

'A duty to love our neighbours'

Mennonite leaders address
the vaccination question, pg. 18

PM-0063104-R09613

COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card
Please keep this record card, which includes medical information
about the vaccines you have received.
Por favor, guarde esta tarjeta de registro, que incluye información
medica sobre las vacunas que ha recibido

INSIDE
The power of their faith 4
Pain and potential 11
What is appropriate humour? 19

Stefhan
KRISS
Last Name
4/28/72
Date
1/22/21
Product Name/Manufacturer
5

EDITORIAL

Celebrating the good

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive Editor



The March 15, 2020, entry in our household calendar reads: “We started COVID-19 social distancing today.”

It’s been one year since the worldwide community began confronting the reality of the latest coronavirus. In the past twelve months, this pandemic has brought confusion, fear, anger, illness, death and more. No need for details—you know what I’m talking about.

Here is an invitation to focus on some of the good things this year brought, gifts we can be grateful for. Through the heavy curtains of loss and mourning humanity has faced, moments of beauty and goodness shone through. Here are a few God-given gifts of the past year:

Moments of serendipity. There were times when we saw glimpses of God’s goodness, even if we didn’t name the Divine Presence at that moment. We enjoyed four seasons in the outdoors, watched wildlife in urban backyards, found beauty in forests and at campsites, cultivated vegetables and tended houseplants. We snuggled with—and laughed at—our pets. Music, visual arts, dance, poetry and humour continued to inspire us in these times, despite the difficulties.

Problem solving. Facing new challenges, we harnessed our God-given creativity to work out good solutions. The scientific and medical communities developed new vaccines at record speed and are now working to make them available to all. Social agencies found new ways to

minister to marginalized people in their communities. Parents, schools and students bravely launched into ways of making education happen safely.

In our congregational life, we pivoted activities to virtual platforms; pastors learned to set up cameras and preach via screens. Congregational leaders figured out how to communicate and to conduct church decision making. Caring teams offered pastoral care in new ways. The faith community found ways to continue learning together. Church musicians got creative in making music together safely. Occasionally, we even figured how to have fun together.

Human connections. Defying the danger of getting too close, we created virtual gatherings that helped build and maintain our relationships. We found safe ways to stay physically distanced but still connected with each other. Even if we couldn’t embrace our loved ones in person, we intentionally tried to stay in touch with them, aware of how isolation and stress have been hard on everyone’s mental well-being. We used technology to pray with siblings in the faith who live in other places. We’ve expressed our caring through social media venues and with the help of the trusty telephone and postal mail. Friends met around virtual campfires, ate meals together in front of Zoom screens, and took part in virtual film and book clubs.

Generosity. This was a time when we learned more about serious social and financial inequities that plague our world. Some of us spoke out about these

injustices, and many of us were inspired to share with those in greater need. We donated through nationwide and international organizations, and we gave individually, in our own communities. We volunteered, even when the safety logistics got complicated. We made commitments to look beyond ourselves and to keep on expressing God’s love, humbly and generously.

Throughout the year, many stories have been told of how people experienced God’s presence, and of how they are expressing creativity, human connections, generosity and more. We proudly share some of those stories through this magazine.

Even as we think back on these reasons to celebrate, it’s easy to see that serious challenges remain. The coming year will offer many struggles and more unknowns. Yet, I join with the Apostle Paul in his expression of gratitude for the faith community. “*My dear friends, we always have good reason to thank God for you, because your faith in God and your love for each other keep growing all the time*” (II Thess. 1:3, CEV).

As the pandemic life continues to stretch us in the coming months, let’s keep finding ways to see and celebrate the gifts before us. Can you think of examples that inspire you? What do you want to celebrate? Drop us a line at letters@canadianmennonite.org or 490 Dutton Dr., Unit C5, Waterloo, ON N2L 6H7.

Correction

The Generous Space group gathers once a month in Winnipeg to pray and share with each other. . . . During COVID-19, the group has been connecting over Zoom. Incorrect information appeared in “The importance of ‘generous space’ in Manitoba,” Feb. 1, page 16. *Canadian Mennonite* regrets the error. ❧



Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Canada

ISSN 1480-042X

CONTENTS

MARCH 1, 2021 / VOL. 25, No. 5

ABOUT THE COVER:

Stephen Kriss, executive minister of the Mosaic Mennonite Conference in the United States, poses for a selfie after getting his COVID-19 vaccination in January. Read more about vaccines and the role faith leaders play in helping their congregants to follow suit on page 18.

PHOTO: STEPHEN KRISS

The Vegetable Academy is a growing concern 16

Saskatoon market gardener **Jared Regier** grows and teaches about good food.

Women's voices in song 22

A recent lecture-recital highlights the work of women songwriters in *Voices Together*.

Instead of just hitting 'Send' 23

Church members enjoy mailed correspondence during the pandemic lock-down.

'God is at work among us' 26

Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe interviews Michael Pahl, the new executive minister of Mennonite Church Manitoba.

The power of their faith 4

Joon Park recalls the biblical story of the paralytic man and his friends and considers the role of communal faith.



Regular features:

For discussion 6 Readers write 7 Milestones 7
A moment from yesterday 8 Online NOW! 28
Schools Directory 28-29 Calendar 31 Classifieds 31

Raising reconciliation from the dead 8

Scott Morton Ninomiya

Vaccine inequities 9

Arli Klassen

Speculating about berry-filled trees 10

Troy Watson

CANADIAN MENNONITE

490 Dutton Drive, Unit C5,
Waterloo, ON, N2L 6H7

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

Website: canadianmennonite.org

Facebook.com/Canadian.Mennonite @CanMenno @canadianmennonite

Please send all material to be considered for publication to

General submission address: submit@canadianmennonite.org

Readers Write: letters@canadianmennonite.org

Milestones announcements: milestones@canadianmennonite.org

Calendar announcements: calendar@canadianmennonite.org

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40063104 REGISTRATION NO. 09613

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

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

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

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

Canadian Mennonite Staff

Publisher, Tobi Thiessen, publisher@canadianmennonite.org

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

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

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

Editorial Assistant, Barb Draper, edassist@canadianmennonite.org

Graphic Designer, Betty Avery, designer@canadianmennonite.org

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

Advertising Manager, D. Michael Hostetler, advert@canadianmennonite.org

Senior Writer, Will Braun, seniorwriter@canadianmennonite.org

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

Alberta Correspondent, Joanne De Jong, ab@canadianmennonite.org

Saskatchewan Correspondent, Donna Schulz, sk@canadianmennonite.org

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

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

One-Year Subscription Rates

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

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

Subscriptions/address changes

(e-mail) office@canadianmennonite.org

(phone) 1-800-378-2524 ext. 221

FEATURE

The power of their faith

Adapted from a sermon preached at Emmanuel Mennonite Church,
Abbotsford, B.C., on Feb. 7, 2021

By Joon Park

When you consider Jesus' three-year ministry, which specific events come to mind? Which of his actions inspire you the most?

When I was in seminary, one assignment was to pick one of the gospels and to identify every encounter Jesus had in that gospel. We were asked:

- **What was the person's** presenting problem?
- **What would good news** look like to that particular person?
- **How did Jesus** respond to the person?
- **What word might** best describe who Jesus is to that person?

I chose the Gospel of Matthew and found 19 incidents in which Jesus encountered people and their problems. As I thought about how Jesus responded to each person and what word might best describe who Jesus was to them, the dominant theme seemed to be Jesus as a healer. In those encounters, 13 cases were related to his healing and saving ministry; four cases had to do with exorcism; and only three cases related to his teaching.

Healing, by definition, goes beyond physical recovery. According to the Center for Christian Ethics of Baylor University "Jesus as Healer" study guide, "Healing involves restoring meaning to life, whether the person's physical condition improves or remains the same. . . . For instance, the fever that afflicted Peter's mother-in-law



impeded the fulfilment of her domestic role. When the fever left her, she rose and served the visitors (Luke 4:38-39). Jesus the healer restored health and meaning to the life of Peter's mother-in-law."

In the story of the healing of the paralytic man, in Mark 2:1-12, the forgiveness of sins is a part of Jesus' holistic healing ministry. After seeing the faith of the paralytic's friends, Jesus did not immediately command the infirm person to stand up and go on his way, as he did in some other incidents.

Rather, Jesus preemptively proclaimed that the sick man's sins were forgiven. These words seemed irrelevant to his physical sickness and therefore gave people an excuse to persecute Jesus later. Jesus, son of Mary, appeared to steal God's authority by forgiving a person's sins in public. Blasphemy! Nevertheless, we see in this incident that, because of Jesus' God-given authority to forgive sins and cure sickness, the whole human being was healed, and sanctified.

Yes, Jesus is the healer and he wants people to be whole and holy, both physically and spiritually. So we can ask for his healing, and he heals us. Is that it?

Toward a collective faith

As you meditate on this story, what strikes you most? Which word or phrase holds your attention? What amazes me are the words, "*Jesus saw their faith.*"

These words take me back to a time when my wife Shim was carried into an operating room for a serious, life-changing surgery. I sat at a nearby coffee shop, anxiously waiting for what was supposed to be a seven-hour surgery.

I was about to start my meditation on this passage in Mark when a text message from an anonymous caller came in. It read, "All things work together for good to those who love God, so don't worry!"

I almost burst out crying with thankfulness. A community of people was surrounding us in prayer!

Soon a call came from Shim's surgeon. He said, "I do not think she needs this surgery today. I think her tumor is gone. Come and take her."



PHOTO BY YWAM ORLANDO ON FLICKR

This story of the paralytic man's healing is not about individual faith. It's about "their faith." Through the collective and communal faith of the paralyzed man's friends, he was forgiven and healed by Jesus.

I couldn't believe it! I was thrilled to see the connection between this healing story in Mark 2 with the power of collective, united prayer of our community, bringing good to Shim, as it says in Romans 8:28. Later, I tried to identify who had sent that text message, but I still do not know who the sender was.

What I knew then was the power of Jesus in saving my wife's life, a power that came from the faith of my friends, not my faith. At that time, I had no energy to pray; I was totally exhausted and disoriented. The power that sustained me day to day came from friends—from their prayers and their faith.

This story of the paralytic man's healing is not about individual faith. It's about "their faith." Through the collective and communal faith of the paralyzed man's friends, he was forgiven and healed by Jesus.

What is collective, communal faith? It is when members of a community, united in prayer and action, call for God's favour to heal and save the community. Salvation doesn't stay in the realm of individual well-being or satisfaction but extends to the wider community. In collective faith, our ego

and selfishness are dissolved by God's grace, and a new perspective on others is born, also by God's grace. We now come to live for others, concerned for the well-being, flourishing and salvation of others. Through this transformed, collective faith, we become Jesus' partners to heal and save the world.

Understanding Jesus' healing ministry

When we look at Jesus' healing ministry and the power of faith, there are some things we need to pay attention to:

- **First, Jesus didn't** heal only individuals. He also healed groups of people, in response to their collective and communal faith. When he met two blind men crying for help, he stopped and healed their sight, saying, "*According to your faith be it done to you.*" There is the story of 10 lepers who lived between Samaria and Galilee. When they asked for Jesus' grace upon them, Jesus stopped and said to them, "*Go, show yourselves to the priests.*" They were all healed.
- **Second, Jesus' healing** ministry is not always contingent on the faith of an individual or a group of people.

Sometimes he confers grace and mercy indiscriminately. We can see many examples when Jesus healed people without explicitly acknowledging their faith. If we put too much attention on individual or group faith, we overestimate the power of human faith, stymieing Jesus' authority. Through our faith, we can appeal to Jesus and ask for his healing mercy, but what ultimately heals and saves us is the power of Christ.

