

CANADIAN MENNONITE

January 18, 2021 Volume 25 Number 2



'The show must go on'

Focus on Education
begins on pg. 25

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EDITORIAL

Learning together, apart

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive Editor



Whether you call it Sunday school, faith formation or Christian education, one aspect of a congregation's life together is how we nurture faith in people of all ages. Last spring, with the coming of the COVID-19 restrictions, many churches saw drastic changes in their faith education programs.

I chatted recently with folks who have responsibilities around faith formation in a congregation. Over the past ten months, their congregation has been worshipping through pre-recorded and Zoom services and has not had any larger in-person gatherings. These educators spoke about challenges and opportunities they faced.

They've worked hard to maintain connections with scattered congregants, planning online activities and outdoor events with minimal risk. They appreciated the flexibility for activities to happen outside of the regular Sunday morning slot. During the pandemic, congregants have been more available, because of fewer time commitments, travel or sports activities to fill their calendars. Plus, if participants are connected via the internet, activities happen without transportation logistics or weather cancellations.

Now more than before, planners and teachers have accessed online resources, for example photos and videos to share with learners. They've also availed themselves of opportunities for virtual professional development.

During a series on racism, the congregational worship times flowed

easily and quickly into the adult discussion times, with minimal interruptions. And, without the usual large-group adult class gathered in one place, some of the adults committed themselves to smaller study and discussion groups. This year there were no summer vacations to interrupt the activities.

There were, of course, challenges. For some people, the online activities just don't have appeal, or they don't even have access to the technology. When hands-on materials were distributed to homes, it was hard to measure whether families appreciated or used them. For younger children, the activities depended on parents' help, which may or may not have been available. Sharing content online required extra logistics and expense for obtaining permission to use copyrighted materials.

Maybe some of these benefits and challenges resonate with your experience. How has your church been nurturing your faith together? What new opportunities have you found to grow in faith together?

You may be using the printed and online resources of CommonWord and MennoMedia. Maybe you have accessed webinars and speakers offered by regional churches and Anabaptist post-secondary institutions.

How might congregational educators find ways to better share their experiences and resources with each other? As Christian education continues in large part online, can help be given, at a more centralized level, for obtaining permissions for copyrighted materials? How do we make sure that all congregants,

regardless of their circumstances, are learning and growing as disciples?

As our churches operate in the reality brought about by the pandemic, and as we envision reality on the other side of this coronavirus season, it will be necessary to keep creating and refining congregational practices around faith formation for all.

Mennonite schools too continue to invent and adapt. Check out the Focus on Education on pages 25-30 of this issue to catch glimpses of how the schools are helping to nurture students' faith in their own settings.

Responding to violence

The violent protests that broke out at the U.S. Capitol building on January 6 shocked and troubled many, even those of us living many kilometres away. The rioters' symbols, words, and actions elicited strong condemnation and lament among people of goodwill. Both Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada responded with public statements.

MC Canada's statement read in part, "As leaders of Mennonite Church Canada and its regions, we pray for our siblings in Mennonite Church USA and, together with them, lament the escalation of violence that led to Wednesday's events on Capitol Hill. We condemn white supremacy and Christian nationalism that are revealing themselves in American and Canadian society." (See more here: canadianmennonite.org/capitolhill.)

In the days that follow this troubling event, all of us must scrutinize the ways in which hateful attitudes have been allowed to grow in our nations, our communities and in our own hearts. Let us resolve to seek and spread the peace of Christ with all the creativity we can muster, and with God's help to live courageously into truth and justice. ☿



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PHOTO: ANN PAN / MENNO SIMONS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

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FEATURE

Colombian Mennonites report violence, call for solidarity

Will Braun
Senior Writer

Despite a landmark 2016 peace deal that held the promise of ending more than 50 years of violence in Colombia, Mennonites in South America's second most populated country report that the conflict that affected more than eight million people—through killings, disappearances, threats and displacement—continues to claim more victims.

During a video call with seven senior leaders of the Colombian Mennonite Church and Justapaz—the peace, justice and nonviolent action arm of the church—I was told of 291 killings of civil and community leaders from Jan. 1 to Nov. 14, 2020. In addition, five churches were entirely displaced, three church leaders were killed, and 10 children of church families were forcibly recruited into illegal armed groups. In one case, children were taken from a sanctuary.

These were not Mennonite churches, but churches in areas where Justapaz works, at times in collaboration with the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia.

For security reasons, I am not using the names of the church leaders I spoke with. Justapaz, in particular, is the target of ongoing threats.

The organization accompanies churches and others in numerous parts of the country, including those regions most affected by the armed conflict. For 28 years, it has documented human-rights violations, accompanied people in danger and promoted peacebuilding initiatives.

Church statement

Late last October, Iglesias Cristianas Menonitas de

Colombia (IMCOL) sent a statement to Mennonite Church Canada, among others, about the violence in Colombia. In reporting the killings, it said, “Death has been sown, and with it, terror.”

The statement (bit.ly/2VPfsCp) calls on the Colombian government to comply with the terms of the 2016 Peace Accord. It also lists seven calls to action for churches, including denunciation of violence, teaching nonviolence, accompanying victims, inviting those who commit violence to accept the gospel, and practising solidarity by working for the common good.

In stating that the gospel of peace can accomplish what weapons cannot, the document states: “Our clear and consistent message as churches will permeate the culture, the economy, the social relationships and the exercise of government in our country.”

IMCOL includes 25 congregations in various parts of the country, including areas marked by poverty, unemployment and social problems. A Mennonite Brethren (MB) conference in Colombia includes about 45 congregations. MB churches in certain regions of the country have suffered particularly acutely from the violence. I was told that one church was entirely displaced and children there were raped.

The promise of peace

The 2016 Peace Accord required the demilitarization of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known as FARC), which was the main armed insurgent group in Colombia. In exchange, the government promised: massive investment in disadvantaged rural areas that had



PRESIDENCIA EL SALVADOR PHOTO / CREATIVE COMMONS

Candles mark the hope many Colombians had when a Peace Accord was signed in 2016.

served in part as a base for FARC; government incentives for farmers to grow crops other than coca, a crop used in the production of cocaine and a major source of financing for FARC; redistribution of land; a truth commission; and legal immunity for the majority of players in the conflict.

The Accord narrowly failed to gain approval in a national plebiscite, largely because of opposition to immunity for FARC fighters. The government of the time subsequently took measures to enact the Accord without a plebiscite.

Most FARC fighters turned in their arms, but the government failed to establish a strong presence in poorer rural areas formerly controlled by FARC. Without sufficient security, health services and economic development assistance in these areas, other illegal armed groups filled the void, jostling for control, since the Accord with FARC did not directly include the numerous other armed groups in the country.

Coca production in Colombia is reportedly at record highs, financing violence and fuelling efforts to control agricultural areas. Armed actors also fight for control of mineral resources.

In 2018, a political party that opposed the Accord came to power in Colombia,

further muting the once-high hopes that many Colombians had for the ambitious peace process.

When asked for comment, the Colombian Embassy in Ottawa directed me to two Colombian government officials, neither of whom responded to the questions I sent via email.

Church on the front lines

With a presence in half of the 32 states that make up Colombia, Justapaz has a thorough process for documenting and verifying human-rights abuses. It publishes occasional reports, called “Llamados Proféticos” (Prophetic Calls). The most recent one is a 61-page document that includes theological reflections; detailed analysis of the impacts of the pandemic on the conflict; analysis of the concentration of executive power during the pandemic; and, the heart of the report, a summary of numerous specific cases of human-rights violations.

Each of the latter include: a name or names (sometimes altered for security reasons); the offence suffered; a date; a location; the presumed perpetrator, if known (names of numerous armed groups appear throughout the report); and a two- to three-paragraph

description of what happened. Many note the association of the victim to a church. In some cases, entire churches are listed as the victims.

Three stories

- **One case** involves a 40-year-old man who had left a paramilitary group in 2016 and came to faith. In March 2018, members of an armed group came to his house in a small settlement not too far from the border with Panama. They said he should come with them.

When the pastors of his church heard of this, they joined with community members to go looking for him. They found his body in a paddock.

The man travelled a lot for his work, and some armed actors in the area accused him of collaborating with guerrilla forces.

After his death, his pregnant wife’s health deteriorated.

- **Another case tells** of a teenage boy who cared for five siblings while his mother worked. Due to economic pressures, he went with a friend to do manual labour in a mining area. But he ended up in an armed group, not by his choice.

He maintained sporadic communication with his mother but could not tell her of his predicament because of the threat that would pose.

One day, as he went to fetch water, he heard a military helicopter and ran out into the open, hoping to be spotted and rescued. Hearing a commotion, his captors came running, but the youth fled and was eventually taken in by military personnel. He then entered a government program of reintegration into society.

- **In a third case**, amid increasing clashes between armed groups in the area, a pastor reported that many families in the neighbourhood had been forced out of town. Armed groups were moving into vacated homes, pretending to be ordinary families.

The children and youth of the five churches in the area were at high risk of being forcibly recruited by the armed

groups for combat or to transport illicit substances and arms. One youth in the pastor's church had to move after receiving a death threat. The pastor's two teenaged daughters were also moved after receiving direct threats.

It is assumed there is an informant within the church community.

Compassionate urgency

During my interview, the head of Justapaz shared one account after another of human-rights violations, including current accounts of threats to a well-known MB pastor. He spoke with specificity, concern and urgency. At one point, he mentioned that on that very day he was in another state to accompany a commission that was receiving five people leaving an armed group.

He emphasized that Justapaz also supports more than 50 peacebuilding initiatives, largely in churches. Faith communities are actively addressing the conflict.

On Dec. 11 and 12, 2020, Justapaz organized a national gathering of victims of armed conflict. The National Truth Commission—created under the 2016 Peace Accord—was present, and about 200 church leaders shared about how they have been affected and the efforts they are taking to address the conflict. This was a church contribution to the implementation of the Peace Accord.

For its part, IMCOL leaders have been in direct communication with government officials regarding the conflict. "Our role as church is to push government to take concrete actions," one person told me.

The people I spoke with also expressed a wish that Canadians would make our government aware, partly because international attention can help provide protection for church leaders in Colombia.

