Sunday school rooms that used to bustle with children's activities and now simply serve as storage space for donations for refugees.

He recalled the last time the choir sang "Brahms' Requiem" for Easter, and how there weren't that many more people in the congregation than in the choir.

He lamented the absence of middle-aged and younger people in the hands-on work of the church, and he wondered why it was the seniors that

often have to carry the load. He wondered how much longer they can do this and what will happen to the church when they can't do it anymore.

What will become of our institutions? How will faith be formed in our young if the elders die?

We sat with these questions for a while. The structures and institutions that formed many of us in the Christian faith don't seem to be being embraced with any enthusiasm by upcoming generations. The structures and institutions aren't perfect, of course. And, of course, God can always do something new. But I don't know what will happen if these die. I don't know what this will mean for our future.

At the end of one of Root's presentations, someone asked if it will be up to the theologians and poets to "re-enchant" the world in a secular age? Or is this a fool's errand?

Root paused before responding. And his response wasn't what I expected. He said something to the effect of, "Yeah, I think it probably is a fool's errand. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. What else can we do? Isn't the message and the way of the cross on some level always destined to be seen as foolishness?"

Near the end of my conversation with my B&B host, there was a long pause and we were just silent. After a few seconds had passed, he sighed, "Well, this year we have enough people to fill four rows of the choir loft to sing 'Brahms' Requiem.' And so we'll sing."

Yes. We should definitely sing while we can. It's probably a fool's errand, but that doesn't mean it's not worth doing.

✎

*Originally posted in a longer format on Feb. 12, 2020, at [ryandueck.com/2020/02/12/a-fools-errand/](http://ryandueck.com/2020/02/12/a-fools-errand/).*



## PERSONAL REFLECTION

## A bit of 'colour' inside

Donita Wiebe-Neufeld

I like to bring simple card-making supplies into the secure unit of the Edmonton Institution for Women. The inmates enjoy the chance to be creative but, more than that, they crave an opportunity to make something to send to family on the outside. Life stories bubble up as they write in the cards, and I listen.

I've heard heartwarming and heart-breaking things, but last summer

women are mothers, separated from their babies by prison walls and painful histories.

The young woman continued: "We don't get any smells in here. The only thing that has any smell is my shampoo."

Unfortunately, the wipes I brought were unscented.

"But they still smell like babies," another woman told me as she pressed a



PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

**I can understand why no one pulls a lonely yellow-flowered weed out of a crack. It is the only spot of living colour other than the empty sky above.**

something startled my eyes open anew. As I pulled supplies out of a clear plastic tub, I set a packet of baby-wipes on the table, intended for cleaning stamps.

The women immediately focused on it with an obvious hunger.

"Can I smell them?" one twentysomething asked.

My heart shattered with sudden understanding. Most of these young

wipe to her face and closed her eyes.

Prison life is deprivation. In the secure unit, there are no perfumes, no smells of cooking, no air-conditioning when the sun beats in and no air movement in the bedrooms. It is a loss of control of your body as you are "patted down" each day. It is absence of safety in tight spaces full of volatile people. It is isolation from family and friends. Connections with



GOOGLE MAPS PIC

*The Edmonton Institute for Women.*

nature are missing in the too-small, brick-and-wire yard, where you might get to spend an hour.

I can understand why no one pulls a lonely yellow-flowered weed out of a crack. It is the only spot of living colour other than the empty sky above.

If your family does not visit, you also carry the pain of abandonment. I haven't yet heard an inmate say she doesn't deserve prison. Most understand their need for separation from the situations that resulted in their crime, but they still want to love their families.

What good does all this extra deprivation accomplish when the incarcerated are so often already damaged from the lack of safety, healthy relationships and positive opportunities in their lives on the outside?

How can healing happen when all that gives life fragrance, colour and good connections is withheld?

"I like it when your group comes; otherwise I don't get visitors," a young inmate told us.

We will continue to show up and bring a few moments of laughter over a game, a listening ear and a chance to create cards, in order to help a woman connect with her family.

Perhaps our visits can bring just a bit of "colour" inside, a bit like that flower growing in a crack in the prison yard. ❧



*Donita Wiebe-Neufeld serves as a volunteer visitor in the Edmonton Institution for Women. (Visits are currently curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic.)*



# Out of the boat

*Mennonites explore virtual worship*

By Virginia A. Hostetler  
Executive Editor

**“W**e’ve been thrown out of the boat and now we’re learning to walk on water!”

This lighthearted metaphor comes from Cathrin van Sintern-Dick, as she considers changes in congregational life resulting from the novel coronavirus outbreak. Sintern-Dick serves on the regional ministry team of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, and recently she helped lead an online meeting for MC Eastern Canada pastors around the challenges for Good Friday and Easter congregational worship, in light of this new reality.

In mid-March, when public health officials started encouraging Canadians to practise “social distancing,” leaders in MC Canada and the five regional churches advised congregations to avoid large gatherings.

Some congregations cancelled their March 15 services as they figured out next steps. The following week, MC Canada staff organized the first of several video services. According to an MC Canada news release, “These services are meant to help local congregations as they continue to make adjustments to their own worship practices amid the COVID-19 outbreak.”

The video was recorded in the sanctuary of Douglas Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, with worship leader Judith Friesen Epp, pastor of Home Street Mennonite Church, and a small group of local musicians. There was no congregation in the pews, and participants stood physically distant from each other. Doug Klassen, executive minister of MC Canada, gave the message based on the lectionary text from John 9:1-41. For the virtual children’s time, he sat on the front step of the sanctuary, looking directly into the camera. There were a few familiar songs, a time for prayer and an encouragement for viewers to give financially to their own congregations, as customary.

That service was available for viewing by Sunday, March 22. By the middle of April, it had more than 4,600 views on MC Canada’s YouTube channel.

Staff from the nationwide and the regional church offices then began coordinating more services to be shared across the church. Collaborative efforts in Ontario and Saskatchewan produced recorded services for March 29 and April 5, and a team in Alberta led Good Friday and Easter celebrations. The hope is to provide recorded services until meeting restrictions are lifted.

While there has been appreciation for these centralized efforts, many people wanted their own church to plan times for worshipping and connecting. And so the challenge: How to lead meaningful congregational experiences when you can’t share the same space? This has required creativity, changing expectations of congregational life, and an increased dose of technological savvy. Some churches continue the usual posting of sermons and bulletins on their websites and a few already were posting their services online. But, for many others, this has meant learning new skills as they prepare content to be accessed digitally.

Some churches and pastors have new YouTube accounts; some groups are learning how to have a presence through Facebook Live. Creative efforts have included children in their homes waving handmade palm branches on Palm Sunday, congregants sharing photos of spring flowers, and prayer times and sharing in breakout rooms through the Zoom teleconferencing app. Individual musicians performed at home, recording

separate tracks to be later edited together digitally. Some groups experimented with virtual communion by inviting congregants to partake of the elements in their own homes.

Efforts have emerged to provide resources for congregations learning how to do this new “walking on water.” MC Canada’s website ([bit.ly/mccda-outbreak-resources](http://bit.ly/mccda-outbreak-resources)) offers online resources, and a new Facebook group has emerged called the Anabaptist Worship Network, meant as a place to share ideas and resources at [bit.ly/anabaptist-worship-network](http://bit.ly/anabaptist-worship-network).