Let's come back to the story and refocus on the words "their faith." In the story, the friends collectively achieved their goal to bring the sick man to Jesus. They took the risk of climbing the wall, lifting the paralytic man up, stripping off the rooftop and lowering him down to Jesus' feet. Whew! How easy it would have been for them to become discouraged and give up when they realized that the crowd inside was impenetrable. It would have been easy for them to just wait outside the house. Or they could have employed some strong men to yell at the crowds and blaze a shortcut to Jesus.

Instead, they took the ingenious and painstaking step of lugging the paralytic man up to the roof over Jesus' head. In their sincerity of faith, this group of friends believed in Christ's power to heal, to make whole, and to make right what was wrong. And this collective belief led to collective action. Then the soul of the paralytic man opened up and was ready to receive Jesus' forgiveness and healing, without defences. The scene was perfectly set for Christ's grace to be endowed upon them. All cast members on the stage were of one mind, open and humble. Their faith prevailed and Christ's salvation drew near.

Collective faith in a pandemic time

We're living in a time when physical distancing has become the norm, and sometimes even God seems to practise social distancing. Many people feel alienated and lonely, living in a time when privacy, individualism and selfie culture seem to be present even in the church. In a time when we may even question the power of Christ to heal those suffering from the novel coronavirus, we need to

recall the witness of this paralytic man and his friends, and we need to refocus on their collective faith.

We need to ask ourselves how desperately and persistently we have strived to be a community of faith, taking care of each other regardless of our external or physical situation. Have we put effort into connecting with those who are sick, locked down and dying, appealing to God with our communal, tenacious faith? Can we move from an individual faith to a life in which all are fed, recovered, healed and saved?

Our Christianity depends on a communal, collective faith, one that requires us to be actively involved with others, living as each other's friends and servants. Our worship, our communion, our fellowship and all our church activities are communal. I believe our salvation is not an exception. If we as individuals seek salvation and believe that our relationship with God is important, we must have genuine and equal concern for the other person's salvation. To be forgiven, we

must forgive others. To be loved by God, we must love others. *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."*

Collective focus. Collective faith.

In Mark 2:1-12, the forgiveness of sins is a part of Jesus' holistic healing ministry.

Collective healing. Collective power. Collective salvation! That's what the church here and now, and forever, longs for! ❧



Joon Park is an intercultural educator and author. He attends Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, B.C.

❧ For discussion

1. As you think about Jesus' ministry, what are some encounters or events that come to mind most vividly? In his travels, Jesus met and physically healed many people. What questions do you have about these encounters? Why do you think the gospel writers included these stories?
2. Mark 2:1-12 tells the story of Jesus healing the paralyzed man whose friends lowered him from the roof. What is surprising about Jesus' first words to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven"? Why were the teachers of the law so upset by this statement?
3. Joon Park describes how the collective and communal faith of his friends sustained him when his wife was facing serious surgery. Have you, or someone you know, ever had a similar experience? How are the prayers and faith of a community different from those of an individual?
4. Park writes, "Our Christianity depends on a communal, collective faith, one that requires us to be actively involved with others, living as each other's friends and servants." Why is this so important? What are some examples of ways that we care for each other? How can we work to strengthen our faith communities during the pandemic?

—By Barb Draper

See related resources at
www.commonword.ca/go/2175

CommonWord
 Bookstore and Resource Centre

/// Readers write

✉ A sombre revelation for a former neighbour

Re: “‘What will happen to us now?’ A son recalls his mother’s experience of the 1918 pandemic,” Jan. 18, 2021, page 24.

Living at the parsonage in Osler, Sask., from age 6 to 12, with my own grandparents back in Manitoba, Maria Buhler was our neighbour and she was called “Grandma Buhler” in our household. She was known by the neighbourhood children for giving out

full-sized chocolate bars at Halloween. Her home was warm and welcoming, and I never knew what she had endured as a child until now.

M. MICHELLE HILDEBRAND (ONLINE COMMENT)

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

/// Milestones

Baptisms

Angela Isaak, Emily Isaak, Alesa Isaak, Daniel Isaak—Lowe Farm Berghaler Mennonite, Man., Dec. 5, 2019.

Deaths

Baergen—Bob (John Robert), 86 (b. Sept. 24, 1934; d. Feb. 6, 2021), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Brown—Henry, 91 (b. Feb. 26, 1929; d. Jan. 30, 2021), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Buhler—Susanne, 95 (b. Feb. 5, 1925; d. Nov. 27, 2020), Foot-hills Mennonite, Calgary.

Enns—Sinaida (nee Dirksen), 96 (b. Sept. 18, 1924; d. Jan. 6, 2021), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Fieguth—Anneliese (nee Janzen), 84 (b. July 31, 1936; d. Jan. 23, 2021), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Goertzen—Florence, 84 (b. Nov. 23, 1936; d. Jan. 19, 2021) Grace Mennonite, Steinbach, Man.

Klassen—Harold Henry, 60 (b. Jan. 14, 1960; d. Jan. 8, 2021), North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Klausen—Aganetha (Agnes), 95 (b. March 8, 1925; d. Jan. 18, 2021, Carman Mennonite, Man.

Leis—Lester, 83 (b. May 18, 1937; d. Jan. 2, 2021), Poole Mennonite, Ont.

Mullet—Belle Leah, 93 (b. Oct. 5, 1927; d. Jan. 6, 2021), North Star Mennonite, Drake, Sask. (formerly of Sharon Mennonite, Guernsey, Sask.).

Neufeld—David, 91 (b. March 7, 1929; d. Jan. 16, 2021), Berghal Mennonite, Didsbury, Alta.

Neufeld—Susannah “Susie” (Boldt), 93 (b. July 4, 1927; d. Jan. 5, 2021, Vineland United Mennonite, Ont.

Schmidt—Elsa (nee Claassen), 79 (b. May 12, 1941; d. Dec. 3, 2020), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Schmidt—Mary Lillian (Bartel), 95 (b. April 30, 1925; d. Jan. 12, 2021), North Star Mennonite, Drake, Sask.

Schott—Edward, 96 (b. June 20, 1924; d. Jan. 11, 2021), Crystal City Mennonite, Man.

Thiessen—Hilda (nee Brown), 84 (b. March 6, 1936; d. Jan. 31, 2021), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Weber—Doug, 64 (b. March 9, 1956; d. June 30, 2020), Bethel Mennonite, Elora, Ont.

Wiebe—Annie (nee Ginter), 88 (b. Dec. 28, 1931; d. Nov. 20, 2020), Berghaler Mennonite, Alton, Man.

Wiebe—Menno, 88 (b. Dec. 13, 1932; d. Jan. 5, 2021), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Wiens—Leona (Wiens), 80 (b. Nov. 2, 1940; d. Nov. 26, 2020), Ebenfeld Mennonite, Herschel, Sask.

Zacharias—Hilda (Enns), 93 (b. Aug. 30, 1927; d. Jan. 24, 2021), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.



Canadian School
of Peacebuilding
AN INSTITUTE OF CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY
















Courses Offered

<p>CREATION AND COMMUNITY IN BIBLICAL AND INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE</p> <p><i>Instructors:</i> Danny Zacharias and John Boopalan June 7–11 and 14–18 8:30–11:30 AM CST</p>	<p>COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH AND PEACEBUILDING</p> <p><i>Instructors:</i> Rich Janzen and Heather Campbell-Enns June 7–11 and 14–18 12:30–3:30 PM CST</p>	<p>REFUGEES AND DISPLACEMENT: LEARNING TO EXTEND HOSPITALITY</p> <p><i>Instructors:</i> Mary Jo Leddy and Dan Epp-Tiessen June 7–11 and 14–18 5:30–8:30 PM CST</p>
---	--	--




FROM OUR LEADERS

Raising reconciliation from the dead

Scott Morton Ninomiya

“Reconciliation is dead.” I saw that stark message on a sign at the Landback Camp in Victoria Park in Kitchener, Ont., in June 2020. Local Indigenous people established the camp as part of a larger effort to assert their presence and reclaim their space on the Haldimand Tract in Ontario. As chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Working Group of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, the sign’s startling message evoked many emotions and questions for me.

After speaking with people at the camp, I understand the sign’s message more deeply. “Reconciliation” conjures a warm, comfortable process, like sitting on a cozy couch for friendly conversation. The reality is more uncomfortable. Too often, when Indigenous people express anger, they are dismissed for “holding on to the past.” This dismissal covers up ignorance of colonial oppression and violence that persists today. The arrest and harassment of land defenders at another site of Indigenous resistance (1492 Landback Lane) near Caledonia, Ont., is an unsettling, current example. When police opened fire on them last summer, the meaning of the Victoria

Park sign became chillingly clear.

As settlers, if we hope to see reconciliation raised from the dead, we must face the truth of ongoing colonial violence, speak out and act against it. Our working group collaborates with a grassroots ecumenical coalition to seek ways to stand in solidarity with the 1492 land defenders. We also host a virtual, yearlong speaker series called “Treaties as sacred covenants” at mcec.ca/programs/truth-and-reconciliation, where Indigenous and settler leaders explore the historical contexts and present implications of treaties made, broken and renewed.

Over the past year, I have learned that Indigenous-Settler reconciliation is more like reconciling a bank statement than having a cozy conversation. One compares the balance in the account book to the most recent bank statement; differences between the two must be examined and rectified. If historical Indigenous-Settler treaties are recorded in a “cosmic account book,” there are many differences—injustices—to be examined and rectified. Settlers like me should feel uncomfortable when we engage sincerely in reconciliation. There

is no cozy couch; settlers are collectively perched on the proverbial hot seat, whether we acknowledge it or not.

Perched on that seat, I am grateful, and relieved, to find that reconciliation is more than a relentlessly uncomfortable reckoning. I have had wonderful, warm conversations with Indigenous leaders in my work with the working group. Last fall, I spoke with Mary Anne Caibaosai, an Anishnabe woman who invites settlers to join her annual “Water walk for the Grand River,” walking behind her, listening and learning.

Now is the time for settlers to walk behind and alongside Indigenous people. There is much listening and learning to do. I invite you to join that learning, to speak against colonial violence and to build living reconciliation through relationships. ❧



Scott Morton Ninomiya lives on the Haldimand Tract with his family. He is a PhD student in global governance at the University of Waterloo, Ont., focusing on decarbonizing and decolonizing local energy systems.

A moment from yesterday



Epp sisters Anna Klaassen (1904-1976) and Maria Nickel (1903-1957) work together on the family farm in Saskatchewan stooking sheaves of grain. Stooking required workers to gather the cut grain into sheaves and then to stand the sheaves upright to help dry the grain before it is threshed. It was back-breaking work. The worldwide crisis known as the Second World War forced many sectors to do more with less. Necessity led to innovations in many areas, including agriculture. New machinery became more widely used, as farm labourers were harder to find. To produce 100 bushels of wheat in 1900 took 100 hours of labour, but by 1958 that was chopped down to 26. What innovations will our current crisis promote?

Text: Conrad Stoesz

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Archives



archives.mhsc.ca

THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

Vaccine inequities

Arli Klassen

I struggle often with my relative wealth and privilege. Working with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) for 20-plus years helped give me something “to do” to address inequities in our world. Working with Mennonite World Conference (MWC) makes me even more aware of the inequities of wealth and privilege, and how we might respond as the church.

Like many others, I am upset about coronavirus vaccines—vaccine wars, vaccine diplomacy, vaccine inequity. Canada committed to sharing its surplus vaccines around the world, and Canada contributed substantially to the COVAX initiative. And yet, Canada has pre-purchased (“booked”) more than five times the number of vaccine doses needed for everyone in this country. Canada is trying to take good care of its own, and it then will be generous after we Canadians are taken care of first.