"When the Mennonite family around the world knows what is happening in Colombia, that helps us to feel that we are not alone," one leader said. Another encouraged Canadian Mennonites to also put into practice the seven points related to nonviolence in the recent Colombian church statement, as this



PHOTO BY LUIS ALEJANDRO BERNAL ROMERO / CREATIVE COMMONS

Mennonites in Colombia accompany people suffering violence and displacement in rural areas.

helps to strengthen the international Anabaptist church.

The Justapaz spokesperson also asked for prayer as they accompany people in their pain and suffering. ¶

The people Braun spoke with repeatedly expressed a desire for ongoing dialogue with Mennonites in Canada. For those who are interested, email Jeanette Hanson of Mennonite Church Canada Witness (jhanson@mennonitechurch.ca).

¶ For discussion

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you feared for your personal safety? How would you have responded if there had been no one to call for help and no law enforcement available to protect you? When people live in situations where killings, threats and displacements are common, how can they protect themselves while following the teachings of Jesus?

2. Justapaz, the peace, justice and nonviolent action arm of the Mennonite church in Colombia, has been documenting human-rights violations, accompanying people in danger and promoting peacebuilding. What peacebuilding initiatives are Colombian churches working at? Can you think of other ways they might promote peace?

3. Last December, Justapaz organized a national meeting of victims of armed conflict in Colombia, to hear their stories. Why is this an important step in peacebuilding? What can churches in Canada do to promote peace in their local communities?

4. Will Braun quotes a church leader in Colombia: "When the Mennonite family around the world knows what is happening in Colombia, that helps us to feel that we are not alone." What are some concrete ways that the church in Canada can support the Mennonite Church in Colombia?

—By Barb Draper

See related resources at
www.commonword.ca/go/2232

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/// Readers write

✉ Seeking a call to discernment

Re: “Credentials terminated for theologian-academic-pastor,” Nov. 9, 2020, page 18.

Last October, John D. Rempel joined John Howard Yoder, Karl Barth and numerous other theologians in the company of men whose personal wretchedness stained brilliant intellectual legacies. Out of respect for victims, their families and friends, it is understandable that ecclesial and academic institutions want to ban their writings.

However, would any theologian, minister, writer or artist—any person of times past or present—survive a close scrutinization of their personal lives? That is not to say that abuse should be overlooked or relativized. Rather, it is a call to discernment.

While acknowledging the harm abusers caused to their victims, we also need to recognize that no one, if analyzed closely, can stand the rigid morals of our time. We would quickly run out of art, literature, theology and science.

Yoder and Rempel gave birth to great theological pieces and ideas that are essential to contemporary Anabaptist theology. Barth is the parent of modern orthodoxy, no less. Instead of banishing them, I urge seminary professors and deans, seminarians and ministers to disclose their wrongdoings but keep their precious contributions. Engage with them critically and remember that no one is immune to losing their reputation in our time and culture.

Seminaries and the church can do without Barth, Yoder and Rempel, but the lack of their works and genius would greatly impoverish our faith and intellect.

KARL ZENI, WINNIPEG

✉ Repentance and forgiveness cannot be rushed

Re: “When is forgiveness in season?” letter, Dec. 7, 2020, page 8.

I sense an impatience with a process of moving toward forgiveness in the tone of the question. In this response, and most of the others to the issue of sexual misconduct, I have become unhappily aware that our communal response, including that of our leaders and of our structures, continues to ignore or minimize the place the victims find themselves in. Instead, we are concerned that we do “the right thing” toward the victimizer. It’s like we are telling the victims that Scripture says they must forgive or they are not in the right spirit.

Having ignored the victims’ voices for far too long, preventing any meaningful movement towards healing, we now want to have them move quickly to forgiveness, bypassing a process of transparent, heartfelt repentance from the victimizer and the leadership. Neither repentance nor forgiveness is likely to happen under time constraints.

There is a proper time for the community to speak words of forgiveness and restoration, but, in my opinion, it’s not until the victims have had the “season” they need to move willingly and healthily towards forgiveness, having been truly heard, helped, cared for and affirmed by the faith community. I have come to read Isaiah 40:1-11 as a guide for repentance—do the work of “repairing the road.” God will not come in with a bulldozer and level things out; we have to do the work of removing the obstacles to proper relationships. Then, with God’s help, the glory of the Lord can be revealed in renewed and restored lives.

The victims need to continue to be heard in any discussion of restoration. If the community forgives without their participation, the victims are victimized once again—and the victimizer becomes more important than the victims.

ALBERT DURKSEN, WINNIPEG

✉ Mary doesn’t need the title ‘mother of God’

Re: “Gendered images of God,” Nov. 23, 2020, page 23.

In this article we are told that “the language used for God may be unsettling to some.”

What we are not told is that not only the language for God has been changed, but that theology which is totally foreign to, and rejected by, Anabaptists is included in the hymnal. The offence is found in the words of the song entitled “The Angel Gabriel Called Mary Blessed,” No. 221 in the new *Voices Together* hymnal.

In a worship video by St Jacobs (Ont.) Mennonite Church on YouTube, on Nov. 29, 2020, Sarah Kathleen Johnson, the new hymnal’s worship resources editor, explained why she believes that Mary should be called the “mother of God,” which has been approved by the committee for the new hymnal: “When the committee discussed the classic carol, ‘The Angel Gabriel,’ there was a sense that this is a beloved tune, but that the way the text presents Mary as a lowly maiden and favoured lady, gentle and meekly bowing, does not reflect the Mary we encounter in Scripture, or how we would hope to speak of women today. . . . One significant change is replacing the repeated line, ‘most highly favoured

lady; with the image of Mary as the mother of God. While Mennonites do not often speak of Mary in this way, it is true to our theology, which claims Jesus is God, Mary is the mother of Jesus, and, therefore, Mary is the mother of God.”

I believe that Johnson has completely misunderstood the meaning of meekness. Would she have us believe that Mary’s humility was false when she said that God had regarded “*the humble state of his bondservant*” (Luke 1: 48)? I believe that Mary will be remembered and honoured not by the tutelage of a title but rather for her meekness in mission.

DAVID SHANTZ, MONTREAL

✉ Church needs a creative, imaginative approach

Re: “Going to church,” Nov. 23, 2020, page 12.

Arli Klassen’s column sparked a lively discussion at our seniors coffee group. We all fell into the “71 percent of boomers [who] say they want primarily in-person church attendance after COVID is over.” We were also concerned for the continued participation of Generation Z. Klassen draws attention to “disruptions that already exist in our church” that are “increasing the speed at which change is happening.” While not identifying these disruptions or changes, she makes several creative suggestions about potential future directions.

Her column forced me to reflect on changes

among Mennonites in B.C. Mennonites have become urban, educated and wealthy. Family size is lower than the replication rate, reducing natural church growth. The values surrounding marriage, baptism and church membership have weakened. Mennonites are influenced by a neoliberal approach to individual autonomy and economics. Authority in the church is more democratic and corporate through written constitutions and elected councils using Robert’s Rules of Order. Ministers are mostly seminary trained and under contract.

There is a continuing struggle to blend North American evangelical theology with the resurgence of Anabaptist fundamentals. Leadership is dominated by boomers, muting the voices of Generation Z. There is a mixed response to the voices of committed LGBTQ+ Christians. These changes keep Mennonite identity in B.C. in perpetual transition.

While change is ubiquitous, it is critical to ask whether Mennonites will keep Christ at the centre of their institutional structures, theology and service, and whether the church will be authentically intergenerational and inclusive? The seniors coffee members concluded they must be cheerleaders or mentors for the next generation, valuing their energy, passion and giftedness. We have had “our kick at the can.”

Mennonites must take Klassen’s creative and imaginative approach as the Spirit leads us into expanding “bubbles” of faith, hope, love, peace and courage.

JOHANN FUNK, SURREY, B.C.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Stobbe-Wiebe—Jamie Francis (b. Nov. 27, 2020) to Blayne and Emily Stobbe-Wiebe, Carman Mennonite, Man.

Baptisms

Roger Jean Richer—Grace Mennonite, Prince Albert, Sask., Dec. 13, 2020.

Deaths

Barkovsky—Margaret (nee Krueger), 94 (b. Nov. 4, 1926; d. Dec. 17, 2020) Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Bergén—Annette, 57 (b. July 25, 1963; d. Dec. 18, 2020), Rosthern Mennonite, Sask.

Driedger—John, 79 (b. Aug. 27, 1940; d. Sept. 17, 2020), Carman Mennonite, Man.

Janzen—Jean, 71 (b. Aug. 6, 1949; d. Dec. 9, 2020), Rosthern Mennonite, Sask.

Jantzi—Lavina, 100 (b. Feb. 29, 1920; d. Nov. 1, 2020), former Riverdale Mennonite, Millbank, Ont.

Neufeld—Elsa Klassen, 88 (b. March 13, 1932; d. Dec. 12, 2020), Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Penner—Tena, 88 (b. Nov. 17, 1932; d. Dec. 2, 2020), Rosthern Mennonite, Sask.

Schultz—John, 76 (b. July 31, 1944; d. Oct. 29, 2020), Poole Mennonite, Ont.

Thiessen—Anne (nee Funk), 94 (b. Oct. 5, 1926; d. Dec. 8, 2020), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Thiessen—Neil, 96 (b. Dec. 5, 1924; d. Dec. 6, 2020), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Wiebe—Eldon, 86 (b. Sept. 3, 1934; d. Nov. 16, 2020), Carman Mennonite, Man.

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

FROM OUR LEADERS

Refined, pared back, purified

Josh Wallace

In his book *Transforming Mission*, missiologist David J. Bosch famously pictured the church's mission as "a ceaseless celebration of the Feast of Epiphany" with our life together, our prayers, our programs always "pointing to God, holding up the God-child before the eyes of the world." We gather before the starlit cradle, where Zion's light casts the promise of a new dawn on all peoples (Isaiah 42:6-7 and 49:6-7).

On Jan. 6, we celebrated that moment when the the promise of Immanuel begins to shine, from Bethlehem to the ends of the earth. It begins as the magi (pagan foreigners) step into the child's light. The story continues over the next weeks as we, too, come to see more and more clearly what good news this baby proclaims.