The fact that so many church groups are embracing these challenges has surprised Klassen. “It has highlighted how important Sunday morning worship is for us,” he says. This is an opportunity to give more thought to the purpose and practices of congregational worship.

Sintern-Dick recognizes that some congregants are not connected with the



PHOTO FROM YOUTUBE VIDEO

***The Easter worship service of Cedar Valley Church in Mission, B.C., was livestreamed on YouTube and Facebook. It included singers and instrumentalists performing from separate locations, a message from Pastor Rob Ayer, and information about a Minecraft Easter egg hunt for children.***

current technologies and need to have their spiritual needs met in other ways. Some congregations will choose not to join the virtual wave, and that’s okay. “We don’t want to see our pastors burnt out through this,” she says, adding that the MC Eastern Canada staff is “marvelling over the creativity of our pastors, their ability to adapt during times like this.”

She goes on: “Ministry is taking on different forms, so let’s see where this is going. There’s a certain amount of excitement: What will this be for all of us?”

# MCC set to address COVID-19 threats

By Linda Espenshade  
Mennonite Central Committee

**A**s COVID-19 spreads and worsens, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) continues its worldwide work while attending to the health and well-being of its staff.

MCC is well positioned through its ongoing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health and food programs to address the threats of the novel coronavirus for some of the world's most vulnerable people, including people displaced from their homes. In times of crisis, those who are most vulnerable suffer the most. Where possible, the organization is scaling up this work.

Many of its partner organizations bolster health efforts by providing training about nutrition, hygiene and disease prevention, and by strengthening access to food and clean water. MCC also supports several hospitals and clinics that serve people already at risk.

"Much of the work that MCC does around the world with vulnerable populations is helpful in a pandemic like COVID-19," says Paul Shetler Fast, MCC's health coordinator.

"The principles of MCC's work in WASH are helpful across a broad range of infectious diseases, including epidemics like cholera, Ebola and now COVID-19," he says. "Just as we here in Canada and the U.S. are being reminded to wash our hands and practise good hygiene to prevent spread, our WASH partners around the world are working on these same types of issues. This is a truly global pandemic impacting every corner of the world."

To help people who have been displaced by war or other disasters, MCC sends hygiene kits and relief kits. Hygiene kit shipments are on their way to Jordan, Ukraine and Mozambique, says Bruce Guenther, MCC's director of disaster response.

Locally purchased hygiene supplies will be distributed to displaced people in Lebanon, Syria and Malawi along with food packages that were already scheduled, he says. To decrease the health risks

to partner staff and volunteers who distribute supplies, MCC is providing locally purchased masks and gloves, adding extra handwashing stations at some distribution points and adapting distributions to ensure physical distancing.

MCC's food distributions and agricultural work remain critical, Shetler Fast says. "As Canadians and Americans are realizing the fragility of our supply chains, seeing grocery stores emptied, our food security and malnutrition partners around the world are trying to ensure that the most vulnerable families can access the basic nutrition their bodies need to fight off a new pathogen."

For example, 250 families living at the Mubimbi camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will continue to need food distributions to supplement the crops they can grow in fields rented for them by MCC's partner Église du Christ au Congo (Church of Christ in Congo).

They need the nutrition, Shetler Fast says, because "people who are malnourished have weakened immune systems and are particularly at risk for COVID-19."

One MCC-supported mobile clinic serves the people of Mubimbi and the neighbouring Poste camp, where people went to escape violence from armed groups in their rural home communities. The nurses are equipped to help people recover from malaria and other common illnesses. Now they will need to be alert to any signs of COVID-19, so they can refer them for a higher level of care.

MCC also supports clinics and hospitals in other countries whose focus is on primary care, emergency medicine, maternal and child health, HIV-AIDS and mental health treatment.

"These health providers are on the front line as their communities are impacted by COVID-19—not only helping in some cases with prevention and treatment, but also dealing with the rippling health impacts of the pandemic for vulnerable groups," says Shetler Fast.

## Shuttered thrift shops, cancelled relief sales

Yet the spread of the coronavirus is forcing MCC to carry out its ministry with less funding, travel and staff in some places.

Domestically and internationally, staff are telecommuting wherever possible, continuing MCC's work with partners and constituents virtually. Training and



PHOTO COURTESY OF MECC

*Middle East Council of Churches, an MCC partner, distributed relief kits, which contain hygiene supplies, to the most vulnerable displaced people and host community members in a neighbourhood in the Syriac Orthodox diocese in Aleppo, Syria, in 2016. This year, MCC's partners in Syria and Lebanon will distribute individual hygiene kits and food to help people protect themselves from the novel coronavirus. (Names withheld for security reasons.)*

meetings have been cancelled, postponed or moved to virtual events.

In some countries, such as India and South Africa, where governments have issued nationwide lockdowns, MCC's work is limited. Getting canned meat and other supplies to nursing homes and hospitals in North Korea has been delayed because of a closed port.

MCC is not suspending or ending international assignments at this time, but some participants in its young adult programs—Seed, Serving and Learning Together (SALT), International Volunteer

Exchange Program (IVEP), and Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN)—have chosen to end their assignments and return home early. MCC is actively helping all personnel who make this decision, as well as those who remain.

Its thrift shops in Canada and the United States are temporarily shuttered, drying up funding that averaged more than \$1.7 million a month in 2019. Ten relief sales have cancelled or postponed sales this spring, events that last year brought in more than \$2.4 million.

Material resources centres across Canada and the U.S. are closed to the thousands of volunteers who come each week to sew comforters and prepare hygiene kits and other items for shipping overseas. Nevertheless, it has a three-month reserve of kits and comforters ready to be sent.

The 2019-20 meat-canning season ended in March instead of April, but, with 500,000 cans of meat, it's enough to meet the requests from partner organizations for the next 12 months, says Tom Wenger, MCC's material resources coordinator.

MCC's work in Canada and the U.S. has been limited by the pandemic, but working with marginalized groups remains a priority. In Canada, getting information about COVID-19 to refugees and returning Low German-speaking people, as well as monitoring the condition of remote First Nations groups, is ongoing.

So far, only a few centennial celebrations have been postponed or cancelled, but organizers of alumni gatherings and other celebrations will be following the advice of local health authorities and other government guidelines as the pandemic evolves.

"Times of uncertainty call us to dig deeper into faith—to cast all our anxiety on God because God cares so deeply for us," says Rick Cober Bauman, executive director of MCC Canada. "We believe this is a time to recommit ourselves to caring for our neighbours and acting generously—whether in our homes, across the street or around the world."

MCC is advocating with Canadian and U.S. governments to increase their assistance to people internationally who have been displaced from their homes and is calling on people of faith to encourage their legislators in this. ❧

*Donations to support the ongoing work of MCC, including its intensified work in response to COVID-19, can be designated to "where needed most" at [mcccanada.ca/donate](https://mcccanada.ca/donate).*



### ❧ #COVID Kindness

#### Calgary chef gives back to the community



PHOTO BY ASHLEY GUSZTAK

***Chef Stefan Gusztak of the NOtable Restaurant in Calgary, makes food for the community during the COVID-19 crisis.***

Stefan Gusztak, a member of Foothills Mennonite Church and a head chef, was forced to close his restaurant, NOtable, on March 15 due to COVID-19. The last-minute closure meant there was a lot of leftover food that would go to waste. Wanting to help out as much as he could, Gusztak chose to give away all his fresh produce to the Mustard Seed in Calgary to help feed the homeless. He also prepared 50 meals to give away to seniors, as well as community and health-care workers. It was his way of saying thank you! He made two different meals—pasta and meatballs; and pork, vegetable and potato—that could be frozen. Opened in 2010, NOtable bills itself as "an upscale bar and eatery with creative, locally sourced Canadian dishes." Gusztak hopes to re-open after the pandemic.