Right now, in early February, 16 percent of the world’s population has booked more than 60 percent of the vaccines being developed in 2021, according to the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines. It will take years before there is sufficient vaccination in many parts of the world to bring safety to all. I anticipate that the result will be

closed borders, for years to come, to people from countries with inadequate access to vaccines.

Then there are the ethical dilemmas about appropriate vaccine distribution within our country, within our provinces, within our communities. Canada is a country that likes orderly lineups and likes clarity about who is first by need rather than by power. But it is hard.

These dilemmas become very personal for me. I am an “essential caregiver” (Ontario’s label) for my parents in an assisted-living facility. That puts me in Phase 1 to receive the vaccine, likely within the next month. That means I am nearly first in line when looking at this from a global perspective. I will accept the vaccine when it is offered to me, but with tears of sadness.

I will likely be the first to be vaccinated of the 12 MWC regional reps with whom I work, who live in 12 very different countries. I know they are generous people who will be glad for me. But how long will it take for all 12 of them to access quality vaccines? How can we plan to be together in person in 2022 if not all of them have access to the vaccines by then?

Mennonite Church Canada members generously supported MWC’s COVID Fund in 2020. That was one way to “do

something” from a health and economic perspective about the inequitable impacts of COVID-19 around the world. MCC continues to support similar projects. But how do we, as the church, respond to the inequities about vaccine distribution? No COVID-19 fund will help with that.

For me, every time I am in a conversation with other Canadians who are impatient about vaccine availability, I name these global inequities. Whether you get the vaccine in February, June or September, we must not forget our privilege, even as we worry about our own safety and equities within our own communities.

I listen to stories from people from other countries, and I pray for mercy for what is happening in those countries, particularly for the churches.

I let my federal Member of Parliament know about my concerns for how Canada is protecting itself first before sharing with others.

I remember that churches have other gifts that may also be inequitably distributed. Valuable gifts may be shared by churches who experience community, generosity, discipleship, joy and peace-building from places of marginalization.

Church here and there is about sharing gifts in suffering and in joy. ☸



Arli Klassen lives in Kitchener, Ont., and serves as the regional coordinator of representatives for MWC.

Et cetera

MennoCon21 to be both in-person and virtual

Mennonite Church U.S.A. is planning for a hybrid biennial convention from July 6 to 10 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Partly because of the financial implications of cancelling the contract for the convention centre, there will be an in-person event as well as virtual programming. The number of in-person registrations will be determined by pandemic health guidelines. The theme for MennoCon21 is “#BringthePeace,” with worship and seminars focusing on many aspects of peace and justice.

Source: Mennonite Church U.S.A.

#MENNO
CON21

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Speculating about berry-filled trees

Troy Watson

A few years ago I was trekking through a desolate, snow-filled forest, enjoying the spacious tranquility of a crisp winter hike, when I came upon a tree buzzing with activity and life. There were well over a hundred little birds gathered in and around a relatively small tree less than 10 metres ahead of me. It was striking both visually and audibly. Surreal even.

I hadn't noticed a single bird up to this point on my hike. Now here was a whole flock of them in one tree, having a party. Why here? What was so special about this tree?

As I moved closer I found the answer. Little red berries. Of course! These birds were in this tree because it had food.

Jesus said: *"Birds don't store up food for the long winter, yet God provides what they need each season. Don't you think God cares about you as much as God cares about birds?"* (my paraphrase).

This is probably feeling like the longest winter on record for many of us. Some have been hit harder by this pandemic than others. Some are worried about how they're going to find basic necessities like food, jobs or shelter. For many, it's the other necessities of life, like social interaction and human connection, that are in short supply. Most of us are missing simple things like having coffee with friends, embracing loved ones or singing in church together. I think we are all experiencing days when it feels like we're "starving" and all the trees around us are bare. We're starving for stability, predictability, foresight, belonging, a break, a hug. Where are the berry-filled trees in this barren forest we find ourselves?

My wife and I have lived in three houses in our 20 years of marriage, and at each house we've had bird feeders. I think my wife goes a little overboard, to



PHOTO BY MATT HOLMES ON UNSPLASH

be honest, but that is only my opinion, and I've come to accept that my opinion is wrong. We currently have five bird feeders in our backyard. Maybe that's normal or maybe I've revealed something about our family I should have kept to myself.

Regardless, my point is this. Whenever we put bird feeders out, at first no birds come. Then one morning I hear my wife rejoicing. Finally, a bird has come to dine at the Watson birdhouse emporium. Each day after that, more and more birds arrive. Then, after a few weeks, we need to purchase more gargantuan bags of bird seed because of the constant flow of birds visiting each of our specialized feeders.

Birds always seem to find our feeders. Eventually. Birds instinctively find berry-filled trees and seed-filled feeders. Try saying that five times fast!

I wonder if human beings are the same as birds in this regard. Is there an

intrinsic part of us that naturally gravitates toward places, people and things that feed us? That nourish us mind, body, heart and soul?

I'm speculating here, but perhaps the reason we can't find the berry-filled trees of life, at times, is because we aren't in tune with that deeper part of ourselves—our inner guide—that leads us to the nourishment we need. Maybe God does provide what we need each season, but the problem is that we are often disconnected from our internal spiritual compass.

Like I said, I'm speculating.

I do think people are like birds, in that they tend to congregate where they are fed and nourished. People are actively, maybe even instinctively, seeking the nourishment they need. Of course, more and more people are finding the nourishment they need for mind, heart, body and soul in places other than the church. This is puzzling and concerning for churches, but I believe there is a simple solution. In theory at least.

Trees that produce fruit gather in the hungry. Especially in seasons of scarcity and instability. Where there is fruit, people will come. Eventually. This is why so many flocked to Jesus. He fed and nourished people. Jesus was a berry-filled tree in a barren world.

Of course, sometimes the nourishment we need to be offering people is actual fruit. Physical food. But that's not the only nourishment people need in life. The more our lives and churches produce the fruit of the Spirit, the more nourishment we have to offer others. We become like berry-filled trees in a desolate winter woodland. ❧



Troy Watson is seeking to be the berry-filled thorn bush God created him to be.

LENTEN REFLECTION

Pain and potential

Derek Cook

After a long period of waiting, we learned in December that a COVID-19 vaccine had been approved and distribution was beginning. We were told that, by the beginning of September, we all should have received the vaccine, and life can begin to return to “normal.”

“Normal” might be once again gathering as a church community, sharing a meal with friends and family, going for coffee with a neighbour, or simply being able to hug someone in need of a hug.

There was so much put on hold and there are so many losses of things to grieve that we simply took for granted. As we reflect on these past months and the ones ahead, we can say along with the Psalmist that we have truly walked through the valley of the shadow of death.

But in our faith, death is never final; it only presages a rebirth to come. Anticipating the time when we can return to normal, perhaps we might think of the time between now and then as a gestational period as we wait for the birth of a new life together. If so, can we treat the time between now and then as an expectant mother would her developing child?

We know that a developing life is fragile, and that there are a few things we need to do to nurture it into being, things that nourish both mother and child. As a father, I recall many years ago how my wife and I gently ushered our developing child into the world.

First of all, a healthy pregnancy requires you to stay active. Even though we cannot physically gather, we have stayed active in our church communities using new ways like Zoom to maintain virtual community.

Second, it is also important during pregnancy to avoid toxins, like tobacco and alcohol, that can harm the child. So,



PHOTO :FLICKR.COM/JENNIFER

As we wait for this new life to emerge, we dream about who that might be and we begin to bond with her or him.

too, the temptation to consume that which is toxic, like the anger and conspiracies that swirl around us, must be avoided in favour of that which nourishes the spirit.

Another thing we are told to do is to make a plan. We attend prenatal classes, have a birth plan, set up a nursery. So, too, we might think about making a plan for our new world on the other side of the valley. What do we need to do to prepare and get set up for that new world?

This requires us to also monitor the health of the new life growing within us, expectantly watching and waiting for each new stage of development. As we wait for this new life to emerge, we

dream about who that might be and we begin to bond with her or him.

I recall my wife and I singing to our child before she was born, letting her get to know the sound of our voices as we tried to imagine what she would look like and who she would become. So, too, we can sing our new world into being.

As Mennonites, we have a deep tradition of singing, our canon rich with songs of peace, justice, grace, community and love. In verse 3 of “For the Healing of the Nations,” we sing: “All that kills abundant living, / let it from the earth be banned: / pride of status, race or schooling, / dogmas that obscure your plan. / In our common quest for justice / may we hallow life’s brief span.”

This is the new life we must sing into being now, the one we must imagine, nurture and prepare for.

Over the past months, the injustices of our old world have been brought into sharp relief: racism, poverty, inequality, violence.

Can we imagine that the valley of death we are passing through is the death of all that robbed us of life? And although we walk through that valley for just a little while longer, let’s sing as we walk and prepare to welcome a new life. Let’s do all that we can, and must do, to nurture and prepare for it. There will be pain in the labour, but so much potential in the birth. ❧



Derek Cook is the Mennonite Church Canada representative to the Canadian Council of Churches’ Commission on Justice and Peace. He attends Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary. This reflection appeared in the Jan. 20 issue of the MC Alberta Communiqué.

NEWS

Fellowship is stronger than lockdowns

Mennonite World Conference

“**T**ogether on [Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday], we feel connected to our brothers and sisters all over the world,” said Jannie Nijwening, pastor at Doopsgezind Gemeente Zaanstreek in the Netherlands.

Around the globe on Jan. 24, congregations in the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) family celebrated Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday as “an opportunity to remind our communities of faith that we are all part of one body made up of many tribes, languages and nations (Revelation 7:9).”

Congregations tagged themselves on a Google map on the MWC website, leaving pins from GKMI Bukit Hermon Depot in Indonesia, Eglise évangélique Mennonite du Birkenhof in France and Igreja Evangélica Irmãos Menonitas Renovada in Brazil, to Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Central de San Pedro Sula in Honduras and Boulder Mennonite in Colorado.

In its recorded service, the Zaanstreek Dutch Mennonite congregation included greetings from Columbus Mennonite Church in Ohio; Iglesia Mennonita Teusaquillo in Bogotá, Colombia; and from three Colombian Mennonites who are currently studying peace in Amsterdam.

“We feel connected and we wish you all the best success in all the challenges that society is posing to you: tensions, violence, separation between peoples. We hope you can contribute to more fellowship between peoples like we also hope we can do in our country,” said Nijwening as she addressed the Colombian church.

In turn, the congregation in Bogotá included greetings from the Dutch congregation, along with greetings from missionaries in Casa Grande children’s home in Benin and a song from Iglesia Menonita de Quito in Ecuador.

In India, local health orders permitted some in-person gathering. “We had a blessed time of worship and prayer



PHOTO BY PRESHIT RAO

Rajnandgaon Mennonite Church in India shared a meal together after its Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday service.

together with our brothers and sisters around the world,” said Vikal Rao of Rajnandgaon Mennonite Church.

“We started this Sunday worship by introducing Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday,” said Pastor Ashish Milap of Bethel Mennonite Church in Balodgahan, India. The congregation used the MWC worship resource materials in their service in addition to teaching about Anabaptist beginnings, including persecution for their faith, separation of church and government, and practising nonviolence.

“We were blessed,” said Milap. “We thank MWC to lead us in wonderful and blessed celebration of Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday. This has surely united

and encouraged us to grow in a global manner.”