We travel quickly from cradle to baptism. On Jan. 10, we remembered that Jesus walked to the front of the crowd, waded out into the river and gave his amen to God's promise. It's then that we begin to hear what God-with-us means: "*You are my beloved Child; I'm delighted with you*" (Luke 3:22). In some congregations, we dip

our fingers into a bowl of water and remember our baptism, that moment we stepped forward with Jesus.

And then to the desert.

The lectionary pushes this episode to the first Sunday in Lent, but, as the Gospel writers tell the story, the voice at Jesus' baptism never moves to become good news for the world (Luke 4:14-21) without walking this desert road.

In some ways, I feel we've already been in the desert with Jesus—not just for 40 days but for closer to 300. Like Jesus' time in the desert, this past year has meant vulnerability, doing without, a mandatory restricting of life. Jesus went without food and human companionship, accompanied only by the devil, wild beasts and angels. In no small part, we shared that experience during 2020, left alone with ourselves, our devils, our God.

The desert didn't blindside Jesus. Instead, as Sister Margaret M. McKenna reminds us in *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*: "The desert is the place where the prophets of Israel were transformed by awareness of God's presence and Word, and were

sent out to proclaim it to the world." Jesus chose to go there, chose to be changed. There, the promise and mission given by the heavenly voice were tried and tested, refined, pared back and purified.

The desert means embracing vulnerability, need, weakness. We come to know that it's our very weakness that God declares to be "*my beloved child in whom I am well pleased*." The desert means aloneness and exposure. But it's right there that God's promise to be with us becomes good news, light for the whole world.

When the desert does its work, we come back changed. Jesus did.

I wonder how we live this season of Epiphany this year, after so many months in the desert. I wonder how we remember those baptismal words differently, and how we see new light dawning for us and all the earth. ✎



Josh Wallace is Mennonite Church Saskatchewan's church engagement minister.

A moment from yesterday



Why go to all the trouble of producing a new hymnal? The *Gesangbuch* commission of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada faced this question in 1961. The 1942 version, it was felt, lacked readability and a variety in tunes. Furthermore, the world of the early 1960s "demanded a broader witness," with more vocational, youth and gospel songs. The conference needed a unifying hymnal. Although the adoption of a German hymnal of the Mennonite Brethren denomination was considered, "the fullness of time for a complete exchange of spiritual treasures seems not to have arrived" due to theological and musical differences. Visit bit.ly/37tLbA4 for the identity of *Gesangbuch* commission members at this Winnipeg meeting.

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing
Photo: *The Canadian Mennonite* / Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

IN THE IMAGE

The kingdom of heaven now

Ed Olfert

At the end of the infamous year 2020, I retired from pastoral ministry. Again. We'll see if it "takes" this time.

Looking back, I am reminded that, at different times in my ministry, I have been impassioned by different scriptural concepts. The passion that drew me into ministry was shaped by Isaiah 58:1-9, about a sarcastic God calling out much of what we might normally think of as church, and then pointing in another, transforming, direction.

I recall a time of kneeling at the words of I John 4, being reminded that love is God, and God is love, being overwhelmed at the simple concept that again pointed toward transformation.

The description of being faithful in Matthew 25—the sheep and goats—described my best passion for quite some time.

Then I jumped to Genesis 1:26, lingering there for years in awe of the implication of all things being created "in the image."

I end my formal ministry time gripped by the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Those who read my column might recognize that passion.

And so, a story.

On Dec. 13, my second-last service, I officiated at a baptism and received another person into membership at Grace Mennonite Church in Prince Albert, Sask. The baptismal candidate was Jean Richer, recently achieving day parole after 31 years of incarceration. The other person was a retired parole officer.

I have Jean's permission to tell his story. As a teenager, he was convicted of a crime, a life taken, for which he has always maintained his innocence. There is little doubt that the length of his incarceration was directly related to his refusal to acknowledge any guilt. Most of those locked-up years were lived, unsurprisingly, as an angry person. His quick mind allowed him to grasp the intricacies of the law and the nuances of his rights as an inmate, and his time was much given to filing grievances against staff for perceived injustices. This did not make him a darling in the institution.

About five years ago, Jean faced cancer. During those hard days, he realized that if he was to have any hope of being released to care for his aging mother, he would need to change. So began the very hard work of releasing his anger. In the two or three years I have known him, I

have never heard him speak derogatively about another person. He gets angry, impatient, like all of us. His social skills, framed by his incarceration, occasionally leave him in awkward situations. But these moments are offered to his community: "How can I grow? What should I learn? How can I change?"

On a cold day in December, a traveller came by the church. He asked for a warm coat. All I had to offer was a women's quilted coat liner. He laughed and turned it down. I offered gloves, toques, food, but no, those weren't his needs. With a cheery goodbye, he walked away.

Jean, who spends considerable time at the church, using the facilities as a base for job hunting, suddenly appeared. He asked what the man wanted, then pointed to a couple of coats on the rack. "Those are mine," he said. "I brought them in case somebody could use them." With that, Jean sped out the door and down the alley, returning with the traveller in tow. A coat fit just fine.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Jean is now a member of Grace Mennonite. He makes the congregation better; fresher; more hopeful; more eager to leap forward, instead of hesitating; more determined to bring about "the kingdom of heaven" now. ❧



Ed Olfert (p2peho@gmail.com) is thankful for trust given and relationships offered.

Et cetera

Keeping children and youth safe

Dove's Nest describes itself as a Christian organization that aims "to empower and equip faith communities to keep children and youth safe in their homes, churches and communities." It now offers training and resources related to life in pandemic times. Topics include: Tech tips for Zooming with kids; Best practices when working with youth during a pandemic; Involving children in the (virtual) worshipping community; and 11 ways to keep children and youth safe while they're at home. To learn more, visit dovesnest.net/COVID19.



Dove's Nest

Faith Communities Keeping Children & Youth Safe

MIND AND SOUL

The practice of faith

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

The Buddhist nun looked across the table and asked me if Christians were taught how to practise faith. “Is Christian faith only beliefs that you try to internalize? Or do you do anything to help people more deeply develop themselves?” she asked.

I knew what she meant. Buddhists—especially of the western tradition—engage in meditation and other techniques that serve as training of mind and spirit. Like athletes, they assume that disciplined practice is the only thing that can counter the ways of the world and lead to higher performance.

Bodhi and I were preparing a joint presentation about climate change for an interfaith event. My Christian and her Buddhist understandings didn’t differ on the facts, nor did her training as an environmental scientist or mine in the social sciences. We differed slightly on causes, mostly due to different notions of human nature, and the suffering and goodness in the world. But we were now at the stage of pondering how our different faiths led to action, and what type of action.

Neither of us assumed faithful religious belief leads to effective reversal of human actions damaging the climate.

That perception is squashed by dedicated American evangelical Christians who also happen to be fervent climate deniers. (It is worth noting, however, that evangelical Christians globally do not generally reject climate change; the consequences are sadly evident in much of the world.)

Among Bodhi’s proposals for action on the climate crisis was meditation, which has been criticized as an incomprehensibly irrelevant response. Others question the Buddhist notion of “detachment,” assuming that it means ignoring issues. I’ve faced the same criticisms as a Christian when I advocate praying for the crises present in the world or when I insist on the need for hope despite the evidence!

For about three years now I’ve been practising meditation. It was suggested by a counsellor to help as my mind began to splinter from the stress of a job that was being changed into something for which I was not suited. Meditation helped control the mental “spin,” which increasingly fragmented my ADHD brain. Meditation is a form of mental training. In secular circles, people call it “mindfulness.”

Meditation is a way of helping our minds to become more self-aware more

often and to develop the habits of loving kindness, in Buddhist terms. It has given me tools to reduce my feeling of frenzy and over-reactivity. Scientific research supports these claims, which is why I was prescribed meditation via a course paid for by Alberta Health Services.

Meditation is called a “practice” in Buddhism because, with discipline and training, one can get better at it and see lasting effects in everyday life. Religion is more than beliefs; it includes institutions, history, practices and theology, too. Faith without connection to these aspects remains utterly subjective. As an example, in stressful jobs like stock traders and snipers, mindfulness training is used to give an extra edge of self-control—and performance. So any technique needs to be filled with content.

Christianity has resources of contemplation developed over 20 centuries of Christian practice. Mostly, though, we focus on correct beliefs, emphasizing reading Scripture to understand the truth of the world and the Creator. We assume that from correct belief comes the works of compassion, by which faith in Christ will be known. But what my Buddhist friend was asking was, how do Christians train in deliberate, specific and disciplined ways? ☸



Randolph Haluza-DeLay is in the process of moving from Alberta to Ontario during a pandemic.

Et cetera

One million trees

Mennonite Men, an organization associated with Mennonite Church Canada and MC U.S.A., has launched an initiative targeting the problem of climate change and inviting care for the Earth. The goal of the JoinTrees campaign is to plant one million trees by 2030. The organization is locating land, forming a network of partners and resources, assisting with tree planting, and receiving contributions for this program. It invites men’s groups, youth groups, congregations, universities and other groups to participate in this campaign. Women, girls and boys are welcome as well. To learn more, visit mennonitemen.org/jointrees.

Source: Mennonite Men



TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

Launched into oblivion

Joshua Penfold

My youngest daughter Ruth can be a little firecracker. We say that she's sweet and spicy.

Sometimes she can get into a real funk, though, and I can feel lost as to how to help her. I am thankful for my wife, who often sweeps in to save the day when my strategies are failing miserably. Sometimes our strategies work and sometimes they don't.

And the parental strategic weapons we wielded for victory when challenged with my oldest daughter have often proved to be powerless against my little firecracker's spiciness. Through trial and error we have been learning lots of different methods to try to snap her out of her states of anger, misery, frustration or grumpiness.

At this point, I had better balance this by stating that Ruth can also be the sweetest little thing in the world and melt your heart with joy. Sweet and spicy.

When it comes to her grumpiness, one such strategy that I have employed involves putting my hand out waiting for her to give me her "grumpies." Sometimes she is reluctant; other times she's more willing.