—BY JOANNE DE JONG

### ❧ #COVID Kindness

#### St. Catharines church women making masks for long-term-care homes



PHOTO BY ANNE HUEBERT

***A sample of the masks made by members of St. Catharines United Mennonite Church for local long-term-care facilities and others who need them.***

At the end of March, the Michael Garron Hospital in Toronto posted a challenge on its website for locals to "make 1,000 masks per week" to be used by approved visitors to the hospital and discharged patients. Lorrie Sawatzky saw this article and mentioned it to her husband Herb, who serves as pastor of Bethany Mennonite Church in Virgil in southwestern Ontario. He sent an email to his ministerial colleagues in the area. One of the ministers on that list picked up on the idea and mentioned it to a quilter. And the rest is history. Eight women at St. Catharines United Mennonite Church took up this challenge. The sewing is done individually in their homes. Quilt material from prior donations for quilts is being used for the masks. White sheets are cut up and used for the inside. Instead of sending the finished masks to Toronto, though, they will be used locally in the Niagara Region. The long-term-care home in Vineland has asked for some; others will be donated to various long-term-care homes in the area, to older individuals and to anyone else who is in need of one.

—BY MARIA H. KLASSEN



# Caring during COVID-19 crisis

*Social service agencies adapt 'in the face of pandemic'*

Story and Photo by Janet Bauman  
Eastern Canada Correspondent

**H**ow do you stay home when you don't have a home? How do you physically isolate when you already seem invisible? How do you wash your hands frequently when public facilities are closed?

For people who are struggling, the COVID-19 pandemic adds "another layer of challenge," says John Neufeld, executive director of the House of Friendship (HoF), a Waterloo Region-based non-profit organization that provides food, housing, addiction treatment and neighbourhood support to some 40,000 people a year.

As public health officials and government leaders announced new physical distancing measures, organizations that serve the most vulnerable people scrambled to meet those standards while still providing essential care.

For HoF, "everything had to change," according to Neufeld. Almost overnight, "we had to learn how to be a virtual organization."

The organization had to shut down its community centres and their programs, which means outreach workers now offer counselling and support by phone. Regular food distribution had to adapt, too. Now pre-packaged food is handed out from the back of a truck, instead of people assembling their own food inside the centres. And, while the residential addiction treatment program continues, addiction counselling is done by phone.

The biggest change involved the men's shelter. During a video call with community partners in response to new social distancing directives from the government, Neufeld admitted they were in trouble. The "close quarters" for some 50 men was a problem. But, before that video conference was over, Neufeld received an email from a local hotel manager stepping up with an offer. He promised that beds in his hotel could be ready for the men from the shelter tomorrow! "Somebody has to

do this," he said.

By supper time the next day, all the men from the shelter had been screened for COVID-19 symptoms, bused to the hotel and settled into their rooms, where they are monitored by medical personnel and supported by shelter workers around the clock.

Neufeld describes the move as "an incredible experience" of "God's presence" at work. In less than 24 hours HoF moved the men's shelter to a space that made physical distancing possible and provided a floor in the hotel for anyone who needed to self-isolate. And it implemented a vision, intended to take three to five years, that integrates health care into shelters. Neufeld calls it "God's humour" that it all happened in 24 hours.

## 'Presence in the face of pandemic'

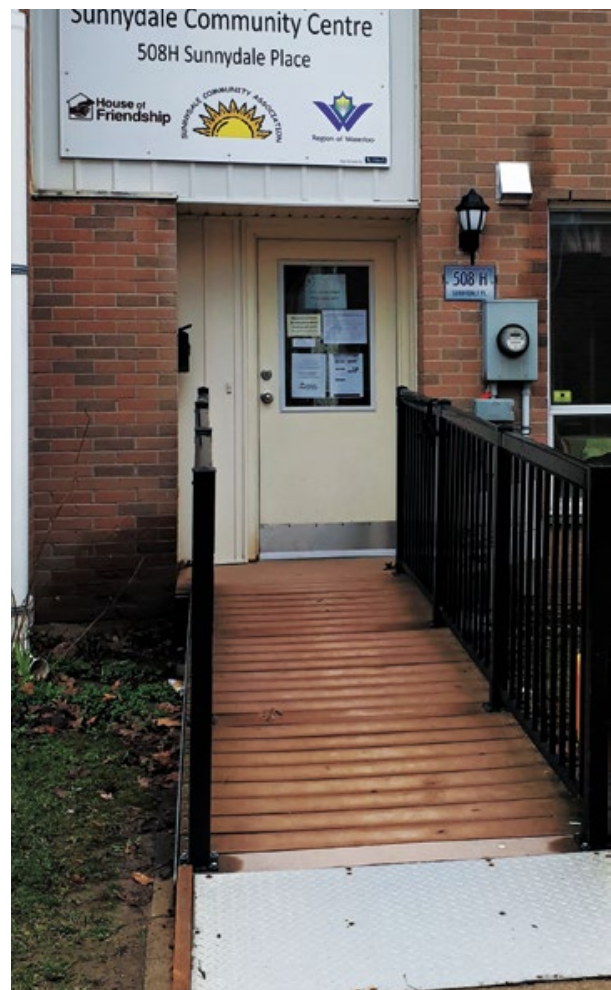
Margaret Nally, a spiritual caregiver in community ministry, says people have "no roadmap" for the pandemic crisis enveloping the world. She sees her role as "[holding] the centre . . . a sacred space that is grounded in the comfort and care of the Creator of all."

Drawing on spiritual resources and prayer practices, she tends to the well-being of frontline social and health-care workers. "We need them," she says. They are "often quite young," and they are doing "heroic work."

She meets with them via phone or other media, encouraging them to "pay attention to what is breaking hearts and lifting spirits." She says this "releases people into the care of the One who created them, and opens time and space to place in

God's keeping the whole story of the work day." She calls it practising "presence in the face of pandemic."

Neufeld and Nally acknowledge that, while the pandemic affects everyone in some way, it is not an equal-opportunity crisis. It affects the most vulnerable people more severely and exposes societal gaps. For Nally, it is a "real awakening



*House of Friendship's Sunnydale Community Centre, usually a hub for a diverse range of community programs, is quiet, its programs cancelled or modified due to pandemic protocols outlined in the notices on the door.*

to a broader reflection.” She says it calls everyone to “constant vigilance . . . to pay attention to who isn’t at our tables and in our programs.”

Nally sees this as a unique time to stop, be still and turn inward, “breathing deeply into the assurance that God is with us in this time.”

She insists that “every positive way of

being present with others matters.” She offers some suggestions:

- **Pray** for those who are “in the whirlwind of care of others.”
- **Get involved** in sewing projects, providing gowns, caps and masks for outreach workers and frontline nurses.
- **Send encouraging** notes and cards to

those who are alone, or living in grief or fear.

- **Be a positive presence** on social media.
- **Place messages** of hope in your windows.