Hamilton (Ont.,) Mennonite Church also took full advantage of the worship resources provided, using videos from from the 2015 assembly in Pennsylvania for congregational singing, Scripture reading in Hindi and English, sharing prayers and testimonies from the worship package, and basing the sermon on the suggested materials.

In California, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church, Reedley First Mennonite and Mennonite Community Church held a joint service hosting MWC general secretary César García as their speaker.

Mennonitengemeinde zu Hamburg und Altona in Germany had planned to hold ordination on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, “in part, because we wanted to embody the way preachers are called to serve the whole church, not just the local congregation.” Unfortunately, lockdown conditions moved the service online, delaying the ordination for a later in-person event.

However, the virtual celebration of communion was “weirdly powerful,” said Marius van Hoogstraten. “There is something stronger than lockdowns keeping the church together!”

Whenever congregations celebrate Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, “we are in a continuous process of seeking unity and of sharing love and hospitality,” said Nijwening. ☼



PHOTO COURTESY OF ASHISH MILAP

Celebration of Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday at Bethel Mennonite Church, Balodgahan, India.

MDS Canada offering Spirit of MDS Fund again

More grants for congregations responding to COVID-19 needs

By John Longhurst
Mennonite Disaster Service Canada
WINNIPEG

After a successful first year, Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada has announced a new round of funding from its Spirit of MDS Fund.

The 2021 round of funding runs from Jan. 31 to April 30. It will provide grants up to \$2,500 to Canadian Anabaptist/Mennonite congregations.

Funding is available to congregations to help meet practical needs in their communities, for things like food, shelter, PPE and emergency financial assistance such as rent, groceries and medications.

It is also available on a case-by-case basis so congregations can assist people who need mental-health support due to the pandemic.

Unlike the first round of funding in

2020, technology and camps will not be funded this time.

Preference will be given to congregations that are part of an Anabaptist-Mennonite denomination that supports MDS Canada, but applications from other churches will be considered. Of special interest are ethnic and inner-city congregations whose members have been hit hardest by the pandemic.

Last year, MDS Canada provided 81 grants from the fund, totalling \$102,000, to churches and other organizations from Nova Scotia to British Columbia.

The money was used for things like food banks, meal programs, PPE, assistance for homeless people, technology for churches to help them connect with their members,



MDS PHOTO

Bob Ratelle does cleanup in the kitchen at Scott St. Church in St. Catharines, Ont., after making meals made possible by support from the MDS Canada Spirit of MDS Fund.

and iPads for personal-care homes so seniors could stay in touch with family and friends.

“The pandemic isn’t over yet,” says Ross Penner, director of Canadian operations for MDS Canada. “The needs are continuing and, in some cases, growing as the pandemic keeps going.” ❧

For an application form, visit mds.mennonite.net/.



❧ News brief

Mennonite women awarded Manitoba trailblazer awards

Several Mennonite women are the recipients of the 150 Manitoba Women Trailblazer Awards. The Nellie McClung Foundation, in partnership with the *Winnipeg Free Press*, has distributed these awards to celebrate Manitoba’s 150th anniversary and the profound contributions women have made to the province’s development through the decades. Listed alongside the likes of Olympian Clara Hughes, Senator Mary Jane McCallum and the suffragette Nellie McClung herself, are:

- The women who created the first Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) thrift shop. Selma Loewen, Sara Stoesz, Linie Friesen and Susan Giesbrecht founded the first thrift shop in Altona in

1972. It soon expanded into more than 100 shops across North America that generate millions of dollars annually to support MCC’s work.

- The Winnipeg Raging Grannies for Social Justice were also honoured with an award. Carolyn Epp-Fransen, who attends Home St. Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, is a member of the group that supports causes like environmental justice and human rights through song and other forms of activism, all while wearing big flowery hats.

The 150 Manitoba Women Trailblazer Awards are given to individuals and groups that have been leaders in their field and have significantly impacted life in Manitoba. The recipients will be recognized in a book that will be featured at the



MCC PHOTO BY GLADYS TERICHOW

In 2007, founders of MCC’s network of thrift shops, pictured from left to right, Linie Friesen, Selma Loewen, Susan Giesbrecht and Sara Stoesz, gathered at a celebration in Winnipeg to recognize their contributions to MCC. In March of 1972, they opened the first MCC thrift shop in Altona, Man.

Manitoba Museum, once it is open to the public.

—BY NICOLIE KLASSEN-WIEBE

Join the crowd

Congregations invited to create new websites through MC Canada's website hub

By Katie Doke Sawatzky
Mennonite Church Canada

Fifteen congregations have launched new websites through the Mennonite Church Canada congregational website hub.

"On the one hand, it's hard work but it's creative work," says Rachel Siemens, pastor of Carman (Man.) Mennonite Church, whose website launched in August 2020.

hub to create new websites.

The platform offers several tools congregations have found useful during the pandemic.

First Hmong Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont., launched in May 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic. The congregation used the built-in event



PHOTO BY MARY ANNE FALK

Rachel Siemens, pastor of Carman (Man.) Mennonite Church, created her congregation's website. It launched in August 2020 as part of Mennonite Church Canada's website hub.

"What kind of images do we use, what do we say about us, what are the words we use to talk about ourselves?"

In February 2020, the five regional churches and MC Canada launched their new websites, which are part of a website hub created by Barefoot Creative, in Breslau, Ont. Shortly after, 21 pilot congregations were invited to join the

registration system to register service attendees when capacity was limited and contact tracing mandatory.

"This was important for ensuring we weren't over capacity and helped to keep track of everyone's information," says Mollee Moua, who co-created First Hmong's website.

Moua says the site will come in handy

for the congregation's plans to make digital Sunday school materials available for parents to download.

Siemens has been writing monthly e-mails to those in her community who are caring for aging parents and posting her messages in a blog on her congregation's new website called "Caring for Parents." The blog is highlighted on the church's "Building Community" webpage.

People developing their congregation's website work closely with Barefoot Creative from the beginning. Churches are given a pre-built template, which they manipulate to form into their own website. Barefoot provides training through instructional videos and online meetings, and staff respond quickly to questions.

Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship in Surrey, B.C., also launched in May 2020. In the frantic but necessary move to make things virtually accessible during lockdown, Pastor Gerald Neufeld worked hard to launch quickly, to enable online giving for the congregation, and to post sermons and weekly Zoom worship services on the website. To celebrate the congregation's 20th anniversary, he posted a video of people bringing greetings even in isolation.

"Over half of the people attending our online worship services are from distant cities across Canada and Japan," he says. "Through our website, e-mail and Zoom meetings we can now build connections with them."

The Fellowship's website can be completely translated into Japanese using Google Translate.

The creation of a website can feel daunting for some, especially when, on top of the technical details, there are decisions to make about content and exactly what to communicate to visitors.

A foundational component of the platform allows for interactivity between websites in the hub.

Edmonton First Mennonite Church launched in August 2020 and shares "News from the Broader Church" on its news webpage, allowing visitors to filter news from MC Canada and MC Alberta.

Likewise, Carman Mennonite's news webpage features news from MC Canada and MC Manitoba.

“It’s a simple way to help keep us connected,” says Siemens, when asked why she chose to integrate nationwide and regional news onto her church’s website.

Jon Olfert, director of MC Alberta’s Camp Valaqua, whose website launched in February 2021, says the most helpful thing the platform allows is for camp donations to be processed through MC Alberta’s website, cutting down on administrative steps for his staff.

“It simplifies life for our treasurer, which is always a good thing,” he says.

Edmonton First Mennonite also makes use of a built-in intranet function that comes with the platform. Congregational members can log in to access secure pages of their website, where documents like board minutes, bulletins, policies and congregational listings can be placed.

Along with the registration, news integration and donation-processing abilities, the hub also offers congregations the ability to track donations, manage donor mailing lists, manually add giving by cash or cheques, and issue tax receipts directly from the site.

“We are committed to empowering churches and Christian ministries, especially in the difficult months of COVID-19,” says Gayle Goosen, creative director of Barefoot Creative. “Our goal is to make it easy for churches to have an online space that tells their unique story. We’re excited to see churches across Canada creating unique and engaging online environments for their congregations.”

All MC Canada congregations are invited to join the congregational website hub. Interested congregations can contact their regional churches for more information:

- **MC British Columbia:** Kevin Barkowsky (info@mcbc.ca)
- **MC Alberta:** Tim Wiebe-Neufeld (tim@mennonitechurch.ab.ca)
- **MC Saskatchewan:** Josh Wallace (churchengagement@mcsask.ca)
- **MC Manitoba:** Rick Neufeld (rneufeld@mennochurch.mb.ca)
- **MC Eastern Canada:** Norm Dyck (ndyck@mcecc.ca) ☞

Transcending borders

Mennonite Church Canada congregations match \$50,000 donation for MWC COVID-19 fund in 2020

By Katie Doke Sawatzky
Mennonite Church Canada

Congregations across Mennonite Church Canada have matched a \$50,000 donation made by the nationwide church to a COVID-19 relief fund operated by Mennonite World Conference (MWC).

The fund, which is part of MWC’s Global Church Sharing Fund, helps MWC-member churches struggling because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This giving demonstrates to churches in other parts of the world that we belong to each other, and that we, with more financial resources, can help those with less to carry out their witness as Jesus followers in pandemic times,” says Arli Klassen, MC Canada Joint Council member and regional representatives coordinator for MWC.

MC Canada’s Joint Council approved a \$50,000 donation to the fund in May 2020 and asked congregations to match the amount in their giving for the rest of the year.

Congregations across the five regional churches gave \$50,946 in 2020, which means MC Canada’s total contributions

to the fund totalled more than \$100,000.

Klassen says Canadian congregations have much to learn from churches in the Global South, who connected with needy families in ways Canadian churches did not, because North Americans often leave tasks and relationships to social agencies and government support.

As of November 2020, the MWC COVID-19 fund supported 45 humanitarian initiatives carried out by 53 national Anabaptist churches in 28 countries. Its current total project value is US\$436,824.

The national church recipients of the relief fund include Angola, Colombia, India and Indonesia. In India, desperate families were given relief kits with food and hygiene supplies; in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, people received food relief, equipment and training in protective health measures.

“Mennonite Church Canada’s giving enabled this strong witness,” says Klassen. “We are growing in our understanding of what it means to be an Anabaptist faith community that transcends borders.” ☞



PHOTO COURTESY OF SERAPHIN KUTUMBANA

Francine Mukoko, standing at right, a public health graduate from the Communauté Mennonite au Congo community in Bateke, presents public-health advice in Teke, the local language.

The Vegetable Academy is a growing concern

Saskatoon market gardener turns to teaching gardening online

By Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON

The seed that eventually grew into the Vegetable Academy was planted when Jared Regier was a boy working, somewhat reluctantly, in his parents' garden.

"Good food was always part of our home," he says, and gardening was "an essential part of being human."

Years later, Regier became a high-school teacher and established a home of his own, but gardening wasn't initially part of that home. He remembers feeling embarrassed about going to the grocery store to buy carrots that tasted inferior to the ones his parents grew.

In the classroom, teaching ecology, Regier began thinking more about how closely food production is tied to the challenges of sustainability.

Eventually, Regier left his teaching career to become a market gardener. He called his venture Chain Reaction Urban Farm, although it wasn't a farm in the traditional sense.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JARED REGIER

As Jared Regier worked in his market garden plots, people walking by would stop and ask him questions about gardening. This led to the creation of the Vegetable Academy.

"There were no tractors, no sprawling acres of farmland," he says. "It was all here in Saskatoon." Regier farmed just fewer than 930 square metres in plots either in people's backyards or along boulevards. He sold his organically grown produce through subscriptions and delivered it by bicycle.