Almost always, though, she will eventually hand them over, invisibly

dropping her "grumpies" into my receiving hand. I carefully take them, not wanting to accidentally drop any, then I turn and launch them out as far away as possible into oblivion, symbolically ridding her—and the room, the

house and possibly the planet—of this particular batch of "grumpies."

Often we've succeeded in ridding her of them all, and then the "grumpies" are replaced with giggles, a wonderful transformation from spicy to sweet.

It's amazing how we're able to be rid of an invisible thing, an intangible thing, by symbolically treating it like a very physical thing. I was reminded of how we do this in our spiritual lives. Have you ever written a transgression down on a piece of paper and then nailed it to a cross or thrown it in a fire, as a physical way of letting go of your sin and offering it to God?

Even Scripture speaks of a way in which God does this: *"You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl our iniquities into the depth of the sea"* (Micah 7:19).

Have you ever written a transgression down on a piece of paper and then nailed it to a cross or thrown it in a fire, as a physical way of letting go of your sin and offering it to God?

I take great delight in visualizing God putting his hand out before us, waiting patiently for us to hand over our iniquities, so that once offered, God can quickly pivot, wind up and launch them into the depths of the sea, never to be seen again, followed by giggles of delight. ✎



Joshua Penfold (penfoldjoshua@gmail.com) won first place for ball throwing in Grade 6 track and field for the City

of Guelph, so you know he must have a good arm for launching things into oblivion.

Et cetera

Remembering the 1918-19 influenza pandemic

Urias Martin, an Old Order Mennonite minister at Martin's meetinghouse near Waterloo, Ont., remembered the pandemic of 1918-19. His grandson, Donald Martin, wrote: "Urias recalled that on a given day there were 13 open graves in the Mount Hope Cemetery [Kitchener, Ont.]. At one point Urias held three funeral services in four days. The flu attacked the lungs and generated a high fever, and often within a few days claimed its victim."

Source: *The Church Correspondent*, March 2015

PHOTO: JAMES REUSSER/MENNONITE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO
Martin's Mennonite cemetery and meetinghouse.



VIEWPOINT

Good graces

Ryan Dueck

As human beings, we're generally pretty lousy at grace. We long for it in our deepest and truest moments, and we desperately need it, God knows. But we often struggle to receive it. We'd prefer to earn, to justify, to merit. Grace is for the weak, and that's not us.

At least this is the impression we often give. We're even worse at extending it, particularly to those we are convinced will treat it recklessly and wastefully. Those who most need it, in other words. We are far more interested in, and skilled at, scorekeeping and evaluating. This is our lane, and we're too often happy to stay in it.

I was listening to a podcast recently where a quote from the Nigerian theologian Nimi Wariboko stopped me in my tracks: "Grace, by definition, is a genuine gift and not a secretly instrumentalized one. Freely it's given and freely it's received. It has no purpose, no

self-addressed envelope from the giver to send something in return."

When I think back on my life thus far and how grace has been presented, I don't think I've ever consistently heard the message that grace is a genuine gift and not a "secretly instrumentalized one." The more conservative iteration of Mennonite faith that I grew up in talked about grace a lot, but usually as a preamble to the more serious business of "accepting Jesus into your heart" and embracing a pretty rigid doctrinal package about who God was, who God wasn't, who God accepted, who God didn't, and what this "free gift" actually required.

In the more liberal version of Mennonite faith that I presently inhabit, talk of God's grace, when it makes an appearance, is the means by which we are "set free" to get busy following Jesus on the activist trail. There are injustices to resist, politics to embrace (or condemn), petitions to sign, rallies to attend. In both cases, grace is quite quickly instrumentalized. The "self-addressed envelope" always demands something in return.

This instrumentalizing of the gift of grace is among the church's more well-travelled paths. We just can't seem to tolerate, or even conceptualize, the concept of a genuine gift. We demand progress, whether in personal holiness, theological acumen or social justice. We demand this of our leaders and from the people in the pew.

I know of too many pastors who have walked away or have been driven from the church at least in part due to a highly instrumentalized approach to faith and leadership. I know of too many people who have walked away from the church because they quickly discovered that the word "grace" was a Trojan horse by which to smuggle in a whole checklist of things that this grace demanded.

Way back in 2001, when my wife and I adopted our kids, U2's *All That You Can't Leave Behind* album was dominating the airwaves. One of my favourite songs was called "Grace"; we gave our daughter this as a second name. I would listen to it while marvelling at these two beautiful little lives that inexplicably were now part of my world. There's a line in the song that says simply, "Grace makes beauty out of ugly things."

One of the ugly things that I'm convinced that grace can make beauty out of is our relentless human tendency to instrumentalize everything and everybody. We so easily treat one another as means toward ends.

We're nice to people who think like us because they validate us and make us feel bolder in our views. We affirm those who buy into our vision for the church or workplace because this is how our little kingdoms are built and how our reputations are burnished. We massage egos in the hope that the favour will be returned down the road. We praise in the hope that we'll be praised, invite in the hope that we'll be invited, serve in the hope that we'll be served. The list could go on.

And yet, in Christ we encounter a genuine giver offering genuine gifts. Gifts of forgiveness, hope, truth, mercy, judgment and a right-making that goes beyond what we could ever accomplish or imagine. The gift of love. Of course. And not the versions that we are able to muster that never really escape a certain whiff of selfishness.

This love is deep, true, wide and expansive. It's the love that is the very ground of being. Not the prelude to a theology exam, not the thin justification for a socio-political agenda. It's a genuine gift. It's the gift that never stops giving. ☞



Ryan Dueck is pastor of Lethbridge (Alta.) Mennonite Church.



VIEWPOINT

Following Jesus in(to) the climate crisis

Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld
Mennonite World Conference

What does “following Jesus” mean? What does it mean to follow the One who is our hope?

These questions take on special importance at a time when people around the globe are worried about the fate of our earthly home. Even as we struggle with the immediate effects of the coronavirus, we are facing a more encompassing crisis we see in the rapid and alarming changes in our environment.

For some of us, hope means counting on Christ’s coming to rescue us from catastrophe. We then too quickly give up on God’s beloved creation.

For others, hope means active engagement, not only in changing our ways, but in trying to get our societies and political leaders to change their ways. We ourselves, rather than Jesus, too easily become “our hope.”

Our agenda as Jesus followers

Anabaptists have drawn a clear line from Jesus’ call to love the enemy to refusing participation in war. More, we have come to see the call to follow him as a summons to work actively for peace in our world, including calling on governments to change their violent ways.

But how do we follow Jesus in relation to a global crisis that did not exist in the world he taught in? Living in a pre-industrial world, Jesus did not address climate issues or even creation care more generally. Does that mean that the New Testament has nothing to say to us about our fragile and endangered environment?

Not for a moment.

Following Jesus would need to be re-envisioned again and again as times and circumstances changed, up to our own day. As the Book of Acts shows us, Jesus’ circles of followers quickly moved beyond the countryside of Galilee and



PHOTO COURTESY OF MWC

Francisca Ibanda is pictured on a farm in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Judea, becoming global, taking root in cosmopolitan cities like Ephesus, Corinth and Rome.

Christ-hymns

Yes, Jesus was remembered as a healer, teacher and storyteller, as we see in the gospels. But his followers came to see him and confess him as cosmic Lord and Saviour, hope of all creation, as they expressed in the great Christ-hymns.

In one such hymn we read of the *Logos*, the “Word,” that was not only with God, but was God, by and through whom “*all things came into being*” (John 1:3). The Gospel of John introduces us to Jesus as that *Logos* becoming flesh and “tenting” with us (1:14).

In another great Christ-hymn, Jesus is worshipped as the “icon” of the invisible God, the firstborn of “*all creation*” through whom and for whom “*all things*” in the universe were created. Through him, God was pleased to reconcile “*all things*,” making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:15-20).

These hymns remind us that if we wish to be true to the Jesus of Scripture, we must not choose between the Word through whom all things were made and the Word that became flesh in Jesus. We must not create a dichotomy between creation and new creation.

The truth that is in Jesus

To follow Jesus is to “*learn Christ*,” as Ephesians puts it, that is, “*the truth that is in Jesus*” (4:20-21). The one in and through whom “*all things*” are made, is the one in and through whom a saving God gathers all things (Ephesians 1:10). All creation groans in anticipation of Jesus’ followers learning Christ in that fashion, as Paul might have said (to adapt Romans 8:18-25).

While there are many other concerns on our plate as the Faith and Life Commission, we have encouraged the establishment of the Creation Care Task Force, and pledge to do our part to strengthen our global family’s capacity to respond faithfully to the climate crisis as hope-filled followers of Jesus.

We have the opportunity to “*learn Christ*” together as a global family, to strengthen our hope in such a way that it fully engages us in God’s love for creation. It will take courage, imagination, commitment to discipleship and trust in the One who promises us a “*future with hope*” (Jeremiah 29:11). ☿

Tom Yoder Neufeld is chair of MWC’s Faith and Life Commission. He is a member of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont.

Churches work together to serve curbside Christmas dinner

Communal effort aims to show that people care

By Janet Bauman

Eastern Canada Correspondent
BADEN, ONT.

On Christmas Day, 137 free turkey dinners were served up for people who needed some Christmas cheer in the Wilmot and Wellesley townships of Waterloo Region.

The curbside Christmas dinner was organized by the Wilmot Family Resource Centre based in New Hamburg, and supported by more than 10 local churches. It was aimed at anyone who was alone at Christmas, regardless of income, to “show that people out there care about them,” said Trisha Robinson, the resource centre’s executive director. “It’s the right thing to do,” she said, adding that this kind of generosity “is not anything unusual for our community.”

Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden served as the distribution hub. With its large parking lot and kitchen, it was ideal for smooth traffic flow and physical distancing of volunteers. Rick Brenneman, who represented the Baden area church in implementing the event, emphasized that it was “a communal effort.”

The idea came from a resource centre volunteer who remembered working with churches in Port Hope, Ont., where she used to live, to serve a Christmas dinner for people who were alone.

The intent was to provide an in-person, sit-down meal, but with COVID-19 restrictions in place, that wasn’t possible. Undeterred, Robinson said they were determined to “find a way to do this.”