“Let us be those who live in the light for those who dwell in the shadows,” she says. ☸

## Westview adapts outreach during pandemic

By Maria H. Klassen

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

**H**ow does a community fellowship deal with the current physical distancing and self-isolation situation that everyone is facing?

Caleb Ratzlaff, the convener of Westview Christian Fellowship in St. Catharines, Ont., which also serves as the hub for the Westview Centre4Women, says staff needed to be creative to reach people in the neighbourhood during this time of change, especially because not everyone is connected to the internet.

A pod-mapping exercise took place just before physical distancing and self-isolation were enforced. Because the community is diverse, and not everyone has access to a computer, a “phone fan-out” was created so every person is connected to four other people that they could call in the event they needed help or had an emergency.

Under the direction of Jane LaVacca, the executive director of the Westview Centre4Women program, lunches are now take-out, available to anyone in need in the community. During the first week of isolation, 50 lunches were handed out daily, a number that has since increased to 88.

The basement facilities are large enough to allow for physical distancing while making the lunches while wearing face masks and gloves. Lunches are handed out through a window, with tape marking a physically acceptable distance between people in the line. The Centre’s kitchen

staff is preparing food, as community members are not allowed to help at this time. As of April 14, the Centre extended its normal 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. lunch time by two hours, as the line-ups were getting too long outside.

Like many other churches, Westview has adopted livestreaming of its services using Zoom, an online videoconferencing app. For the first time in the church’s 30-year history, there was organ music for worship using a mix of old and new technologies.

Westview is an active member of the Queenston Street Neighbourhood Association that is using Zoom to check on neighbours.

The neighbourhood has adopted the rainbow as its symbol for spreading cheer and encouragement in the area. Pictures of rainbows are hung in windows and rainbows are painted in suitable spots for those to enjoy who are able to walk in the area.

Inspired by friends from The Commons

in Hamilton, Ratzlaff is sharing his passion for sourdough-bread baking over Zoom and a Facebook group, where beginners can support one another. He has also been featured on “Niagara in the Morning,” a local radio show, sharing positive stories of neighbourhoods finding ways to connect despite physical distancing. ☸



A poster explaining the Queenston Street Neighbourhood Association's rainbow symbol campaign in St. Catharines, Ont.

# Doing justice in a pandemic

*Saskatchewan's restorative justice organizations impacted by COVID-19*

By Donna Schulz  
Saskatchewan Correspondent

COVID-19 has altered the lives of most Canadians, but for those in prison and those reintegrating into society after prison terms, the pandemic's impact is enormous.

Parkland Restorative Justice in Prince Albert, Sask., offers inmate visitation through its Person to Person (P2P) program. Executive director Heather Driedger says visitors have not been allowed into the federal penitentiary since mid-March. Phone calls are also not permitted.

She encourages Parkland's volunteers to write letters to the inmates they had been visiting and to try to maintain contact with them.

Micah, a Saskatoon-based restorative justice organization, also supports inmates in the Regional Psychiatric Centre through P2P.

The Centre has relaxed its rules, says Dave Feick, Micah's executive director and community chaplain. Prior to COVID-19, volunteer visits and phone calls could only take place during regularly scheduled P2P time. But, "with this [pandemic] they've opened that up. [Volunteers] are able to phone and write letters."

Phone calls and letters are critical, especially for inmates who have no other source of support.

"It's challenging for their mental health to find motivation or hope for the day," says Heather. "They're in survival mode, trying to wait it out." Many would like to move forward with their correctional plan, she says, but the programs they need to take are no longer happening.

Feick says that many clients wonder what things are like on the outside. "They're wondering what will be there for them when they do get released," he says.

Concerned citizens have called for the early release of nonviolent offenders in order to lower population density in correctional facilities and, thus, the potential

spread of COVID-19. While this might solve one problem, it would create others.

"Where are those people supposed to go?" asks Feick. "If they have good supports and a place to live, that's one thing, but if they're just being turned loose and don't know where they're going, that [puts them at] greater danger of reoffending."

Inmates aren't the only vulnerable ones. Former sex offenders served by Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) are also in precarious positions.

Florence Driedger volunteers with CoSA South Saskatchewan in Regina, where upwards of 22 circles of three to five volunteers used to meet regularly with released sex offenders, known as core members. These circles offer support and friendship, but also hold core members accountable so they don't reoffend.

Now that they can't meet in person, many circles meet online. But not all core members have internet access. Some can't afford the technology while others are not permitted internet access as a condition of their release. For them, meeting by phone is a solution, albeit an imperfect one.

"It works as best as it can work," says Florence. "But you can't see. So much of communication is nonverbal."

Most CoSA circles met weekly before the pandemic started, but now it's important to meet by phone more frequently.

"Core members often feel unwanted and unloved," says Florence. "This COVID-19 thing really turns it right back to being



PHOTO BY AMY SMITH

**Prison visits through Person to Person aren't happening in person right now. Volunteers are encouraged to write letters to inmates instead. (Photographed simulation featuring restorative justice staff and volunteers.)**

unwanted and unloved, like when they were in prison."

While the three organizations are doing their best to support both clients and volunteers, their employees' jobs are less secure than they were just weeks ago.

"Our funders are not sure they can send our regular cheque," says Feick. "Even when we apply to a foundation for a program we're already running, they say they're setting aside all applications they've already received and we're having to reapply." This means trying to access other sources of funding they haven't accessed before.

Heather also worries about funding. Some of Parkland's donors are out of work and not able to give as they had been. And, if the situation continues, Parkland may lose volunteers, as people find themselves in different circumstances.

Although the situation seems bleak right now, Florence is philosophical. "We've had to change ways of doing things so many times, so often, in so many different ways," she says. "This is just one more of those ways."

And there are signs of hope and of



God's presence. Heather finds hope in her engagement with Parkland's volunteers, who have proven enthusiastic about writing letters. "They're not giving up on these

relationships," she says.

For Feick, hope comes from knowing that others are doing what they can to help. "Even getting a call from a reporter from *Canadian Mennonite* [helps me] realize we're not alone," he says.

These organizations' administrators trust God will see them through this crisis.

"If it is to continue it will continue because of God at work," says Heather. ❧

## Bread, masks and serving seniors

*Couple connects with community carefully*

By Amy Rinner Waddell  
B.C. Correspondent

**T**im and Sandra Kuepfer of Vancouver are among those doing their part to keep themselves and those in their neighbourhood safe during the current pandemic.

Sandra works at Swiss Bakery and routinely brings home extra artisanal bread loaves. Tim, who is the English pastor of Chinatown Peace Church in Vancouver, then takes the bread to the eight senior residents living in a single-occupancy residence near the church. The church purchased the building earlier this year as a place for housing and connecting with the neighbourhood in what they call a "living room for Chinatown."

Masks are now required at the bakery, so Sandra sewed masks for Tim and herself.

"We didn't buy any before the huge demand emptied the shelves, so now that wearing them is tentatively encouraged in more public settings, we also wear them

to go grocery shopping," she says.

Tim also thought it would be good to wear a mask for his brief trips into the seniors residence, to protect the vulnerable there.

"Things are on hold as a result of COVID-19, but we are trying to care for the eight seniors who live on the second floor of the building," he says. "We are in the process of trying to repair the leaky roof, add security to the front door and improve the cleanliness of the building. But we are also trying not to enter the building at this time more than absolutely necessary, in order to protect the residents from infection."