After operating the market garden for six years, he felt he had reached the limit of what he, as one person working alone, could do. He also felt he had reached the limit with regard to the income he could generate for his family. So he decided to combine the knowledge he'd gained as a market gardener with his skills as a teacher and to open the Vegetable Academy.

"The idea started with all the questions I got," he says. "I have a lot of plots that are very public—you can see the whole garden—and people often wanted to stop and chat." When they asked him why they couldn't get their home gardens to look like his, he realized there was a learning gap that he could fill.

"Seed to table," the Vegetable Academy's first online gardening course, launched in January with slightly more than a hundred registered learners. Most are from Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta, but he also has participants from Ukraine, Mexico and Australia.

Some will be planting urban gardens, while others are setting up homestead gardens on acreages. Some are young novice gardeners, while others are retirees wanting to get back into gardening, he says. What they have in common is a commitment to growing their own food.

Regier, who attends Nutana Park Mennonite Church, sees food as a powerful vehicle for change that can have a far-reaching impact.



Above: Jared Regier holds a tray of seedlings ready for transplant into his market garden.

Below: Jared Regier displays some of the fruits of his labour: winter squash and garlic, ready for storage.





Jared Regier harvests summer squash in his market garden, Chain Reaction Urban Farm.

of ecosystems, people and energy reserves around the world,” he says, adding, “We don’t need bigger machinery or more sophisticated technology to correct the failings of our current food system. We simply need more educated people willing to do the work, and I happen to be well equipped to help with this transition.”

To learn more, visit vegetableacademy.com.



“Several times a day we get to use our forks to vote for the kind of world we want to live in,” he says. “When we make good food decisions, we nourish our bodies and elect to build healthier local ecosystems.” He adds, “The rewards are fast, the benefits are long lasting, and if we make a mistake, we get another chance to make better choices the next day.”

Regier sees growing good food sustainably and teaching others to do the same as an act of love for his neighbours and for future generations.

“My insistence on getting my hands dirty by growing my own food at home is an act of love that removes me from the industrial food system and its exploitation



Jared’s five favourite crops

1. **Strawberries:** “This is probably my favourite crop to stick in my mouth, but I also enjoy the unique challenges of managing a perennial strawberry patch.”
2. **Tomatoes:** “I find it satisfying to trellis and prune indeterminate tomatoes, and the incredible diversity of tomato varieties available keeps this crop interesting to grow every season. The fact that we get fresh, flavourful tomatoes out of the deal is just an added bonus.”
3. **Carrots:** “Carrots are a bit finicky during their germination phase, so it’s always satisfying for me to seed and establish new carrot beds well. After that point, I appreciate growing carrots for their reliability, flexible harvest window and storability.”
4. **Potatoes:** “There’s just something about the hunt for buried food that makes potato harvesting extra fun, at least when you are not digging potatoes by hand for 50 families!”
5. **Garlic:** “Our garlic stash enriches our meals on a year-round basis, and it’s easy to grow and store. What’s not to like?”

News brief

Thrift store shopping during the pandemic



PHOTO BY TIM ALBRECHT

Elizabeth Hildebrandt, assistant retail manager, stands behind plexiglass at the Christian Benefit Thrift Shop’s cash counter, with safety signs for the pandemic in clear view.

The Christian Benefit Thrift Shop in St. Catharines was closed in the middle of March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It reopened from last June until December, when it closed again due to further pandemic restrictions. Much changed in the layout of the store in order for it to reopen in June. In order to allow for more space for the shoppers, the furniture section was removed. Masks had to be worn and, when the store was open, there was limited occupancy in the store. A major difference now is selling online on Facebook Marketplace. Currently, only paid staff work and handle the curbside pickup sales. Manager Tim Albrecht says, “Sales are down from a year ago, but not significantly.” The store has strong support from its customer base and, because of its online presence now, new customers are shopping. Even though some senior volunteers did not come back after reopening, for health and safety reasons, new volunteers have joined the team. Some of these newcomers are the snowbirds who are not able to spend time in the sunny south, and they want to make good use of their time, while others are students. Albrecht says the seniors are good mentors to the students. He is hopeful the store will reopen soon, when provincial restrictions are lifted.

—BY MARIA H. KLASSEN

COVER STORY

'A duty to love our neighbours'

North American Mennonite leaders weigh in on the vaccination question and how involved the church should be

By John Longhurst

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

Should Mennonite Church Canada leaders promote vaccines during this public health emergency?

That question arose in January when Dr. Theresa Tam, the chief public health officer, met with over 1,300 Canadian faith leaders, including from MC Canada, to encourage them to promote vaccines to their members.

Since faith leaders are “trusted voices” in their communities, they will be “instrumental” in promoting vaccines and overcoming vaccination hesitancy, she said. “Your leadership is vital for supporting and building resilience in your communities as we move through this pandemic and beyond.”

As for MC Canada executive ministers, they see their roles as mostly providing information and opportunities for discussion about vaccines:

• **Since the start of the pandemic**, MC Eastern Canada has been convening online conversations for pastors to talk about pandemic challenges and how to adapt, says **Leah Reesor-Keller**. The regional church will continue to use these forums to provide pastors with information about vaccines, she says, adding “God’s healing power can take many forms, including the development of COVID-19 vaccines and other forms of medical treatment.”



As for herself, she says: “When our turn does come, my family and I will be eager and ready to get our vaccines, not just to protect ourselves but to protect the more vulnerable people in our extended family and community in the best way that we can. It’s a tangible way of putting our faith in action to care for the well-being of others.”

• **Michael Pahl** of MC Manitoba expects congregations in that province will be supportive of promoting vaccines, just as they have been following other health guidelines and protocols.



“Our congregations have worked within health regulations and guidelines since COVID first began impacting Manitoba last March,” he says. “I don’t anticipate that to change with vaccines being made available.”

Individual congregants may choose not to get the vaccine, he says, but “this would not be a strong position among our congregations.”

• **Throughout the pandemic**, **Tim Wiebe-Neufeld** of MC Alberta has been encouraging congregations to discern the best ways to “meet minimum requirements or to reduce risk with more restrictive steps.”



Vaccination programs are a little different, he says, since those decisions are more up to individuals. “Generally, I feel our church community trusts the health-care system and officials, and we would point to them as the ones who have the best knowledge of what will reduce risk and lead to the best health care outcomes,” he says.

When it comes to vaccines, Wiebe-Neufeld says he sees his role, together with pastors, as creating forums where people “feel empowered to respond in these conversations in a caring, helpful and clear way that shows Christ’s love for those around us.”

• **Garry Janzen** of MC British Columbia also sees his role as one of sharing information.

“I am not promoting vaccines as much as sharing the protocols [from provincial health authorities] about how we should behave during this pandemic and what the current restrictions are,” he says. “This certainly includes the anticipation of receiving the vaccine.”



Garry Janzen

Through the updates, his goal is to provide accurate information so churches can “stay vigilant to help flatten the curve,” he says, adding that, when he is able, he plans to be vaccinated.

• **Doug Klassen**, executive minister of MC Canada, sees a role for leaders in promoting vaccines in an indirect way. “In keeping with the teachings of Jesus, we seek to give special care to the weak, vulnerable, marginalized, compromised,” he says, adding that promoting vaccinations against COVID-19 is a way to do what “our faith calls us to do in this pandemic to protect them.”



Klassen plans to get the vaccine as soon as he is able, and he thinks many MC Canada pastors will, too.

“Many of our pastors want to, as well, knowing how terribly lonely some of their parishioners are, and how desperately some of their church ministries are needed,” he says. “They want to get back to caregiving and serving in person as soon as it is safe to do so.”

Other Mennonite responses

• **Glen Guyton**, executive director of MC U.S.A., doesn’t see any “Anabaptist theological basis or organizational basis” for using his role to address the issue of vaccines. “I trust people will make medical

decisions that are in line with their values, beliefs, and the communities in which they worship,” he says, adding, “I encourage MC U.S.A. members to make decisions that demonstrate love and mutual aid in their community.”

- **“As a leader,** I wanted to show it’s a way to serve the greater good and minimize fears about getting the shot,” says Stephen Kriss, executive minister of the Mosaic Mennonite Conference in the United States, after posting on social media about getting his vaccination in January. “I want to serve and be as safe as I can be when serving others. If I don’t get it, I can’t give it,” he says of COVID-19.

Kriss recognizes that not everyone feels the same way, especially people of colour in the U.S. “I won’t be critical of those who won’t get the vaccine,” he says. “But I want to be conscientious myself in a time

of pandemic. I wanted to get it out of love for others, and of love for God.”

- **Don Morris,** national director of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Conference, doesn’t plan to “either intentionally encourage or discourage people about getting the vaccine.” Morris, who got the vaccine in January as well, believes it is a decision that people have to make on their own. If asked, however, he says he will “indicate that I believe there is no moral or theological reason not to get it.”

- **Elton DaSilva,** national director of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference, says he plans to get the vaccine “at the first available opportunity and recommends others to do so as well.”

- **Although Layton Friesen,** conference pastor of the Evangelical Mennonite

Church, was trained in a generation of pastors who were taught “not to venture where they were not qualified to go,” he believes church leaders can play a role in this area.

“We have the responsibility to listen to what the majority of scientists and doctors are telling us, and to follow their plan, rather than seeking out the minority voice in some corner of the internet calling the consensus into question,” says Friesen. He plans to get the vaccine as soon as he is able. “I think we owe a duty of love to our neighbours to be vaccinated as soon as possible so that we can become part of the solution rather than part of the problem.” ❧

As of press time, Ryan Siemens, MC Saskatchewan’s executive minister, could not be reached for comment.

What is appropriate humour?

Edmonton church explores the relationship between humour and Christianity throughout the ages

By Joanne De Jong
Alberta Correspondent
EDMONTON

It may seem obvious when humour crosses the line, but Christians have not always agreed when it is appropriate and when it is not. In fact, throughout many periods of history, Christians have felt that laughing and comedy were terrible sins.

Edmonton First Mennonite Church invited Brian Froese, an associate professor of history at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg, to speak on this very theme, in a four-part series entitled “You had to be there: A history of humour, laughter and comical Christianity,” over a week in early February.

Froese led the congregation to consider the use of humour through the early church era, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance up to modern times. Reading excerpts from various plays, the

congregation experienced humour from different ages and discussed whether the humour was appropriate.

The series began with Froese commenting on how humour can build or destroy people, making them feel better or worse. Aristotle saw humour as a form of abuse, reacting to those who made fun of people in the lower classes. In his book *Nicomacheas Ethics*, he wrote, “[T]hose who carry humour to excess are thought to be vulgar buffoons.” Tertullian felt it was poor form to mock downwards, but making fun of the emperor was acceptable.

Stories of laughter in the early church were rare, Froese said, and Christianity was a call to suffering, not to frivolity. According to Froese, if John Chrysostom, an early Church Father, was asked, “Can you live the true Christian life and be

jovial?” his answer would have been a hard no. He saw humour as an affront to the suffering of Christ and used John 16:20 to justify the position that laughing was for heaven only.

As the church entered medieval times, the church’s position started to soften. One practice during this period was called “Easter laughing.” In this practice, the Easter story was told as jovially as possible, in costume with joy, jocularity, and lots of jokes. Since Jesus got the last laugh—having defeated Satan on resurrection day—pranks were encouraged.

St. Benedict was open to joking yet strongly felt that humour should never be at the expense of others. He came down hard on laughter as a distraction from one’s duties as a servant of Christ.

Thomas Aquinas believed that Jesus’ life

must have included humour, since he was fully human, according to Froese. Aquinas explored the questions, “Is there virtue in playing games? Is there sin in playing too much? Too little?” Aquinas believed that it was part of humanity’s created nature to participate in humour and that a joyless life was an error.