Through the local Wilmot Ministerial Association, several churches in the community agreed to help. They promoted the event, handed out registration forms, and offered financial and prayer support. The resource centre managed the organizational details, inviting people to sign up ahead of time.



THE WILMOT POST PHOTO BY NIGEL GORDIJK

Trisha Robinson, left, executive director of the Wilmot Family Resource Centre, New Hamburg, Ont., stands next to Santa and Mrs. Claus outside Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden, where 137 free curbside Christmas dinners were distributed. At least 10 community churches joined in the effort to bring some Christmas cheer to people in the community who were alone for Christmas.

Angie’s Kitchen, a nearby restaurant, prepared and packaged the turkey dinners at a reduced price, delivering them hot to the Steinmann church kitchen. In a time-span of 90 minutes, more than 20 volunteers saw to it that all the dinners were picked up or delivered. Two volunteers dressed as Santa and Mrs. Claus gave those who picked up their dinners an extra taste of the festive spirit. The kind of community spirit and effort to pull off the event during COVID-19 restrictions is just “one of the miracles that happens in our community every day,” according to Robinson.

James Park, pastor of Wilmot Centre

Church, one of the participating congregations, was quoted in *The Wilmot Post* saying, “We want to be a blessing to our community, not just a building out in the country.”

Robinson saw it as “a gift from our local churches to our community members, to show we care deeply about you,” according to the article in *The Wilmot Post*. In a telephone interview she also noted that “we are very well supported by churches all the time,” and saw this event as “the spirit moving” in those churches. ❧

MWC Executive Committee approves expansion plan

Mennonite World Conference

In online Mennonite World Conference (MWC) meetings in mid-November 2020, the Executive Committee approved expansion of MWC's structure to include new specialized networks.

Deliberation of the proposal to accept new emerging networks into MWC's structure occupied much of the meetings. The peace, health and education networks would expand MWC by creating an official relationship with their member organizations.

"The idea of networks is coherent with our vision cast in 2009 to be a global communion," said César García, MWC's general secretary. "Networks draw together Anabaptist agencies to exchange experiences and resources to improve their own work."

In 2009, the General Council created four commissions—Deacons, Faith and Life, Mission, and Peace—to enrich the church. It projected future expansion to include networks that connect Anabaptist specialists in fields like education and health.

Although the networks' operating funds flow through MWC, the networks would be responsible for their own fundraising through membership fees or grant applications. Each network would have a part-time staff coordinator and representation on a commission.

Two networks are already part of MWC's structure, through the Mission Commission. The Global Mission Fellowship has 71 members from Anabaptist church agencies involved in evangelistic, disciple-making and humanitarian/social activities. The Global Anabaptist Service Network has 57 members from church agencies and organizations committed to the holistic gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of the church through service

ministries.

"This proposal is in line with how MWC works—from the bottom up," said Carlos Martínez-García, a Latin American representative. "This is a way for the experts in these agencies to share their gifts with the global family."

"It gives us more capacity," said Lisa Carr-Pries, although she cautions setting up leaders for a task that is too large.

the networks will be evaluated in 2027 for their continuing status.

"There are risks to increasing the size and complexity of MWC's structure," said J. Nelson Kraybill, president of the Mennonite World Conference. "However, these networks are already going. We are delighted to take the opportunity to have them collaborate with MWC."



MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE SCREENSHOT

In online meetings in mid-November 2020, the Executive Committee approved expansion of MWC's structure to include new specialized networks.

The proposal to add two education networks (a Global Anabaptist Primary/Secondary Education Network and a Global Anabaptist Higher Education Network), a Global Anabaptist Health Network, and a Global Anabaptist Peace Network, was approved, with cautions registered by some Executive Committee members. The General Council will consider the proposal in 2022. If approved,

Struggling churches participate

"God has anointed us to bring good news to the broken-hearted . . . and proclaim the year of God's favour," said Kraybill, quoting Isaiah 61:1-4. "The past 10 months of COVID-19 have been disorienting," he said but noted how the narrative of the Old Testament shows God's faithfulness to his people despite great hardship.

In many of MWC's national member

churches, there are unemployment and hunger from shortages of food and income. This has led to contributions from member churches that are below budget, Len Rempel, MWC's chief operating officer, reported. "We've been encouraged that, despite their difficulties, churches have responded saying, 'We are struggling but still want to do what we can to participate in the global church.'"

MWC's income level is behind previous years, however, due to the cancellation of all travel since March; spending is also lower than in the past. Up to 40 percent of MWC's annual donations are usually received in November and December.

The postponement of the international assembly to 2022 results in an additional year of expenses. Without making adjustments, Rempel projected a \$150,000 deficit for the assembly.

The COVID-19 response fund—an extra-budget project in 2020—raised some \$400,000 in collaboration with a dozen Anabaptist mission and service agencies. Member church projects brought emergency relief to their communities in need of food and hygiene supplies due to the pandemic.

Revisiting conscientious objection

The Executive Committee recommended further revision to a document the Peace Commission created on conscientious objection. This statement will go to the General Council for approval in 2022.

MWC has three kinds of official documents—statements, teaching resources and guidelines—all of which are located in the Reference Notebook, a resource for General Council and Executive Committee leaders.

The Executive Committee approved revisions to the policy document on appointing specialists to MWC commissions. ❧

'With love and generosity'

Eden Mennonite Church serves, connects with community in need

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Eden Mennonite Church of Chilliwack, B.C., is finding ways to reach out to its community and put its otherwise-empty church building to good use.

Eden was recently featured in an article in *The Chilliwack Progress*, describing how church members are actively engaging with those in need through several social service programs, despite not being able to meet for in-person worship services.

Bowls of Hope is a non-profit organization that provides fresh fruit and hot lunches to children in 23 schools throughout the Chilliwack School District. Eden first connected with Bowls of Hope by furnishing space for the program's operations. An added benefit was that the organization increased its volunteer base through Eden's church members.

The Chilliwack District Seniors Resources Society also utilizes the space at

Eden. Roorda had volunteered last year as a driver, delivering food hampers to senior citizens at the start of the pandemic. "At one point, I mentioned to the director of [the seniors group] that our building and our resources were open to them if needed," Roorda said. "This led to them moving their hamper program into our church basement."

Additionally, Eden holds donation drives for the Meadow Rose Society, which provides basic necessities for children under four, such as diapers and formula.

"Every church will have its own response in this time, and we feel that the best way to continue to be

church in our community is to respond with love and generosity to those in need, and we feel that the best response is to have empathy for our fellow human being, and to, in turn, love our neighbour in any way we can," Roorda concluded. ❧

With files from The Chilliwack Progress.



PHOTO BY AARON ROORDA

Pictured from left to right: Ben Roorda, left, Alexis Roorda and Julia Corrigan of Eden Mennonite Church in Chilliwack, B.C., stuff a truck full of food for the Bowls of Hope program last summer.

"As a church, we have felt it is important to respond to this pandemic in a way that serves our community and our fellow human beings," said Pastor Aaron Roorda. "We have worked hard during this time to be creative in the way we do church and we have worked hard at focusing into two areas: connection and serving."



Resourcing the church in transition

Why the Mennonite church should be paying attention to two non-Mennonite groups

By Donna Schulz

Saskatchewan Correspondent



Ryan Siemens

“People talk about church decline,” says Ryan Siemens. “I prefer to talk about church transition.” Lately, he’s been thinking a lot about church transition, and wondering, “What are we being called to open ourselves up to?”

Siemens, who is Mennonite Church Saskatchewan’s executive minister, thinks the church’s future lies in mission at a local, congregational level. In recent years, he has become aware of two groups that, while not Mennonite, may have something of value to offer the Mennonite church in relation to this.

Free Methodist Church, Siemens describes it as having “a very ecumenical environment,” even though the organization’s goal isn’t necessarily ecumenism “but drawing in people of various denominations who are grappling with the same questions.”

“They’re not Anabaptist,” says Siemens, “but I personally resonate with a lot of what they’re saying.” And what they are saying is that the local congregation is the centre of mission, formation and worship.

“This is where the community should touch the hem of Christ’s garment,” he says, “not in denominational structure or program, but at the local congregational level.”

with MC Saskatchewan congregations, says Siemens.

“Every forest needs old trees but also needs saplings,” he says, wondering, “How do more experienced churches become seed beds for new Anabaptist expressions?” He adds, “I think New Leaf can give us insights into what that can look like.”

Siemens is also hoping New Leaf might be able to help the regional church in finding church planters from within its own congregations and in teaching congregations about new expressions of faith.

The Jesus Collective, a fledgling organization launched by the Meeting House, a Be In Christ Canada congregation based



The first is the New Leaf Network, which, according to its website, is “a collaborative, relational and creative missional organization that supports, equips and connects church planters, spiritual entrepreneurs and missional practitioners in post-Christian Canada.”

“They’re trying to understand the Canadian voice,” says Siemens, because, “what works in the U.S. doesn’t work in Canada.”

New Leaf, he says, is grappling with what good news means to the “nones”—those who have never been part of a church—and the “dones”—those who have left the church.

Although New Leaf has its roots in the

Siemens says New Leaf is trying to answer a question like, “Why would someone who didn’t grow up in the church want to start attending?”

“I think we should be [part of] that conversation,” says Siemens. “We have something to offer, but they also have something to give us.”

Josh Wallace, who is church engagement minister for MC Saskatchewan, has been spending time this fall in New Leaf’s virtual “re-design shop.” This space is intended to help established congregations re-imagine mission in their own contexts. Wallace will integrate what he has learned from New Leaf into his work

in Oakville, Ont., is the second group that has come to Siemens’s attention as he considers church transition.

On its website, the Jesus Collective describes itself as “a relational network of churches, ministries and leaders who believe the time is right to unite, equip and amplify a movement that is all about Jesus.”

Siemens says the Jesus Collective hopes to be an Anabaptist network in North America, based on the idea of the church as a centred set, as opposed to a bounded set. He says the collective grew out of requests from independent churches that felt they “[couldn’t] buy into the full

agenda of the evangelical right wing but also [found] some progressive elements they [couldn't] agree with."