The church plans to make the property not only a building where the congregation can meet on Sundays, but that can also be used on the other six days of the week as what Tim describes as "a Christian building for housing and connecting that's much more focused outwardly on what Chinatown needs than on what we might think Chinatown Peace Church needs." ❧



PHOTO COURTESY OF TIM KUEPFER

*Sewing machines have become a friendly weapon in the fight against COVID-19. Tim and Sandra Kuepfer display the homemade masks they now use as they serve their Vancouver neighbourhood.*



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# 20 tips for surviving school at home

By Will Braun  
Senior Writer

**M**any families are spending more time together at home these days, requiring greater parental involvement in schooling. While some parents can calmly slip in a Zoom meeting from an “Instagramably” tidy house while their virtuoso kids make an organic lunch without being asked after having peacefully completed the tasks their teachers “Seesawed” them that morning, for the rest of us, spending lots of time together in a COVID-19-constrained world is taxing.

Here are some tips and consolation from experienced homeschoolers (including me):

**1. Relax. Life is messy.** Parenting is tough. Heaven and earth overflow with grace. Accept it.

**2. Relax. Your kids** do not need to sit still and “learn” for five hours a day. They’ll be fine. My sister-in-law, Esther deGroot, who teaches Grade 3, suggests two hours a day of formal learning. Max.

**3. She also says:** “If you hate what you are doing and your kid hates it too, stop.” (Sometimes I push through.)

**4. Elisa Barkman, a homeschooling mother of four, says:** “If every child would come out of this with a skill or two—knowing how to cook a meal, bake bread, hang the laundry, change a tire or budget under the COVID-19 economic strain—I say we could call this school break a success.”

**5. If you can** break from prescribed learning, board games are fun and educational.

**6. Relax. You are** a good parent. Period. I’m pretty sure of it. Even if you blow a gasket or have to fake your way through Grade 6 math.

**7. Go outside. Notice** stuff. Identify three bird species. Splash in puddles. Watch squirrels for 20 minutes and write down your observations. Repeat daily. Spring is great for this. Walk around and observe. Grass. Buds. Clouds. Lie on your back on the ground.

**8. Elisa says, “Teach** your children what you know.”

**9. Let your kids’** curiosity be the

curriculum. Follow their curiosity. It is a great gift from God. Help them learn more about what they love. (You can do a lot with hockey cards.) Help them learn how to learn.

**10. Questions. If your** kid asks a question like “Why doesn’t the sun smoke?” “What do polar bears drink when they’re on ice floes?” “What is plastic made of?” or “Can you dehydrate water?”—find out. If possible, consult someone other than Siri.

**11. Try to gently** establish a rhythm. Elisa lights a candle to start learning time. Putting the kettle on the stove means break time is near.

**12. Talk about** stress. Anxiety is in the air these days. The world is weird. Kids feel it. Check in with them about it.

**13. Let your kids** be bored. A wise neighbour says it is good for a kid to be bored for two hours a day; it leads to creativity. (Note: My son, having heard this,

perhaps too many times, once said: “Dad, I’ve been bored for more than two hours and I haven’t come up with anything creative.” The dad chuckled, and discontinued use of the “two-hour boredom” aphorism.)

**14. Esther says, “Don’t** underestimate the value of tape, scissors and cardboard.”

**15. Here’s the elephant:** screens. Surely, COVID-19 is a bonanza for video-game makers and YouTube. The Great Babysitter is flourishing. Set clear limits, in collaboration with your kids. Try to steer things toward learning (docs vs. movies). Make them go outside first. Analyze the ads with them. Don’t be too hard on yourself or them.

**16. The world is your** classroom. There are

far more than three Rs.

**17. Relax. Your kid’s** future will not be in jeopardy due to a few months of more relaxed learning. Perhaps the opposite. You’d be amazed at how ridiculously little time some homeschooled kids spend “learning” and then how they do just fine in university. (Sorry, teachers.)

**18. My wife says** that her aim is not to raise geniuses, just descent human beings. Geniuses tend to be annoying anyway.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELISA BARKMAN

*School at the Barkman home in Prawda, Man.*

**19. Elisa says that** if you were taken out of school by a parent, those days are likely ingrained in your memory. These days and weeks will likely be similarly embedded in your kid’s memories. So, Elisa suggests, “attempt to fill this time with some good memories, even at the loss of ‘productive’ school days. Create beautiful moments, laugh, learn to enjoy one another, and don’t feel guilty about it.”

**20. Don’t be intimidated** by the lofty, idealized advice of some homeschoolers. Home learning, like life, is messy. Embrace the grace in it.

Next time, I’ll ask kids for their tips. ❧



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## PEOPLE

# Online contest gathers friends around a virtual table

*Saskatchewan woman holds paska bake-off to celebrate Easter*

By Donna Schulz  
Saskatchewan Correspondent

She couldn't gather family and friends around her table to eat paska this Easter, so Heather Driedger decided to hold a virtual paska bake-off instead.

Paska is a rich yeast bread popular among those of Russian Mennonite heritage. Traditional paska is served at Easter with a sweet cottage cheese spread called *glums*. Modern-day bakers often prepare a cream cheese spread to eat with their paska. Loaves are often decorated with icing and coloured sprinkles.

Driedger invited submissions to her online contest via Instagram. She received 25 submissions from family members and friends.

"They came from all across Canada—from Montreal to Vancouver and many places in between," says Driedger. She even received entries from friends in Colorado and Germany.

"It was neat to see everyone's different takes on paska," she says. Among the more

unusual entries were a gluten-free paska and a sourdough version.

Her Colorado friend, who is originally from Kansas, baked her paska in tins. Kansas Mennonites say that bread baked this way reminded them of the domes of Orthodox churches in Ukraine, where they came from.

Contestants could enter a photo or a video of their paska. They sent their entries to Driedger via email, and she, in turn, posted them on her Instagram page. Each entry included 'Yes' and 'No' buttons, enabling viewers to vote on the appearance of the different breads.

"Some people staged their photos with Easter eggs and Easter grass around [the paska]," she says. "Some just sent a photo of their loaf. Others made videos and tried to make it funny, or elegant and culinary."

"A few people sent pictures even though theirs didn't turn out," says Driedger. "People were generally pretty kind."

On Easter Sunday, Driedger tallied the votes and declared the winners. Holly Brown of Germany received 98 percent positive votes for her Ukrainian braided-style bread. Maria Krause of Vancouver also received 98 percent with her tongue-in-cheek COVID-19 paska. Megan and Jesse Krause of Winnipeg came in second with a score of 96 percent. The lowest score was 46 percent.

Driedger says that winning the bake-off entitles them to "no official prizes other than receiving the virtual 'paska pandemic crown.'"

"A lot of people were thanking me for the opportunity to do something special on Easter weekend," she adds. "The best part of it, for me, was just hearing from



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEATHER DRIEDGER

**Heather Driedger, shown here with her own paska, held a virtual paska bake-off via Instagram this Easter.**

everyone throughout the weekend."

Driedger didn't enter the bake-off herself, although she did bake her own paska. She says that, as she baked, she remembered Good Friday services at Home Street Mennonite in Winnipeg, where she grew up. A number of congregations attended the services, which would always be followed by "a feast of paska" in the church fellowship hall. "It's one of my strongest memories of Easter," she says.