Froese asked members to read parts by the female playwright Hrosvitha von Gandersheim. Her Latin comedy, *Dulcitius*, told the disturbing story of three women who were raped and later martyred. At one point, the rapist becomes confused, kissing the pots and pans. Discussion was had around whether rape can ever be humorous.

Moving on to the Renaissance, Froese highlighted Erasmus’s work. Author of *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus enjoyed skewering the elites and the laity for their superstitions, Froese explained, adding that, as a satirist, Erasmus expounded on corruption in society and in the church.

Participants discussed the popularity of *The Cat Massacre* in the 1730s, a humorous tale that was repeatedly told about the killing of hundreds of cats. Some people were amused by torturing animals, especially cats, as they represented the elite, often being better fed than labourers. The cats were dressed up in papal gowns, set on fire and tortured. Froese said that this would not be considered funny today.

The question of appropriate humour

was discussed in the novel *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S Lewis. In Chapter 11, Screwtape, a senior demon, reverses the ranking of human humour. For him, joy is no longer the best form of humour because it leads to kindness; flippancy replaces it, since it is the least useful. According to Lewis, any humour that leads to vulgarity is a triumph for the devil.

Mennonite historian Marie Funk Wiebe wrote about the trajectory of humour from 1900 to 1952, stating that overt humour was initially frowned on in Mennonite society and was treated with suspicion. Tall tales were considered lies. At the 1908 assembly of Canadian Mennonites, the telling of jokes was *verboden* but, at a 1952 assembly, J.C. Wenger declared that “good, clean humour” was healthy.

Today, Mennonites enjoy humour, according to Froese, and he introduced

The Daily Bonnet, an online Mennonite satirical news site. Video clips from

Mennonite comedian Matt Falk were also shown. ❧



PHOTO BY LORELEE FROESE

Brian Froese, associate professor of history at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), takes a break from his walk along the Walls of Avila, Spain. He recently led a CMU Portable titled ‘You had to be there: A history of humour, laughter, and comical Christianity.’

Extraordinary Opportunity:

Mennonite Church Canada has made it possible for churches to build their own unique website. The website includes:

- View online services
- Newsletters and news archives
- Secure online donations
- Registrations for events and conferences
- Direct news feed from the Canadian and regional churches



For more information, go to... BarefootCreative.com/MC-Church

'Because there's always more to learn'

Xplore program ventures into new territory during pandemic

Canadian Mennonite University
WINNIPEG

When Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) moved its Xplore classes online for the fall 2020 semester due to COVID-19, Marlene Janzen was thrilled. Janzen lives in Ottawa, so the new format meant she could participate for the first time.

"This was really interesting to me, to access these resources from CMU," she says, adding that she had a great experience in her course.

Xplore is a 55-plus enrichment program that offers opportunities for continued learning and engagement on a wide variety of topics. It has been running for six years, but this was the first time it was offered via Zoom. That didn't deter the 135 participants who registered last fall, many in multiple sessions. The eight different courses covered topics from the pandemic and church denominations, to racism and journalling through grief.

Aubrey Hemminger of Winnipeg enrolled in three classes last fall. He studied Ephesians with Robert J. Suderman, former general secretary of Mennonite Church Canada; practised writing with writer and editor Larry Danielson, and discovered how Jesus would have read the Bible, with Michael Pahl, executive minister of MC Manitoba.

Within the confinement of coronavirus restrictions, Hemminger wanted to fill his time with learning. He has taken several Xplore courses in previous years and says he keeps coming back "because there's always more to learn, I think perhaps even more, the ongoing spiritual refreshment of learning about our faith and reflecting on our faith through a knowledge-based process."

CMU held a training session to help participants learn how to use Zoom before classes began.

Hemminger says some people found the technology challenging but,



Marlene Janzen



Aubrey Hemminger

by the end of the course, most were used to the new structure.

The program still lost several regular students who didn't have access to computers. But the shift simultaneously created new opportunities, since involvement was no longer limited to location.

many people 55-plus who are in a place in life where they are asking questions about their faith, about the Bible, about ethical questions, and about how all these things impact their life and their local church. Local churches themselves can provide some of that space to engage these questions, but CMU has an important role in supplementing that space by bringing experts into direct engagement with lay people around these questions.

"I love teaching Xplore courses!" says Pahl, who has taught with the program for six years. "The students are all engaged, and they bring a lifetime of experience to the topic and to class discussions. I learn as much from them as they do from me."

The eight spring courses will include

Aubrey Hemminger of Winnipeg . . . says he keeps coming back 'because there's always more to learn, I think perhaps even more, the ongoing spiritual refreshment of learning about our faith and reflecting on our faith through a knowledge-based process.'

Last fall's session had individuals joining in from across Manitoba, Pennsylvania, Chicago, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and even Switzerland.

Pahl says that continuing education is vital to the life of the church. "There are

"Indigenous Spiritualities and Christianities" with Adrian Jacobs, keeper of the circle at Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre; "The Book of Revelation: Hope in a Time Turmoil" with J. Nelson Kraybill, president of Mennonite World Conference; and "The Power of Music: From Bach to the Beatles" with Dietrich Bartel, CMU emeritus professor of music. ❧

For more information on class subjects, schedules and registration visit cmu.ca/xplore.



PEOPLE

Women's voices in song

Sharing the works of women composers

Story and Screenshot by Janet Bauman

Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

Celebrating the contribution of women composers in *Voices Together* means reclaiming the voices of historical women whose work has been overlooked and also to “elevate the voices of women who are living,” said Anneli Loepp Thiessen. She led a recent lecture-recital as part of the virtual Noon Hour@Home Concert Series at Conrad Grebel University College.

Calling her presentation, “Still singing: Women composers and the *Voices Together* hymnal,” Loepp Thiessen, who served on the Mennonite Worship and Song Committee that gave shape to *Voices Together*, shared stories and presented four hymns by women chosen for the collection. She composed the music for two of them. She also provided context for the intentional effort to include more female composers in *Voices Together* than were represented in the 1992 *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

Loepp Thiessen, a current doctoral student at the University of Ottawa in interdisciplinary music research, is studying women songwriters of contemporary worship music. She co-chaired the popular idioms (folk and contemporary music) committee and served on the tune and accompaniment committee for *Voices Together*.

Committee members gave thought to how genders, ethnicities, cultural contexts, and spiritual and language expressions were represented in the hymnal. Early on in the four-year process of selecting hymns, they noticed that there was a lack of female composers and text writers. She said they made a deliberate effort to address that gap and, while it “feels exciting” to be increasing the numbers, there is still “a long way to go.”

In *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, 14.8 percent of text writers and 9 percent of tune writers were women. Committee members had

to do some research to uncover material by women, and invite current writers and composers to contribute.

In *Voices Together*, 27.2 percent of text writers and 18.4 percent of tune writers are women.

Loepp Thiessen said this doubling of women's contributions is “really good progress,” but “there is still a lot of work to be done.”



Sisters Joanna, left, and Anneli Loepp Thiessen presented several hymns in the *Voices Together* collection by women composers, at a recent lecture-recital.

In her current research, Loepp Thiessen said she will consider why this “significant gap” exists, particularly in the contemporary worship music industry.

For her noon-hour lecture-recital Anneli was joined by her sister Joanna, a voice major at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg.

They presented four hymns, one for each 400- or 500-year span of church history. Joanna sang soprano, while Anneli accompanied on piano and sang alto.

“God, Grant Us Mercy” (No. 142), one of the hymns they shared, dates back to the eighth century AD. Kassia, a Byzantine Greek composer and hymnographer, wrote dozens of liturgical poems and compositions. Her “concise melodies” closely reflect

the rhythms of her texts, said Anneli.

Katie Graber, who also served on the *Voices Together* committee, adapted a transcription of Kassia's original text and parts of the original melody. She arranged the hymn for leader and congregation, to represent the antiphonal choirs that may have been used at the time it was first composed.

Another hymn is “O Holy Spirit, Root of Life” (No. 376). The text is based on the writings of Hildegard of Bingen, a twelfth-century AD mystic, preacher, philosopher and spiritual teacher who was known for her prophecies, poetry and miracles. Several of Hildegard's texts and tunes are represented in *Voices Together*.

Hildegard's writings were given to Jean Janzen, a contemporary poet and hymn text writer, who adapted them for congregational use as a way to “bring in more voices of historical women,” said Loepp Thiessen. In the *Voices Together* process, texts in need of tunes were circulated to contemporary Anabaptist composers.

Loepp Thiessen, who said she was “intrigued by Janzen's setting of Hildegard's writing” submitted a tune. Noting that the church “has silenced the voices of women in corporate prayer” over the years, she wrote a tune “that prioritizes the voices of sopranos and altos,” while the tenors and basses sing a drone line.

Loepp Thiessen said she was “honoured to tell the stories and share the songs of some of the women represented in *Voices Together*. Women . . . have always been writing and singing, whether we knew it or not.”

A video link to the presentation, can be accessed at bit.ly/3rsNELL.



Instead of just hitting ‘Send’

Church members enjoy mailed correspondence during pandemic

By Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

In this time of isolation, some members of Abbotsford’s Emmanuel Mennonite Church are discovering the delights of a relationship based on the old-fashioned medium of handwritten letters.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown last March, Angelika Dawson began thinking of ways she could encourage people. As a writer, she recalled that, even as a young girl, she liked to send letters to a pen pal, her grandfather in Winnipeg, and her counsellors and fellow campers from summer camp. Later, as a counsellor at Camp Squeah in Hope, B.C., she became known for leaving encouraging notes to fellow staff, and when camp was done she wrote to girls from her cabin.

Dawson wondered how she could keep up relationships with church members when they were not gathering regularly. “It occurred to me that I could marry these two things: my love for letter writing and knowing that people appreciate encouragement,” she says.

She began with seniors in the church, members of her fellowship group, families with children, and later youths and young adults—resulting in regular correspondence with a few people—and a couple of surprises along the way.

“What I’ve learned in this process is this: Don’t make assumptions!” she says. “I was assuming that the seniors in our church would somehow be moved by the sheer nostalgia of receiving a letter in the mail and would write me back. I also assumed that the youth/young adults/families would either not write back or would use other means to respond.”

As it turns out, though, she says she discovered that “it’s the young people and



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANGELIKA DAWSON

Angelika Dawson of Abbotsford, B.C., has been corresponding by mail with some members of her church during the pandemic. She is surrounded by some of the many cards and letters she has received.

families who have sent back handwritten letters, and the seniors who have either phoned, texted, emailed or messaged me on Facebook to say thank you!”

Even though Dawson sends three to four letters a week and might get half that number in return, she says it’s not about hearing back from recipients. “It’s about the process itself, knowing that I am offering encouragement to someone in a way that is meaningful.”

One of the oldest members of the church has sent Dawson letters filled with family history and his reflections on life. “As someone in his 90s, he’s got lots of life to reflect upon and it’s been wonderful to correspond with him,” she says.

She has particularly enjoyed corresponding with the McCrimmon family

of Chilliwack, B.C., who have four boys ranging in age from three to 10. She sends them photo cards, and the boys take turns sending her pictures they’ve drawn, along with letters of family news penned by mom Amanda.

“I’ve learned so much about this family and have truly come to love and appreciate them through this process,” Dawson says.

The McCrimmons, meanwhile, treasure the letter-writing relationship just as much. Amanda McCrimmon says that letters go back and forth every two to three weeks, and her children eagerly look forward to hearing from Dawson. They recognize her stationery and handwriting by now, and when a letter comes, McCrimmon says, “It’s probably the most exciting day of the week. The boys will say, ‘Mommy, we have to read it right now,’ and we promptly sit down and read it together.”