Siemens has had some exploratory dialogue with the Jesus Collective, and the MC Saskatchewan council has given him permission to attend online meetings with the group. "They are wrestling with the same questions we are," he says, "and I think we can be a resource to one another. . . . We have things to offer these

neo-Anabaptists."

Siemens says the Mennonite church can bring to the table a historical connection to Anabaptist history, along with resources, theologians, schools and congregations that seek to follow Christ through an Anabaptist lens. The Mennonite church can also be a partner for the journey.

"We are striving to be faithful in our walk, as are these groups," he says. "We could be mutually transformed by these

relationships."

Siemens's desire to see the Mennonite church partner with these groups carries with it a sense of urgency.

"Would we rather see good things die out, or [can we] plant some seeds?" he asks. "Renewal isn't going to come from what we had in the past. It will come with putting Christ at the centre, [with] inviting our neighbours to participate in that, and [with] us participating in their lives." ❧

Partnership provides 'exciting opportunity' to address affordable housing

MennoHomes to work with Mennonite Disaster Service on renovation project

By Janet Bauman

Eastern Canada Correspondent
KITCHENER, ONT.

The need is great. Six thousand people wait for affordable housing in Waterloo Region. Local government is committed to creating 25,000 new housing units in the next five years, but Karen Redman, the regional chair, acknowledged in a Dec. 24, 2020, *Kitchener Today* article, "I don't think we can possibly move fast enough . . . in order to do that, we need partners."

Enter MennoHomes, a non-profit organization founded in 2001 to provide affordable housing to low-income households in Waterloo Region. It currently manages more than a hundred housing units, and is building phase one of a project that will eventually provide another 48 units with space for three partners and community groups.

MennoHomes was recently awarded a Kitchener property in a lottery giveaway of three surplus properties owned by the region, near downtown Kitchener. The lottery was open to non-profit groups with experience in providing affordable housing, and the expertise and funds to continue operating the homes as affordable rental units for at least 25 years.

MennoHomes acquired 24 Mill Street, a two-storey detached house well suited to a family, with three bedrooms and a

yard. The other two houses went to the KW Urban Native Wigwam Project, a non-profit organization providing safe, affordable housing for Indigenous people on low or moderate income.

But 24 Mill Street needs renovations. Enter Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), another non-profit organization that normally coordinates volunteers to do clean-up, repair and rebuilding work for people affected by disasters in Canada and the United States. MennoHomes will partner with MDS, which will coordinate volunteers to do the renovation work, donating time and labour. Materials will cost around \$30,000.

MennoHomes "typically focuses on new construction," says executive director Dan Driedger, while MDS has expertise in restoring a building in this condition. We "trust that it will be in good hands," Driedger adds, calling it an "exciting opportunity to partner in a new way."

Nick Hamm, unit chair of MDS Ontario, says "With COVID and restrictions on travelling, we have volunteers anxious to engage." This project allows MDS to "respond locally" under the current restricted way of doing things.

MennoHomes gets possession at the



PHOTO COURTESY OF MENNOHOMES

This house, at 24 Mill Street in Kitchener, Ont., was acquired by MennoHomes from Waterloo Region in a lottery and will be renovated by Mennonite Disaster Service in a unique partnership to create more affordable housing for families.

end of January, and MDS hopes to start renovations right away. It is anticipated a family could move in by June.

In an interview in the same *Kitchener Today* article, Driedger named partnerships as valuable in solving the affordable housing gap. ❧

'Meet you at the manger'

Outdoor service begins Christmas Day in Yarrow

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

In the early morning of Dec. 25, 2020, still dark and with snow on the ground, a small group of people gathered in front of Yarrow United Mennonite Church to re-enact the first Christmas.

This was the sixth time for "Meet You at the Manger," an early-morning Christmas service designed and led by Heidi Epp and

Christmas was "the darkest place on the lot in the community," and she envisioned a place for the whole family to gather to begin this special holiday.

"I got to the point where I felt the Christmas story is not about a picture-perfect story; nothing is convenient in the story. I felt like 'you need to shake up your

in 2011, a hundred people came, and the event became a favourite. Strangers off the street also came to join them.

When her family relocated to a farm in Chilliwack some years ago, Epp was inspired to continue the Christmas sunrise service in a new format. Her neighbours had sheep, so an outdoor service using



SCREENSHOT BY ROSS W. MUIR

Participants gather outside Yarrow United Mennonite Church in rural B.C. to re-enact the Christmas story on Christmas morning.

involving her family members and a few friends as readers and actors. Usually the event takes place at the Epp farm near Chilliwack with an audience attending, but this year, due to the pandemic, participants gathered at the Yarrow church building, where a manger was already set up in front.

An early morning Christmas come-as-you-are service for Epp began a decade ago when she was attending Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond. She says she felt inspired to plan something when she realized the church building first thing on

Christmas," she recalls. She believed God was giving her a vision to invite people to come at 7 a.m.—admittedly an inconvenient time—to be "unsettled in their convenience, outside the box," to hear the story of Jesus' birth.

Epp invited church members to come as they were, in pajamas if they wished, to hear the Christmas story because, as she puts it, "The first thing should be unwrapping the actual gift of Christmas. People need to come in the dark and leave in the light."

The first year Peace Mennonite tried it,

'I got to the point where I felt the Christmas story is not about a picture-perfect story; nothing is convenient in the story. I felt like "you need to shake up your Christmas."' (Heidi Epp)

animals seemed a natural fit.

This year was different, with fewer people and no animals, but the event was livestreamed and enjoyed across Canada.

Each year, Epp writes original monologues for her actors to read, and she tries to address current events in the world. This year, the characters included Mary talking about the masks people wear, a shepherd reflecting on the value of all lives, and the innkeeper addressing social distancing.

Next year, Epp hopes to be back in the natural, rural setting, and she hopes to continue livestreaming the service.

"There's so much in the Christmas story; that's why it's important to have it speak to us," she says. ❧



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MC Canada responds to Capitol Hill violence

"We condemn white supremacy and Christian nationalism," Mennonite Church Canada leadership wrote in a statement following the events of Jan. 6.

canadianmennonite.org/capitolhill



Common Read continues with 'I Am Not Your Enemy'

Join other Mennonites in reading the Herald Press book, *I Am Not Your Enemy: Stories to Transform a Divided World* by Michael T. McRay.

canadianmennonite.org/notyourenemy



'A public witness to God's love'

In a meeting late last year, Mennonite World Conference regional reps shared the burdens and creative resilience they see in response to COVID-19.

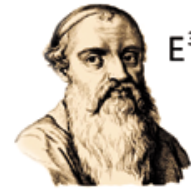
canadianmennonite.org/mwcreps



Pandemic offers new opportunities

The pandemic has turned the graduate-level teaching model at Conrad Grebel University College on its head.

canadianmennonite.org/mtspandemic



$$E^3 = MC^A$$

Encountering, Embracing, Embodying Christ
In life, in community, in the world



Caleb Kowalko, Pastor
First Mennonite Church Calgary

In this first year of MCA's new theme, I have committed myself to "pray without ceasing," or rather, pray without saying "amen."

In so doing, I am asking God to shape and form me beyond the conscious act of prayer.

I want to live continually with the understanding that I am a vulnerable and dependent, yet beloved creation of God.

Just as important, I am seeking to have the prayerful attendance to recognize that each and every person that I come into contact with is also a beloved creation of God; a gift and opportunity to experience the love and grace of our creating God.

The E3 Action Plan:
Living into God's Call



Mennonite Church Alberta

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PEOPLE

Mennonite milestones through an artist's lens

Art residency brings colour into church

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

The year 2020 featured some big moments in the Mennonite world. MennoMedia launched *Voices Together*, the new worship and song collection; and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) celebrated its centennial. Although COVID-19 prevented people from gathering in person to mark these milestones, one artist still found a way to commemorate them.

Lynda Toews, the artist-in-residence at Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg for the 2020-21 season, designed a quilt in honour of MCC's anniversary, sewn by

Bethel member Cheryl Warkentin, which they hung in the sanctuary. Toews also created a painting inspired by the new hymnal.

Toews, who attends Bethel, holds degrees in fine arts and education. Her series of paintings depicting farm animals, "A place in the kingdom," was featured at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in 2015. But the abstract style of the *Voices Together* painting, entitled "Psalm 19," was an adventure into new territory for the experienced artist.

She knew she wanted to express music through an abstract interpretation, like many artists have done before. Musical notes and instruments were too literal for her. Her first question was, "How do I paint something that could be thought of as worshipping God? It is a worship hymnal. My mind went to the heavens and Psalm 19."

In her youth, Toews slept under the stars at a Bible camp, witnessing glittering meteor showers and the mesmerizing aurora borealis lighting the sky in purples and greens. Her mother passed away on New Year's Eve, and the fireworks seemed like the heavens were welcoming her. "So the heavens have always held a special place for me," says Toews.

With a swirling galaxy to embody the movement of music, next she had to make it specific to the Christian and Mennonite contexts. She put together four canvases to form a subtle yet central cross and incorporated the dove and olive branch logo of the Mennonite church. The purple and gold of *Voices Together* and the rainbow of Bethel's stained glass windows colour the canvas.

All of this would have been seen by



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LYNDA TOEWS

Lynda Toews is Bethel Mennonite Church's artist-in-residence for 2020-21.

hundreds from across Canada at a large gathering to launch *Voices Together*, which Bethel had been slated to host in November. The pandemic cancelled those plans. Instead, Toews assembled a book explaining the process behind all the art she has created during her residency, which she is hoping to publish for the church library.



Lynda Toews painted "Psalm 19" to commemorate the launch of *Voices Together*.



Unintentional figures, like a fish and an eagle, appear in Lynda Toews's painting.



Lynda Toews created a quilt with Cheryl Warkentin, in honour of Mennonite Central Committee's 100th anniversary.

While the painting hung proudly on the wall of the sanctuary, she told its story during their Sunday video service dedicated to the hymnal.

She told of the most remarkable surprise that came to her at the end of the process. She had painted the canvas sideways and when she stood it upright, her husband saw two unexpected figures that she had unknowingly painted: an eagle and a fish. "It wasn't intentional, and that's the part that's fascinating about this painting," says Toews.