"It felt like a holy moment as I was working the dough and thinking about these things," says Driedger. "It was a way to celebrate Easter and be more meditative—to think more about the meaning of Easter." ❧

*To watch a video of Holly Brown's winning entry in Heather Driedger's paska bake-off, visit [bit.ly/paska-winner](https://bit.ly/paska-winner). A paska recipe appears at the end of the online version of this story at [canadianmennonite.org/paska-bakeoff](https://canadianmennonite.org/paska-bakeoff).*



**This braided paska by Holly Brown of Germany tied for first place in Heather Driedger's paska bake-off.**

## MEMORIAL TRIBUTE

# 'A well-nourished spirit'

Susan Clemmer Steiner  
April 22, 1947 - Aug. 26, 2019

By Ardith Frey  
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

Sue Steiner left behind a huge legacy when she passed away on Aug. 26, 2019. As beloved wife to Sam Steiner for 50 years, treasured aunt to a number of nieces and nephews, and a cherished member of several circles of close friends, she left personal legacies. As a woman who served the church as pastor, clergy coach and trainer, writer and spiritual director, she influenced many.

Sue began her career as a book buyer for Provident Bookstore, and her love of writing continued in the form of authoring Adult & Youth Sunday School curricula and other articles, as well as three books. (*A full list is available online at [bit.ly/susan-steiner](http://bit.ly/susan-steiner).*) Sue was also a prolific reader and in retirement she co-led a book group for inmates at Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ont.

After training at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Waterloo, Ont., and at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind., she served in several longer-term congregational pastoral positions in Ontario: at St Jacobs Mennonite Church, where she was ordained, from 1987 to 1996; and as lead minister of Waterloo North Mennonite Church, from 1998 to 2005. She also served in interim pastoral roles at Conrad Grebel College (chaplain) in Waterloo, Nith Valley Mennonite Church in New Hamburg, Black Creek Faith Community in Toronto, Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church in Waterloo, and Riverdale Mennonite Church in Millbank.

Sue served the wider church as youth minister and as interim missions minister for the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec, as chair of the Christian Formation Council for Mennonite Church



Canada, as a founding partner of Associates Resourcing the Church, as a clergy coach for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's Transitioning into Ministry program, and in numerous other ways, such as public speaking and resourcing congregational pastoral search and review committees.

Her passion for nurturing faith in youth and children continued in retirement as she chaired the Christian Formation Committee at Rockway Mennonite Church in Kitchener, her home congregation. She was especially touched when, during an anointing service at Rockway after her diagnosis of metastatic lung cancer, a number of youth joined the circle surrounding her.

Sue was also passionate about equipping pastors. Besides her role as a coach for beginning pastors, she was involved in Conrad Grebel College's Integration Seminar and she was instrumental in helping to initiate and co-lead a pastor's seminar on "Congregational leadership from a spiritual guidance perspective."

After she trained in spiritual guidance early in her congregational ministry, Sue's own ministry was influenced in this direction, as she describes in "Paddling Furiously" in her book of memoirs, *Flowing with the River: Soundings from my Life and Ministry*.

Sue was also a founding member of the Mennonite Spiritual Directors of Eastern Canada, of which she was coordinator in its early stages. She continued to guide congregational leaders after retirement through her spiritual direction practice.

On a more personal level, Sue's friends were well aware that she knew how to celebrate life and mark milestones in unique ways. Sue and her husband Sam treasured

annual trips to Pennsylvania and Ohio to nurture family ties, as well as spending annual vacations at Colpoy's Bay on the Bruce Peninsula, where she delighted in early morning contemplative times while overlooking the water, and also searching for Lady slipper orchids (described in her book of memoirs). She knew how to turn ordinary meetings into occasions by meeting in a coffee shop or restaurant. She delighted in good music and good food, and was known for her love of colour, as was evident in her clothing, in the furnishing of her condo, and in the mandalas she liked to create while on retreat.

Beginning on her 70th birthday, Sue began to publish a weekly blog called "A Nourished Spirit." Her intention was to publish 70 blogs, but she continued longer because it received wide readership and, according to Sam, "She recognized it was her remaining place to minister after having to give up spiritual direction." Through these blogs and in many other ways, it was evident that Sue herself nourished her inner spirit, which grounded her as she faced her illness and eventual death.

A memorable hymn-sing event was held at the Detweiler Meetinghouse, near Roseville, Ont., in May 2018, in celebration of Sue's 71st birthday, her 31st year of ordination, Sue and Sam's 49th wedding anniversary, and in acknowledgement of her health situation.

Last July, Sue and Sam held an early "pop-up celebration" of their 50th wedding anniversary with a special cake, after a Sunday service at Rockway.

It is fitting that this memorial tribute will be published close to April 22, on what would have been Sue's 73rd birthday.

Thanks be to God for the life and legacy of Sue Steiner, whose writings and modelling of "a well-nourished spirit" will continue to inspire us. ❧

*Ardith Frey knew Sue as a pastoral colleague, as a co-member of the Mennonite Spiritual Directors, as a co-leader of the Pastors' Seminar together with Sue and Ralph Brubacher, and as a treasured friend through the Retired Women's' Group.*



# We need more Peters!

*Ex-offender praises MCC's Bridges Ministries program and its chaplain Peter Worsley*

By Joanne De Jong  
Alberta Correspondent  
CALGARY

**“W**e need more Peters! He’s only one man,” exclaims ex-offender Kayel Truong, when asked about the Bridges Ministries program run by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Alberta to help prisoners of faith successfully reintegrate into the community.

Peter Worsley, MCC’s offender reintegration chaplain, loves his job. “I get to experience the joy of seeing God work in offenders’ lives,” he says. “Over and over again I see them move towards God, towards Jesus, and every success makes me happy.”

According to Worsley, 95 percent of participants in the Bridges program do not re-offend.

Six months before their release, Worsley meets regularly with offenders to talk about a reintegration strategy that includes connecting the person with a faith community where they are then connected to a person willing to walk alongside them upon release.

Some call Bridges a “mentorship” program, but he feels that it is more like a “friendship” program. “I think the volunteer is not really mentoring because you are both learning,” he says. “They are on a path together.”

Once the participant is released, Worsley continues to meet with that person for coffee monthly until the parole date. Some relationships have continued, even up to 10 years. The coffee time provides an opportunity to check in and make sure they have all the community resources they need. It creates space to listen and learn what the real challenges are, so they can be addressed and prayed for. A holistic ministry, Bridges offers spiritual, social and emotional supports.



**Peter Worsley**

The present challenge has been to connect with prisoners during the COVID-19 crisis, as institutions are closed to only essential staff. Worsley says that, even though he can call prisoners who will soon be released, it is difficult to build trust over the phone.

## **Mennonites on the ‘cutting edge’ for how long?**

Worsley has been working with MCC Alberta since 2003. In 2001, he had a dream that ended with him waking up and asking, “God, are you calling me to work with prisoners?” Then, when the opportunity opened up with MCC Alberta, he asked his bishop what he knew about the Mennonites. The bishop replied, “What I do know is that the Mennonites are on the cutting edge of prison work.”

Worsley is afraid Mennonites are going to lose this reputation, as MCC is phasing out prison ministry over the next two years, to focus on international development. Currently, one third of the program is funded by Correctional Services Canada and the rest by donations from Mennonite churches and other faith groups.