With email having eclipsed regular mail for the most part, Dawson says she has come to appreciate the deliberate nature of letter writing: selecting stationery, composing sentences longhand when backspacing or deleting are not possible, addressing an envelope with a stamp instead of just hitting “send.”

“I think what makes handwritten letters so special is exactly that: the receiver of it realizes you’ve taken significant time to do this thing, to think of them, picture them as you’re writing,” says Dawson. “I know that when I receive a letter it’s the highlight of my day and I savour the reading of each one. It’s something that I hope will continue even after the pandemic is done.” ❧

A new approach to nature

By Maria H. Klassen
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
ST. CATHARINES, ONT.

Everyone knows how a good walk in nature makes them feel: relaxed and refreshed. Due to pandemic guidelines, though, many activities have been restricted, but walking is not one of them.

Niagara Nature and Forest Therapy is taking walking in nature to a new level. Melissa Bollinger Seiling, a certified forest therapy guide, takes people into forests or wooded areas to become quiet and listen to nature using their five senses.

“Being mindful in the forest can be really renewing for people,” says Bollinger Seiling, who attends The First Mennonite Church in Vineland. She says a guide helps participants to slow down, facilitating the letting go of the thinking brain, to allow the individual to simply “be” in the present moment.

These walks can be done individually or with a group, with a guide or as a virtual tour. Cell phones and cameras are turned off or left at home. There is no goal or end point. It is not a time for conversation, but a time to stop analytical thinking and slow down. A forest therapy walk is much slower than a hike; it can take two or three hours to move only one or two kilometres, as participants take in the atmosphere of the forest through their senses, which becomes part of the healing journey.

Forest walks can be done alone and while sitting on a bench on a trail or in the backyard. Participants should stay in this spot for at least 20 minutes and pay attention with their five senses: Is there a breeze? Are you facing the sun? Is it cold? What does the air taste like?

The practice of forest therapy has its roots in Japan, starting there in the early 1980s, where it was called *shinrin yoku* or forest bathing. The certification process for therapists involves an eight-day full immersion course, which is then followed up with a six-month apprenticeship, where

beginners take out groups of people while they are being mentored.

Bollinger Seiling starts her walks by explaining what the session is and what it isn’t, and introduces the participants. Everyone is invited to find that “sit spot” to observe what is happening around them. While sitting or lying down during this quiet time, which is called an invitation, each individual is invited to use their senses by watching the birds, listening to the silence, inhaling the scent of pine needles, touching a tree or feeling the bark, and asking what does the forest have to offer? Each invitation can last 15 to 20 minutes before the group slowly moves down the path.

Bollinger Seiling finds that it takes about two invitations for people to let go of their prior life, to take deep breaths and start listening intently. After several stops, there is a tea ceremony with tea made from local plants. A circle time follows, during which people can share what they have noticed.

It is not meant to be a therapy session, but a time to speak and listen from the heart. Bollinger Seiling finds that participants reach different levels of sharing but have a sense of belonging and of finding safety in the group.

Bollinger Seiling grew up on a farm in Minnesota, she spent most of her childhood outdoors, among trees in the forest, climbing rocks, discovering new streams and hiking trails. She finds nature healing for herself.

Currently she is a practicing social worker/psychotherapist, with 20 years of experience working with the Welland McMaster Family Health Team in Niagara. She says she has introduced some of her clients to nature and forest therapy with great success. In the forest she is not a counsellor. “The forest is the therapist,” she says. The forest is part of



PHOTO BY DEB SIMPSON

Melissa Bollinger Seiling observes nature during a forest walk.

the healing journey.

Studies have shown forest therapy is good medicine, according to Bollinger Seiling. There are many physical and mental health benefits to forest bathing, including decreased stress level, lower blood pressure and heart rates, and a decrease in anxiety and depression levels, and improvements to cognitive ability.

Bollinger Seiling and her husband Jonathan also lead forest church sessions. She was able to lead some walks last year when some of the pandemic restrictions were lifted. Although walks can be done in the winter, the season is best accommodated between April and November, she says. ❧

To learn more about Niagara Nature and Forest Therapy, visit nnft.ca.



/// Staff changes

Pastoral transition in British Columbia

Gerry Binnema was installed as lead pastor of Crossroads Community Church, Chilliwack, B.C., on Jan. 31. Garry Janzen, Mennonite Church B.C.'s executive minister, officiated at the service, which took place on Zoom. Binnema recently served seven years at United Mennonite Church, Black Creek, B.C. A graduate of Trinity Western University, with a degree in aviation, Christianity and culture, he also has a masters' degree in aerospace science. He is a pilot and previously enjoyed several careers in the aviation industry, including flight instructor and accident investigator. He started his own consulting firm in 2008. He is married to Elaine, a registered clinical counsellor.

—BY **AMY RINNER WADDELL**



Pastoral transitions in Manitoba

Jack Dyck concluded 10-and-a-half years of ministry at Springfield Heights Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, on Dec. 31, 2020. He served as the congregation's associate pastor for seven-and-a-half years and as its leading pastor for three years. Dyck is retiring from a 35-year career in church ministry, previously pastoring at Windsor (Ont.) Mennonite Fellowship, St. Catharines (Ont.) United Mennonite Church, and Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon. He earned a master of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.



Ben Pauls came out of retirement to serve as interim pastor of Morden (Man.) Mennonite Church in January 2021, after lead pastor Michael Pahl's departure in December. The position



is a three-month term, with the possibility of an extension. Pauls previously pastored for 26 years in various congregations, primarily in the areas of worship and music ministry. He also taught for 17 years at Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna, Man.; Elim Bible Institute in Altona, Man.; and the Evangelical Mennonite Centre of Theology in Asunción, Paraguay. He holds a master of music degree in choral conducting from Westminster Choir College in Princeton, N.Y.

—BY **NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE**

Pastoral transitions in Ontario

Doug Amstutz began as part-time pastor at Erie View United Mennonite Church in Port Rowan, last December, after serving as interim pastor there for a year. He has experience as a co-pastor with his wife Wanda in the United States and at Grace Mennonite in St. Catharines, Ont. He also served as an interim pastor in a number of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregations, including Crosshill, Rainham, Riverdale and Poole. He earned a master of divinity degree in pastoral ministry from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), Elkhart, Ind. The Amstutzes spent four years as co-country representatives in Ethiopia with Mennonite Central Committee. Recently, he also began a position as development associate for Canada with AMBS.



Matthew Bailey-Dick began a one-year position as support pastor at The First Mennonite Church, Vineland, last November. Most recently he was coordinator for the former Anabaptist Learning Workshop, a program of MC Eastern Canada in cooperation with Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont. He previously served as pastor of Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church and Erb Street Mennonite Church, both in



Waterloo, and worked at Mennonite Central Committee Ontario. His studies include adult education, theology, and peace and conflict studies. He is excited to support a congregation where there is strong lay leadership and mutual encouragement.

Sean East joined the pastoral team of Listowel Mennonite Church last November. Prior to this, he was a member for 20 years of West Hills Fellowship in Baden, Ont., and then pastor there for 10 years, after beginning his career path in finance. He currently serves as the financial manager for MC Eastern Canada. He completed his master of theological studies degree from Conrad Grebel University College, and has worked with ReLearning Community, a discipleship training program for congregations through MC Eastern Canada. He is excited to explore the life of discipleship with the Listowel congregation, asking what God is saying to them and how they might respond.



Kim Penner joined the pastoral team of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener, last month. She earned an undergraduate degree in biblical and theological studies from Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg; a master of theological studies degree from Conrad Grebel University College, and a doctorate in theology from St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology (TST). She has been a sessional instructor at Grebel, Emmanuel College at TST, and Victoria College (University of Toronto). She specializes in Mennonite peace theology, ecclesiology, and feminist theological ethics. She also represents MC Canada in dialogue with the Anglican Church of Canada. She has been a guest preacher in several MC Eastern Canada congregations.



—BY **JANET BAUMAN**

'God is at work among us'

New MC Manitoba executive minister focuses on the local church

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

Michael Pahl's first month as Mennonite Church Manitoba's new executive minister was a traffic jam of Zoom meetings and a steep drive around the learning curve. Pahl, 50, officially began his role on Jan. 1 and spent several weeks in a rush of year-end reviews, budgeting and planning for MC Manitoba's upcoming annual gathering.

He is excited to dive into connecting with the people that make up the regional church.

"I have very much a local church focus in how I'm thinking about this role," says Pahl, adding that MC Manitoba's identity is not the staff who work in the office, but rather all the churches that make up the conference. "I have made a provisional commitment to have a significant connection with every one of our 39 congregations within the next year-and-a-half or so," he says. This drive comes from his experience in pastoral ministry, that he says was an opportunity "to see the local church from the inside out."

Previously he was a pastor of Lendrum

Mennonite Church in Edmonton and of Morden (Man.) Mennonite Church. As a pastor, he says he saw life behind the scenes and got "a real sense of the way the local church works, both the beautiful and amazing things, but also the difficult and challenging things."

Pahl grew up in Coaldale, Alta., attending the local Mennonite Brethren church, but he has lived all over. Before pastoring, he earned his doctorate in theology from Birmingham University in England. He then moved back and forth between pastoring and academics, teaching at Prairie College in Three Hills, Alta.; sessional courses at seminaries in other parts of Alberta; and at a Baptist institution in Ohio.

The old principle "The best way to learn is to teach" proved true for Pahl, whose own Anabaptist convictions grew and solidified out of his teaching and research in the New Testament. He says this careful study will serve him well as he represents the church



PHOTO BY LARISSA PAHL

Michael Pahl, standing right, performs a baptism at Morden Mennonite Church in 2014.

Peace is more than a wish.
It's our work.

morethanawish.ca



to the world and supports congregations “in developing and nurturing a strong Anabaptist identity.”

Pahl envisions his next few years of congregational visits as not only speaking from the pulpit, but also across the potluck table and beyond Sunday morning, developing significant connections with members and pastors.

When he first saw the executive minister job posting, he closed his computer and went on with his life. But when he was approached and asked to consider it, he prayed about it and discussed it with his family and the search committee. At each stage, the step felt right, as did the gifts he could bring to MC Manitoba at this time in its history.

“I try to always take those invitations seriously, because you never know when God might be doing something,” he says.

Pahl is excited to explore a question with congregations too: “How [do] people experience God’s presence and work in their lives or through their church or in their community?” He wants to hear what is happening throughout the whole province and help congregations discern how God is moving among them. At the same time, he is eager to zoom out to the bigger picture and ask, “What does that mean for how we move collectively into the future as MC Manitoba?”

Pahl knows where he needs to start directing his attention as the regional church takes those steps forward. There are some difficult things to address, the most urgent being the survival of Camps with Meaning, MC Manitoba’s camping ministry, through COVID-19.

It is also time to revisit the discussion surrounding the Being a Faithful Church process, particularly the question of same-sex marriage and including LGBTQ+ people in the church.

In 2017, MC Manitoba placed a moratorium on the same-sex conversation but made a commitment to return to it in three years. But 2020 came and went without any dialogue on the matter, in part due to the unexpected coronavirus, Pahl says. He says he has been considering, “What is the best way for us, with our congregations and where they’re at, to enter back into that conversation . . . and what kind of end goal might we imagine coming out of that conversation?”

Pahl’s focus extends beyond just the regional church. “I’d like for us to really tackle some of the urgent questions around us coming out of our societal context,” he says, naming climate change and Indigenous-settler relations as two of these.