She saw the fish as a symbol of Christianity and thought the eagle might represent the relationship between Mennonite settlers and Indigenous peoples. She says it is open to interpretation, though. "Just like seeing faces or creatures in the clouds," other people have seen butterflies, a tuning fork and other shapes.

"In the end," she says, "I just wanted the energy and movement to be like a spinning galaxy, expanding and swirling, stabilized by the cross and energized by the cross, to create this expression of joy and light and celebration, and the rest was an unexpected bonus!"

The work resonated with Bethel member Waldy Ens, who was inspired to write the poem "Lynda paints hymnal":

"Voices sing bright colours into being / together bring olive branch into swirling

*focus / red purple yellow green and blue
in centrifugal sky / centred by inner cross /
all in starry harmony / extended to infinite
master of the universe / worthy of praise
/ bearer of burdens / hearer of prayer /
centre of meditation / giver of love and
law /so let us sing beneath the eagle's wing
/ fishers we."*

Ens says he was struck by the way "the painting does not end at the edges of the canvas, but extends to the infinite, in the same way that our voices do in song, prayer or praise . . . the dynamic, swirling use of colours and starry sky creates a deep impression of the music of the spheres."

It's clear to Toews that visual arts make an important contribution to worship. "The church is so word-based and that's just one way of knowing things," she says. "[Art is] definitely useful because it accesses other parts of our brain, and other ways of thinking and feeling and worshipping. I think it's invaluable." She hopes drama, dance and more art forms will become more common in worship too.

Bethel began its artist-in-residence program in 2016 to recognize and nurture congregants' gifts and open up new ways of worship.

Toews's final project is a six-week series of paintings and essays about trees. She will be presenting it to Bethel in January. //

News brief

Former Witness worker honoured by AMBS



Anne Garber Kompaoré of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, is one of two 2020 recipients of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) alumni ministry and service recognition awards. She earned an MA in theological studies with a concentration in biblical studies in 2004. She first attended AMBS in 1981-82 as a requirement before going to Burkina Faso (then known as Upper Volta) to serve with the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (via Mennonite Church Canada and the Commission on Overseas Mission). From 1982 to 2011, she served in multiple capacities in Burkina Faso: doing linguistic analysis; developing writing systems for languages; planting churches; and doing a variety of Bible translation work. To develop her knowledge of biblical Hebrew, she returned to AMBS in 2000-01 for classes. Since 2011, she has worked as a freelancer for the Commission to Every Nation, serving as a Bible translation consultant, biblical studies instructor, resource developer, and translation trainer for several African countries, as well as India. She continues to connect with her Canadian home congregation, Listowel (Ont.) Mennonite Church, where she was licensed in 2001 as a minister in Bible teaching and translation. She attends and has preached regularly at Eglise de la Mission Apostolique Teedpaosgo-Bethel, the church her husband, Daniel Kompaoré, planted in Ouagadougou.

—AMBS

‘What will happen to us now?’

A son recalls his mother's experience of the 1918 pandemic

By Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON

COVID-19 has given Jake Buhler pause to reflect on his family history and how it has been shaped by pandemics.

In 1918, when both the Spanish flu and tuberculosis were wreaking havoc in South Russia, Buhler's mother Maria was an 11-year-old girl growing up in the Mennonite village of Grigorievka. She was the second of seven children born to Helena and Heinrich Pauls.

Both of Maria's parents became ill, her mother with tuberculosis and her father with the Spanish flu. As their illnesses progressed, they became bedridden. Her mother was moved into one part of the house to try to keep her cool as she battled a fever. Her father, who had chills, was moved into another room to try to keep warm.

Many years later, Buhler recorded his mother's Low German recollection of events, translating it to English.

"I helped look after both of them, trying to make them comfortable, giving them food and water and other things," said Maria. Her parents spoke to each other through the opening in the shared stove between their rooms. "Are you still alive?" each would call out to the other," she said. "Each was worried that the other might have died when there were long silences."

Maria was with her mother when she died, as were her father and her older sister. She recalled how her mother spoke the name of Jesus four times as she was dying. "The last time she had just enough strength to whisper the name," Maria said.

Her father attended his wife's funeral, though he was already very sick, Maria remembered. "He shivered as a result of his chills," she said. "He was very, very sad." After the funeral, she said, "He begged God to 'take me to the place where my wife is.'"



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAKE BUHLER

Jake Buhler's mother, Maria, top left, is pictured with her family before tragedy struck in 1918.

Ten days later, Maria's father died.

Buhler says his mother had a vivid memory of standing beneath a mulberry tree and saying, "Now that our father is dead, what shall we children do?" Her six-month-old baby sister had died of tuberculosis just two weeks before their mother died. And a few months after their father's death, her older sister also succumbed to tuberculosis, leaving Maria the eldest of the surviving children.

"She [felt] she should care for her younger siblings because she was the oldest," he says. "It was an existential question. 'What will happen to us now?'"

The children went to live with relatives in three different households. Her maternal grandparents took in Maria and her brother, Jacob.

"She didn't have a childhood," Buhler says of his mother. "She became an adult long before she should have."

In 1925, when Maria was 18, she began the emigration process to Canada with Jacob and their grandparents. When they reached Southampton, England, Jacob was detained for health reasons. The grandparents left Maria with her younger brother and set sail for Canada.

When Jacob was finally able to travel, he and Maria crossed the Atlantic on their own, telegraphing their grandparents in Osler, Sask., when they finally arrived in Quebec City. Then the siblings travelled by train to Saskatchewan.

In Osler, Maria went to work as a maid for a 34-year-old bachelor named Cornelius Driedger. Eventually they married and had three sons. After he died, Maria married Bernhard Buhler, who had been her sweetheart years earlier in Russia. She had another four children with him. She died in Saskatoon in 2002 at the age of 96.

In reflecting on his mother's tragic childhood experiences, Buhler says, "I think it was incredibly hard. Mother talked not in terms of trauma. It was survival." He adds, "Trauma sometimes comes when you have the possibility of comfort. She had no possibility of comfort." He recalls how she exclaimed to him, "Think about it! Think about what I went through!"

Buhler marvels at his mother's resilience. "She lost her parents and her siblings," he says. "She went across the ocean unaccompanied, went to Osler, didn't know a soul. She raised seven kids with two husbands and outlived them both."

Perhaps Maria's own words offer a clue as to how all of that was possible: "I can say we went through very much sorrow and loneliness, but our God was always with us." ❧

COVER STORY

‘The show must go on’

Story and photos by Ann Pan
Menno Simons Cristian School
CALGARY

Are traditional school productions a thing of the past? Or can the authentic experience still be delivered virtually?

One of the traditions at Menno Simons Christian School has been the Christmas production put on by the Grade 5 class at the school. The torch is passed on yearly to this class, an opportunity to hone their acting skills and give them a taste for what is to come in junior high when they get to audition for the spring production. Does a worldwide pandemic make this opportunity disappear?



Christina Carpenter

Not if Christina Carpenter has anything to do with it.

On Dec. 10, 2020, the school delivered a virtual Christmas event for the school community. Was the school in the middle of a lock-down? Yes. Were things pre-recorded? Yes. Was the school and its supporters able to come together as a community? Yes, albeit virtually. Was the feeling the same? Some would say it was even better!

Packages were sent home with programs, treats and song sheets for a sing-along, along with links and reminders to click into a virtual gathering of singing and games.

Most importantly, the Grade 5 students memorized a script, practised their stage presence, and recorded a special production of *The Little Drummer Dude* for the community to watch. The result? Almost 100 families logged in to an evening of singing, virtual games and, most importantly, community. Parents had the best seat in the house as well as a perfect recording to be enjoyed for years to come.

In this new era of virtual realities, innovation is key to making music and building community.

Carpenter, in her seventh year at Menno Simons, has had to be innovative in her approach as the school's artistic director.

With singing off the table and multiple restrictions on what bands look like, she had to be creative to deliver her program.

What does creativity look like? Delivery of more theory, action-oriented music and percussion. Thoughtfulness in spacing and maintenance of band instruments and even using “pee pads” to handle spit valves in a sanitary fashion

All this so the halls could still be filled with joyful sounds of praise, and music could still be enjoyed in the hearts and minds of those who performed and watched.

Menno Simons can't wait to see what happens next, because everyone knows “the show must go on!” ❧



The Three Wise Men check their map in Menno Simons Christian School's 2020 virtual Christmas production of The Little Drummer Dude. The performers are not identified as per school policy.

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FOCUS ON EDUCATION

In moments of connection, the technology disappears

By Abby Rudy-Froese
Conrad Grebel University College
WATERLOO, ONT.

On Wednesdays at Conrad Grebel University College, a group of students, faculty, and staff choose to gather in the chapel for a worship service. In light of the pandemic, services have moved online.

“Early in the fall, we offered a hybrid version of chapel, where we could be in person and online at the same time,” says Ed Janzen, Grebel’s chaplain. “It was a lifeline to connect with each other like this.”

The hybrid version allowed a limited number of residents into the chapel in a staggered circle. Completing the circle was a webcam and a monitor with all the faces of associates, apartment dwellers and others from the Grebel community who joined via Zoom.

Sarah Driediger, a first-year student living in Ottawa, says, “It really did feel as if I was part of the community and part of the circle,

even on Zoom.”

The service now starts at 7 p.m., opening up the possibility for co-op students like Suomi MacCarthy to participate. “It’s been nice to come to chapel regularly during my co-op term,” MacCarthy says. “Chapel has been a weekly grounding time for me, a time to calm down and get away from work for a little bit.”



PHOTO BY REBEKAH DEJONG

Suomi MacCarthy, seated, during a chapel service.

“Rituals aren’t a big part of Mennonite worship,” Janzen says. “The one thing we do have is a relationship with the people we worship with. If we’re going to be a truly worshipping community, we have to be in conversation with each other while we are in worship, and technology enhances this.”

Communication during worship works well using Zoom’s chat feature.

“I love seeing comments from people,” says Catherine Bergs, a member of the chapel committee. “We’re not from a church tradition that calls out ‘Amen’ during the service, but sometimes people type in the chat ‘that was so powerful’ or ‘you did such a good job.’ It makes my heart very full. People can share a thought without being disruptive.”