## **Bridges’ grad learns to trust . . . and serve**

Kayel Truong, an ex-offender who is currently working as a hair stylist and personal trainer, has nothing but good things to say about Bridges.

“I don’t trust easily,” he says. “Peter was kind and caring. He would pray for me and was practically helpful. He was attentive and it was more than a job for him. There was love in it.”

Truong knows all about the challenges someone in prison has to face once they are on the outside. When he went in, he had power and money. When he came out, he had no power and had to learn to ride the bus. He had to work at repairing the relationship with his family, and he



*Kayel Truong, foreground in white shirt, and his crew cut hair for free every Saturday for homeless people living in downtown Calgary.*



suffered anxiety and panic attacks.

“There was so much change,” he says. “Technology was all new, and I had to face my fears every day. If it wasn’t for my faith and for supports, I wouldn’t have made it.”

One message Worsley tries to pass on during coffee times is that it can be helpful to decrease the focus from all the anxieties of life to how the ex-offender can do good things for others.

Truong definitely found this to be true, as he discovered he could make a difference. While volunteering with a Christian friend in downtown Calgary, he overheard some homeless people talking about job interviews. All he could think about was, “How will they get a job without a decent haircut?”

One Saturday morning he decided to go to the East Village and offer free haircuts—right on the sidewalk. To his surprise, he was warmly received, with one man telling him he was an answer to his prayers.

Now Truong has a team of hairstylists who join him every Saturday to give free haircuts to homeless people. The team has been doing this for two years, having

given more than 3,000 cuts so far.

In addition to offering the cuts, when the temperature drops to -35 C at night, he and his crew roam the city, passing out coffee, food and Tim’s cards to help

prevent hypothermia and injuries.

“I gravitate towards stuff that touches my heart,” he says. “Getting to play a part in someone’s success gives me a lot of joy.” ❧

### /// Staff change

#### New Chair in Mennonite Studies named



**Ben Nobbs-Thiessen** has been appointed as the new Chair in Mennonite Studies at the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, effective July 1; he replaces Royden Loewen, who retires at the end of June. Nobbs-Thiessen, who was born and raised in Port Coquitlam, B.C., holds a PhD in history from Emory University, and has held post-doctoral fellowships at Arizona State University and Washington State University. His master’s thesis focused on Mennonite Central Committee’s work in Paraguay in the 1950s; his doctorate, on Mennonite settlers in eastern Bolivia; and his post-doctoral work, on Mennonite migrants from Mexico in Texas and Ontario. His new book, *Landscape of Migration: Mobility and Environmental Change on Bolivia’s Tropical Frontier Since 1952*, published by University North Carolina Press, is scheduled for release this spring. He will teach a course on Latin America and Mennonites this fall and Mennonite Studies II in the winter term.

—UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

### /// Staff change

#### Pastoral transition in British Columbia



**Rob Ayer** began as transitional pastor of Cedar Valley Mennonite Church in Mission on March 15. He recently completed 15 years as lead pastor at Cross-

roads Community Church in Chilliwack, and previously served at Calvary Baptist Church in Guelph, Ont. He has degrees in biblical studies, education and psychology. A recently trained transitional pastor and an Arrow Leadership graduate, Ayer says, “I hope to partner with Cedar Valley Church over the next year or so of transition to co-create a plan with them around who they are and towards what God is calling them to be and do in Mission.”

—BY AMY RINNER WADDELL



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#### Watch: A pro skier’s advice for his son

A professional skier who died in a tragic accident offers his son advice in this short video.

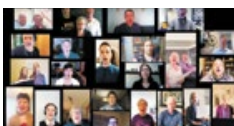
[canadianmennonite.org/video/treadway](http://canadianmennonite.org/video/treadway)



#### Sundays without singing

On the blog: “I long for the church doors to open so we can gather and again make a joyful noise.”

[canadianmennonite.org/blog/cd-singing](http://canadianmennonite.org/blog/cd-singing)



#### Watch: A virtual Mennonite choir

More than 25 Mennonites from across North America participated in this virtual hymn sing.

[canadianmennonite.org/video/virtualeaster](http://canadianmennonite.org/video/virtualeaster)



#### Coffee for Peace affected by COVID-19 shutdown

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting Coffee for Peace, a social enterprise managed by an MC Canada Witness worker in the Philippines.

[canadianmennonite.org/cfpimpacted](http://canadianmennonite.org/cfpimpacted)

# Not so radical after all

*Mennonite history calls for Indigenous solidarity*

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe  
Manitoba Correspondent

**W**hile people across Canada and around the world self-isolate from COVID-19, work continues on the Coastal GasLink (CGL) pipeline in northern British Columbia, without the full consent of the Wet'suwet'en people. The 670-kilometre long pipeline plans to snake through Wet'suwet'en territory and export liquefied natural gas around the world.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF STEVE HEINRICHS

**Steve Heinrichs volunteered with Christian Peacemaker Teams for two weeks on Wet'suwet'en territory in British Columbia.**

Steve Heinrichs, director of Indigenous-Settler Relations with Mennonite Church Canada, volunteered on Wet'suwet'en territory with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) from March 3 to 17. He was not serving on behalf of the nationwide church, but, instead, used vacation time away from his job to independently volunteer.

Instead of assuming the typical CPT role of conflict intervention and de-escalation, Heinrichs and his fellow CPT volunteer, Emily Green, were invited by land defenders to observe and document the actions of CGL and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), to create a legal record of everything taking place.

They joined the 27km Camp, where they did a 24-hour-a-day watch of the

Morris Forest Service Road, monitoring RCMP and CGL presence and noting license plates, vehicle descriptions and their actions. Heinrichs also helped with cooking meals, washing dishes, chopping firewood and building a boardwalk.

Numerous times while Heinrichs was on road watch, those in the vehicles passing through took pictures of him and the other observers, honking at them, making offensive gestures and swerving in front of them. "Taking shifts between two and four in the morning was cold, but stars were beautiful," he says. "But strange to see RCMP still going back and forth on occasion during those hours."

Extractive projects are still considered essential services right now, even though the work environment contradicts the government's physical distancing demands and endangers Indigenous communities that are already more vulnerable due to inadequate access to services like health care, clean water and housing.

Heinrichs arrived on Wet'suwet'en territory at a unique time, right as talks between the federal and provincial governments and hereditary chiefs were taking place in Smithers, B.C. While there were no RCMP officers in full military gear or helicopters, the everyday violence persisted, he says. "At the same time that the Crown is sitting down with hereditary leaders discussing Aboriginal title and rights . . . [CGL] is doing a ton of work in the territory," chaperoned by the Crown's police, he says.

As many point out, there is a diversity of opinions about the pipeline among the Wet'suwet'en people. "And yet the deeper question is around jurisdiction," says Heinrichs. For decades, the government has put off settling the land rights question and used it in its favour to extract as it wishes, saying projects can go forward while the question remains unresolved. Heinrichs says there should be a moratorium on all

work until that is figured out. "I recognize that a lot of people in society don't see that as violent activity, but it is violent because it's a violation of Indigenous law in the ground."

Heinrichs is passionate about this because he is a Mennonite. "Here we are in Holy Week," he says. "It's the story of God become poor to walk with suffering peoples and went to the ultimate lengths to stand in solidarity with vulnerable and hurting peoples who did not have the power to have their voice and their concerns and their well-being honoured. And I think that's the call of the church."