Even though technology shapes and enhances the chapel experience, Janzen says, “There’s this immersive experience during chapel where we forget about the technology.”

“When there’s a really powerful message from the speaker or when the music hits close to home, I forget that I am just sitting in my living room at home watching it on a screen,” says Driediger.

MacCarthy adds, “We’re having fellowship in the presence of God and each other. It doesn’t matter that it was over a Zoom call.”

Grade-based programs place value on interdisciplinary, cross-curricular thinking

RJC High School
Rosthern, Sask.

RJC High School runs three grade-based programs that focus on interdisciplinary, cross-curricular thinking:

- **The Imagine** program is a peacebuilding program that encourages Grade 10 students to reflect on the challenges of the world through hands-on learning experiences.
- **Thrive**, a relationship-development program, helps Grade 11 students pursue

holistic student health through positive relationships with God, each other and creation.

- **Explore**, a leadership program for Grade 12 students, seeks to equip students to be leaders in the communities they find themselves in throughout their lives.

While many of these programs have typically included off-campus and

interprovincial travel between places such as Winnipeg, Edmonton and Saskatoon, the grade-based program leaders found creative ways for students to engage with local and on-campus learning experiences that meet the goals of these cross-curricular programs and meet COVID-19 restrictions.

Back in November, the Imagine class held a Zoom conference with the Florence Centre, a community development

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Practising hope

Reimagining education during a pandemic

Canadian Mennonite University
Winnipeg



RJC HIGH SCHOOL SCREENSHOT

Grade 10 *Imagine students participate in a Zoom call with the Florence Centre in Ukraine.*

program in Ukraine named after Florence Driedger, co-pastor of Peace Mennonite Church in Regina. The centre is committed to supporting children and families with disabilities, and those who encounter abuse, addiction and mental health issues. RJC students had the opportunity to speak with the centre's community leaders about how they have been able to continue to do their work during the pandemic. This learning experience was integrated into the students' Christian ethics curriculum.

Shekinah Retreat Centre has been a common destination for the Thrive students over the past years. Because it is within reasonable driving distance of the school, RJC students were able to continue to visit Shekinah and spent two days participating in activities. One day the students were trained to recognize patterns in their thoughts and feelings during an emotional-agility workshop. Another day, the class spent time building and examining trenches as part of their history class.

The Explore students had several opportunities to consider their leadership development in unique forms last fall, when they participated in a number of virtual university workshops, and heard from individual post-secondary speakers through various online forms. Their Christian ethics project, called "Acts of service," which typically involves an aspect of community service, involved engagement with more local acts of service around the school: decorating for Christmas and leading other on-campus school activities.

Staff and students together have been encouraged to think outside the box of what might be typical during the school year and have found new ways of learning and building community together. ❧

People who arrived on the Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) campus last fall were greeted by singing, soaring not through the windows of the music wing, but from outside. In order to create a safe environment during COVID-19 but still continue voice lessons, CMU scheduled them outside.

This is just one of the many ways faculty have changed their teaching practices to adapt during the pandemic. For most of the fall semester, until Manitoba moved to Code Red restrictions and CMU transitioned to exclusive online learning, the university ran in-person hybrid education programs. This was achieved through mandatory masks, limited numbers, physical distancing, hand sanitizers around every corner, and some creative thinking from the faculty.

Irma Fast Dueck, associate professor of practical theology, met with her seminar graduate course outside. She said "the outdoor classroom asks something of us that's so different, and it's a gift." Unable to depend on screens, or even notes, which tend to blow away in the wind, both class and professor were forced to remember what they read and interact with it in a new way. Fast Dueck said they sat in a circle and got "a level of conversation and engagement we just don't get in the same way inside . . . something else gets created in that environment."

Changes took place inside the halls of CMU, too. Enrolment in Introduction to Global Health, taught by Rachel Krause, assistant professor of biology, jumped

from 30 to 50 students this year. When she asked her students how many of them were taking the class because of COVID-19, most hands went up. Although they also focused on many other key topics, she said the pandemic offered a unique lens through which the class viewed the semester's different units.



CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY PHOTO

Chris Huebner, associate professor of theology and philosophy, pictured, and his colleagues found ways to enhance online classroom participation at Canadian Mennonite University during the COVID-19 pandemic. Huebner discovered that teaching from the classroom, where he could employ large displays and multiple cameras, allowed both him and his students to read each other's faces and body language better than when he taught from behind a laptop.

Krause's students alternated between attending class in-person and on Zoom. She set up small learning groups to help them connect and made classes more interactive, to make the most of the precious time they had together on campus.

Amid technology issues and modified learning, Krause feared her students would be disappointed with classes and would struggle to adjust. Instead, she continually witnessed their patience and resilience. "This is working because of the students that we have that are doing their best too," she said. "They have just really risen to the occasion." ❧

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Rockway raises \$25,000 for food drive

By Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondent
KITCHENER, ONT.

The annual Christmas Food Drive at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate is a big deal. It starts in November with a kick-off chapel and fun incentives. Normally, students collect non-perishable food for the House of Friendship, a local organization that provides Christmas food hampers for people living on low income.

This year, the need was greater, but the pandemic disrupted the usual ways of doing things. Motivated by a desire to



PHOTO BY JO SCOTT

Rockway Mennonite Collegiate student council members celebrate in the school parking lot after staging a pie-in-the-face incentive that helped to raise \$25,000 for the school's annual Christmas Food Drive, one way this small school makes a huge impact, according to the student council's motivational video shown in the food drive kick-off chapel.



SCREENSHOT BY JANET BAUMAN

Hanneke Isert Bender, co-president of Rockway Mennonite Collegiate's student council, tosses in the first \$20 as she motivates her fellow students to get behind the school's annual Christmas Food Drive, as a way to 'put our words and faith into action.'

help others, student leaders stepped up. Instead of collecting food, they encouraged students to raise funds.

In a motivational video they emphasized the school's long legacy of giving and set a goal of \$15,000. At \$9,000, one student shaved his head, as promised. An outdoor "toonie toss" raised \$600 more. With under a week to go, the students met their goal.

"We were beyond proud of our school but we wanted to push them to keep on donating" the students council wrote. So they reached higher, staging an outdoor "pie-in-the-face" incentive.

In total they raised \$25,000, assured by grateful staff at House of Friendship that their gift of money was also "a gift of light and hope." ☞

RJC High School

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FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Humbled by grace and generosity

Story and Photo by Paul Peters
Mennonite Collegiate Institute
GRETNA, MAN.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

Back in March 2020, when we first shut down for the pandemic, our student body spent some time reflecting on this verse: God as our refuge and strength. It was an opportunity to pause and think beyond what was directly in front of us. In an odd way, this entire year has reminded us of God’s continued faithfulness.

When I think of Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI), I am first drawn to the experience of our students. Throughout this pandemic, our students have walked with an inspiring level of courage, patience and grace. It is not easy to have everything you expected taken away. In our case, we have learned from their resilience, and we

enjoyed seeing how God has moved them to be creative and build those connections that MCI is known for. It is important to acknowledge and walk with humble gratitude for the ways they have continued to engage.

In a year filled with such uncertainty, we’ve noticed, and seen, MCI’s supporting community come alive in new ways. Entering this year, we had no idea where we might end up financially. Would people still have room to give, would they still see the importance of a school like MCI? Or would we no longer make the list of organizations to give to? It has been our experience that the supporting communities around MCI have shown unwavering support.

We’ve experienced a steady flow of

reminders that this community called MCI reaches far beyond the walls of the school. From alumni in Hong Kong choosing to donate to our online fundraisers because they saw it on Instagram and a grandparent dropping off some sweets for the staff, to students taking their own time to bake cookies/cinnamon buns for staff and a flood of donations in December, we feel nothing but humbled by these small, yet large, acts of solidarity with MCI.

So we walk courageously with the strength we experience in community, and through God. ☛

Paul Peters is MCI’s student life director.

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Employment opportunity

Professor of Biblical Studies position open. Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary is hiring a full-time professor of Biblical Studies to start July 1, 2021.

Preferred qualifications: PhD or equivalent; expertise in Old Testament or New Testament studies and competence to teach in the other testament; intercultural competency; and the ability to inspire students in face-to-face and online learning environments. See a full job description at:

www.ambs.ca/jobs



Employment opportunity

The **Vice President for Administration and Chief Financial Officer** is a visionary leader who oversees the operational, business and financial affairs of the institution.

The successful candidate will be a hands-on collaborative manager who will lead in accounting, budgeting, business planning, investments, human resources and administration.

The CFO partners with the Administrative Cabinet in strategic decision making and operations. The goal is to ensure AMBS maintains strong academic programs and revenue growth, to educate leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world. For full job description visit:

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**Contract Opportunity
Advertising Representative**

Do you enjoy sales? Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service seeks a representative to manage advertising sales for the CM website and print magazine. Compensation offered is a monthly retainer fee plus commission. Remote work is possible.

Working with the publisher, the advertising representative will develop and implement sales strategies, including creative approaches to advertising and sponsored content opportunities; maintain relationships with existing clients and develop new ones. The ideal candidate has experience in sales and an understanding of the Mennonite church constituency.

Please send expressions of interest to Tobi Thiessen at publisher@canadianmennonite.org. Go to www.canadianmennonite.org/employment for more details.

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Employment Opportunities



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Start date for this 0.8 FTE position is scheduled for June 1, 2021. Learn more at www.shalomcounselling.org/jobs.

To apply, please send a cover letter and resume to Fred Loganbill, Chair of the Search Committee, at ShalomEDSearch@gmail.com by January 31, 2021.

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We are building community together

Thank you for responding to our two fundraising campaigns in 2020. Together, you and other generous donors gave \$171,000 to help keep Mennonites connected across the country through this magazine.

With your support, *Canadian Mennonite* published more than 900 articles, columns and letters in our 22 print issues and in four digital-only issues. In 2020, just under 10,000 households subscribed to the magazine. More than 200,000 people read articles on the *Canadian Mennonite* website.

Reading together helps us work together and builds up the church community.

Thank you!