But it isn't just the gospel that powers his convictions. It's the history of his Mennonite community, too. "Our memory within the Mennonite church, I think, sometimes can be very short," he says. "We think this kind of work is radical or it's just what CPT does, but we forget that we actually do have a tradition of, at the very least, recognizing in public word that we should be in solidarity with Indigenous peoples."

At the 1970 Conference of Mennonites



**While volunteering with Christian Peacemaker Teams, Steve Heinrichs documented the presence of the RCMP and Coastal GasLinks workers on Wet'suwet'en territory in northern British Columbia.**



VIDEO IMAGE BY ANGELA KRONE

*With her music grad recital at Conrad Grebel University College scrapped by COVID-19 closures, Mykayla Turner of Kingsfield-Zurich Mennonite Church took the initiative to ensure that her work received the finale she wanted it to have. With the help of a friend, she recorded her recital in the Grebel Chapel, its intended setting, before leaving residence. 'I hope my recital brings you what you are in need of during this season—be it joy, peace, or hope,' she says of the music that can be heard at [bit.ly/mykayla-music](http://bit.ly/mykayla-music).*

in Canada gathering in Winkler, Man., the delegate body prayed a corporate litany of confession to Indigenous peoples.

In 1977, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) published a statement expressing solidarity with northern Indigenous communities on matters of industrial development. The Conference of Mennonites in Canada affirmed a resolution supporting this statement.

MCC supported a new covenant recognizing Indigenous self-determination and land reparation in 1987, which was reaffirmed in 2007 by both MCC and the nationwide church.

At the nationwide gathering in Saskatchewan in 2016, the church repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery.

Heinrichs is currently working on a book with Esther Epp-Tiessen, the former public engagement coordinator at the MCC Ottawa Office. The book compiles the Mennonite community's many statements on Indigenous solidarity over the years. MCC and MC Canada are co-producing the publication, which they are hoping to release this fall. Working on the book has been encouraging for Heinrichs, who hopes that learning this history will empower more people to take action. ❧

*Learn more about the Wet'suwet'en land rights conflict from resources compiled by Heinrichs, available at [bit.ly/3eq5nEf](http://bit.ly/3eq5nEf).*



## ❧ Classifieds

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# COVID-19 prompts new approaches to teaching

By Stephanie Jantzen  
Columbia Bible College  
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

When instructor David Warkentin heard the news that Columbia Bible College was moving all learning online for the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak, his feelings were understandably mixed.

He teaches classes that connect faith and

principle as he switched to online teaching. He moved classes onto the Zoom platform, which allowed him to teach by livestream, share visuals and put students into breakout groups.

For student presentations, he provided an online forum for students to present and interact with each other's ideas. A church visit assignment evolved into the chance to "attend" online worship, provoking discussion on the pros and cons of technology and the church.

"I have really enjoyed using the Zoom platform," one student says of the switch. "It's nice because it helps things feel a little more normal. It's quite a bit more engaging than just listening to recorded lectures because students



SCREEN GRAB COURTESY OF DAVID WARKENTIN

*David Warkentin livestreams his Peace and Justice Issues class during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

culture—courses like Ethical Reasoning and Church in Mission. For Warkentin, teaching these well means incorporating plenty of group discussion and interactive engagement with the material.

"To not meet in person was disorienting and disrupting for my normal approach to education," he says. "On the other hand, I find change invigorating, a space for creative engagement not otherwise experienced."

"Creative engagement" became his guiding

principle as he switched to online teaching. He moved classes onto the Zoom platform, which allowed him to teach by livestream, share visuals and put students into breakout groups.

are still able to ask questions and be active participants." Despite the challenges, Warkentin is encouraged. "Observing students on Zoom has highlighted how adaptable students are," he says. "I see them continue to wrestle through complex course material by asking questions and listening to one another's perspectives. They clearly want to continue learning!"



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# From challenge comes innovation

Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary and Middle Schools

With innovative, effective teaching solutions, even in the face of a global pandemic, Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary and Middle Schools (WMEMS) is fulfilling its promise of quality, Christian education.

Like students in the rest of the nation, Manitoba students are not in school these days. But the resourceful WMEMS teaching staffers are leveraging all means of technology to bring learning to the school's home-bound cohort.

Grade 4 teacher Wes Krahn sends a daily outline for a regular class schedule, adapted for home. "Videos are shared with students to deliver new content, revisit important strategies and maintain a visual connection," he says, adding, "Group chats keep students connected."

Additional small projects, such as photo-journaling, instrument creation and art activities, are also included to engage students in self-directed learning.

Virtually all of the school's 20-plus teaching staffers are using technology to keep learning going, in addition to maintaining the critical personal connections that mean so much. Group video chats keep students connected throughout the week, maintaining

friendships and offering time to ask their teacher about school work or technology.

"The main idea is to maintain a sense of community despite the physical separation," Grade 6 teacher Mark Wiehler says. "Creating a space for students to connect with staff is key."

"Our children will remember this time as



WINNIPEG MENNONITE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS PHOTO  
**Wes Krahn, a Grade 4 teacher at Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary and Middle Schools, shares a few images from his virtual art class. WMEMS is working to maintain student learning and to keep the school community connected.**

a time where things changed, but also as a time where we were together and grew closer as families," says Lawrence Hamm, WMEMS's superintendent and chief executive officer. "As I think of this pandemic and resulting issues, I am comforted by Philippians 4:6: *'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.' God is amazing and knows our needs.*"

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# Stranded Outtatown students return to Canada

Canadian Mennonite University  
WINNIPEG

Students and staff from Canadian Mennonite University's Outtatown Discipleship School, who were stranded in Guatemala due to COVID-19, arrived back in their hometowns over the last weekend in March.

Thirty-six students, five leaders and two staff who were awaiting repatriation secured passage on a flight that left Guatemala on the afternoon of March 27. They arrived in Quebec that same night and continued to their final destinations the next day.

"We are overwhelmed with gratitude, and wish to express our thanks to the Canadian government, particularly the Office of Global Affairs and the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala, for the continuous support and advice they provided throughout this difficult time," said Renee Willms, Outtatown's co-director.

"We are also aware that there are Canadians in Guatemala still awaiting repatriation," she said. "Our prayers for safety and a speedy resolution go out to them and their families."

Students were feeling a mixture of relief and sadness upon arriving back in Canada, according to Tim Cruickshank, Outtatown's other co-director, who was with the group in



PHOTO BY SHAWN DEARBORN

*CMU's Outtatown Discipleship School 2019/20 cohort travelled around Guatemala since arriving in early January.*

Guatemala.

"They look forward to reconnecting at home and relaxing there, but they are also aware that this means the end of their Outtatown experience," he said. "I have been incredibly impressed with how the students have processed this rapidly developing situation. They have chosen to embrace this time together, at the end of their program year, and to celebrate the growth in relationships, faith and understanding that has taken place."

The 2019-20 Outtatown Discipleship School cohort had been travelling in Guatemala since early January. Initially scheduled to return on April 2, the team booked flights on March 13 to bring the entire group home on March 18. However, the airline cancelled that flight two days later, and then the next day the Guatemalan government banned all flights from North America, leaving no viable options to return to Canada at the time.

Living in a secure compound in San Pedro Las Huertas since March 14 until their flight home on March 27, the team practised patience while confined to a large house they shared and a small terrace outside. ❧