Although these conversations can’t happen in person right now, Pahl says one advantage of the pandemic is that more people are using technology that enables people to communicate over long distances in more significant ways, something that he plans to utilize to connect more regularly with churches far away from Winnipeg. ❧

An installation service for Pahl will take place over Zoom at MC Manitoba’s annual gathering on March 6.



Passionate about fundraising data and reports? **Join our team!**

WE ARE _____
HIRING

We are recruiting for a full-time **Raiser’s Edge Database Manager** to join our Marketing and Development division.

Ideal start date: March 2021

Qualified applicants are invited to apply online at: meda.org/careers



Enrich your Journey

MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

uwaterloo.ca/theological-studies



Conrad Grebel University College

Have a passion for teaching?

Teach English as a second language (ESL) online to young Mennonites and friends in Paraguay.

Volunteer online!

For more information: benevolat@maisondelamitie.ca



Promotional Supplement



explore


A theological experience for youth (grades 10 to 12) who want to develop their leadership gifts. More at ambs.ca/explore



University

Arts Dialogue Faith Science
Community Music Mentorship
Business Character Practica Vocation
Social Enterprise Peace-Justice

Apply now: cmu.ca



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

Master of Arts
Concentration in Christian Ministry
Concentration in Theological Studies

Master of Divinity
Graduate Certificate in Christian Studies

Apply now: cmu.ca/gstm



THE COLLABORATIVE
MBA

Leadership for the common good
Enrol now for August 2020

cmu.ca/mba



ONLINE NOW!

at canadianmennonite.org



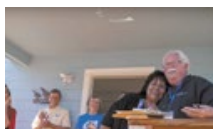
Restorative justice in a nightgown

On the blog: When his wife thwarted a would-be bicycle thief, Daniel Genest learned something about restorative justice. canadianmennonite.org/blog/nightgown



Carrying the light

Living Water Church in Borabu, Thailand, hosted the first Anabaptist gathering in that country last November. canadianmennonite.org/thaimmeeting



Watch: MDS looks back at 2020

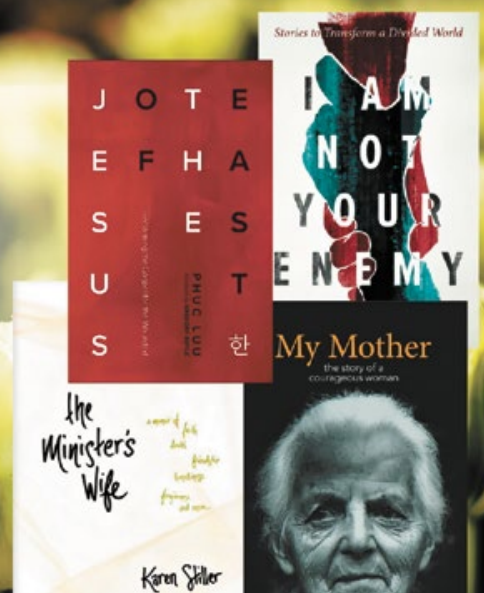
A recent video showcases the unexpected opportunities and blessings that Mennonite Disaster Service experienced last year. canadianmennonite.org/mdsvid



Racism feeds on denial

In a new six-video series from Herald Press, believers are invited into the practice of biblical lament as a powerful way to confront racism. canadianmennonite.org/lamentingracism

Coming April 12
Focus on Books and Resources



Stories to transform a Divided World

JOTES EFHASUS

I AM NOT YOUR ENEMY

The Minister's Wife
Karen Stiller

My Mother
The story of a courageous woman
Halmut Lerneke

Send your suggestion of a new book by or for Mennonites to edassist@canadianmennonite.org.

CANADIAN MENNONITE



Schools Directory featuring Mennonite Collegiate Institute

Christmas in February

By Kayla Giesbrecht
Mennonite Collegiate Institute, Gretna, Man.

We don't get the opportunity to celebrate Christmas in February very often, but this year was an exception. While it was disappointing to postpone the Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) Virtual Christmas Concert in December, we took the unique opportunity and ran with it.

MCI choir director Christina Banman and band teacher Jody Friesen had to get creative this year. Performances look a bit different when there's no audience. Students began rehearsing outside (rain or shine) after Code Red was issued in November 2020.

Although it was incredibly hard, Banman says she was inspired by how the students coped and how they made it work. She recalls the days leading up to filming the Christmas concert being very cold, so rehearsals had to be kept short.

She says, "On the day of shooting, there were 80-kilometre-per-hour winds, a little bit of rain, and yet it was quite warm. Essentially everything happened in one take, just like it would have on stage. You see every little part of it. You see mistakes and the inner workings of what was going on, but once we started shooting, what we got was what we were going to use."

Grade 12 student JJ. Scherr says that singing outside in masks, and distant from each other, made him a stronger singer. "We've had to project a lot more to hear anything and rely

on Mrs. Banman for timing and cues. I feel fortunate that we were able to create a Christmas concert, as it wasn't a possibility for many other schools. It is great to have a video recording to look back on, and see how much we accomplished with all the challenges," he says.

Scherr and grade 11 student Emily Bergen arranged the rendition of "Silent Night" they performed during the concert.

Music is such a huge part of what we do at MCI, so this concert shows what it's like to be in a choir and band during a pandemic. It'll be a powerful time stamp when we're looking back in 10 years. Students have been so happy to be able to do as much as they have and see how lucky they are that we are still singing, playing and putting music together.

We feel so fortunate to be able to share our concerts virtually, because it allows us to connect with people around the world who wouldn't have been able to attend otherwise.

The MCI Virtual Christmas Concert is available for viewing online at bit.ly/3bdbCu6.



MCI's Grade 11 and 12 group, the *Accidentals*.

The secret ingredient for emergency food distributions: peace

How peace in action is a crucial component of humanitarian relief

By Renata Buhler

When disaster strikes, people need urgent relief. In precarious situations, necessities like food, water, shelter and hygiene can be the difference between life and death. But how relief arrives can either build peace or ignite violence.

Incorporating peacebuilding to ensure that humanitarian relief doesn't escalate conflict is a priority for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). This principle of peace sprung to action when MCC worked with partners to distribute food during the crisis in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo).

A clash between armed groups and government forces in 2016 inflamed existing ethnic hostilities and triggered ongoing bloodshed. More than 1.4 million people fled. With many villages razed by the conflict or still unsafe, scores of people could not return to their communities.

MCC responded to the crisis by partnering with Congolese churches to provide emergency supplies to the displaced people. The churches formed local committees to distribute the food in their communities. As the pieces of the plans came together, one problem was still in the way.

Bias.

It would have been all too easy for committee members to default to giving food to people from their own ethnic groups and not others, especially with the conflict still fresh in their minds. A decision like that could have easily roused fighting among the people who had just escaped violence in their home communities.



Agnès Ntumba carries a sack of corn flour and oil she received during a distribution by an MCC partner. She, her husband and seven children were displaced from their home by violence in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. (MCC photo/Mulanda Jimmy Juma)

But peace in action saved the day.

Mulanda Jimmy Juma, MCC representative in DR Congo, used his peacebuilding skills to help the committee face their own biases. In the end, every member of the relief committee agreed on who should receive the food based on vulnerability and need, not ethnicity.

“The food assistance has created a kind of unity,” says Juma.

In addition to incorporating peace into the food distribution, MCC also supported trauma healing training and workshops to address the emotional wounds that burden many displaced people.

The participants learned what trauma is and how it manifests itself in destructive behaviours. Leaders created a safe space for group members to talk about their personal traumatic experiences and to grieve with each other. Then the participants talked together about how to live peacefully in the future.

“By bringing different groups of people together to plan and implement relief projects, we are able to reduce the potential for conflict and work toward peace,” says Bruce Guenther, MCC director of disaster response. “Integrating peacebuilding across MCC’s programs is such a crucial component of our work.”

That’s the power of peace in action.

Calendar

Alberta

Every Monday to Thursday:

Congregants from across Mennonite Church Alberta are invited to join a Zoom group for morning prayer on Mondays and Wednesdays at 7:30 a.m. MST, and evening prayer on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9 p.m. MST, for about 15 to 20 minutes, using Take Our Moments and Our Days. Register online at mcab.ca/events.

March 14: Calgary Chin Christian Church celebrates its 10th anniversary and grand opening, on Zoom from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. MST.

March 20-21: (20) MC Alberta delegate sessions, to be held via Zoom, beginning at 9:30 a.m. MST; (21) Zoom worship service begins at 10:30 a.m. MST.

Saskatchewan

March 13: Saskatchewan Annual Delegate Session, via Zoom beginning at 10:00 a.m. More information at www.mcsask.ca/events.

Manitoba

March 31: CMU's ReNew: "Resources for preaching—James," with Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, 11 a.m. CST. For more information or to register, visit cmu.ca/renew.

March 31: CMU virtual open house, 4 p.m. CST. For more information or to register, visit cmu.ca/virtual-open-house.

Ontario

March 11: Conrad Grebel University College presents the 2021 Bechtel Lecture: "Blackness, whiteness and the Anabaptist 'Imagined Community in Print and Mission,'" 7 p.m. EST, on the Grebel YouTube channel (bit.ly/3lnFHHub). Speaker: Timothy D. Epp of Redeemer University. Music by Diana Braithwaite. To register for the Q&A, visit bit.ly/38RJDaj. For more information, visit bit.ly/3nVDgjr.

March 19-21: Conrad Grebel University College Student Council presents the musical "Big Fish" via livestreaming: (19) 7 p.m. EST; (20, 21) 2 and 7 p.m. EST. For more information and to book tickets, visit bit.ly/37ijrO7.

April 24: MC Eastern Canada Annual Church Gathering, via Zoom. More information at www.mcec.ca/events.

To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send calendar announcements eight weeks in advance of the event date by email to calendar@canadianmennonite.org.



Classifieds

Employment Opportunities



**Employment Opportunity
Interim Pastor (0.6 FTE)**

Danforth Mennonite Church is a small, diverse, urban congregation in east-end Toronto seeking an interim pastor at 0.6 FTE effective summer 2021. Visit us at danforthmennonitechurch.ca.

We are seeking a leader skilled in pastoral care, spiritual leadership and formation, and facilitating congregations in discerning future directions.

For more details and a job description visit bit.ly/374fpsu. Submit inquiries and resumes to pastoraltransitions@mcec.ca.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Are you a visionary leader with a passion for mentoring the next generation?



Mennonite Collegiate Institute, in Gretna, MB, seeks a — **Director of Student Life & Recruitment** — to join the school's leadership team.

Core responsibilities include:

- Directing the student dormitory & staff
- Overseeing co-curricular Christian life programs, including daily chapel
- Fostering a healthy student community & tending to the well-being of individual students
- Leading the school's recruitment processes

Start date for this full-time position is August 1, 2021
Learn more at: www.mcblues.net/job-opportunities

Advertising Information

Contact
1-800-378-2524 x.224
advert@canadianmennonite.org

Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
March 29	March 15
April 12	March 29
April 26	April 12



**Employment opportunity
Lead Pastor**
Calgary, Alberta

We are a multigenerational, urban church of 174 members. The fellowship was established in 1956 and is a member of Mennonite Church Alberta and MC Canada.

A Lead Pastor is sought to guide the congregation after an 18 month interim ministry following our Lead Pastor's 20 year pastorate. Meet us by going to www.foothillsmennonite.com. Foothills MC is an Anabaptist faith community that desires to embody, share and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Job description available on request.

Calgary is a large, modern city with excellent educational opportunities and ready access to Canada's national mountain parks.

Please direct inquiries to: office@foothillsmennonite.ca, Attention of the Chair, Search Committee.

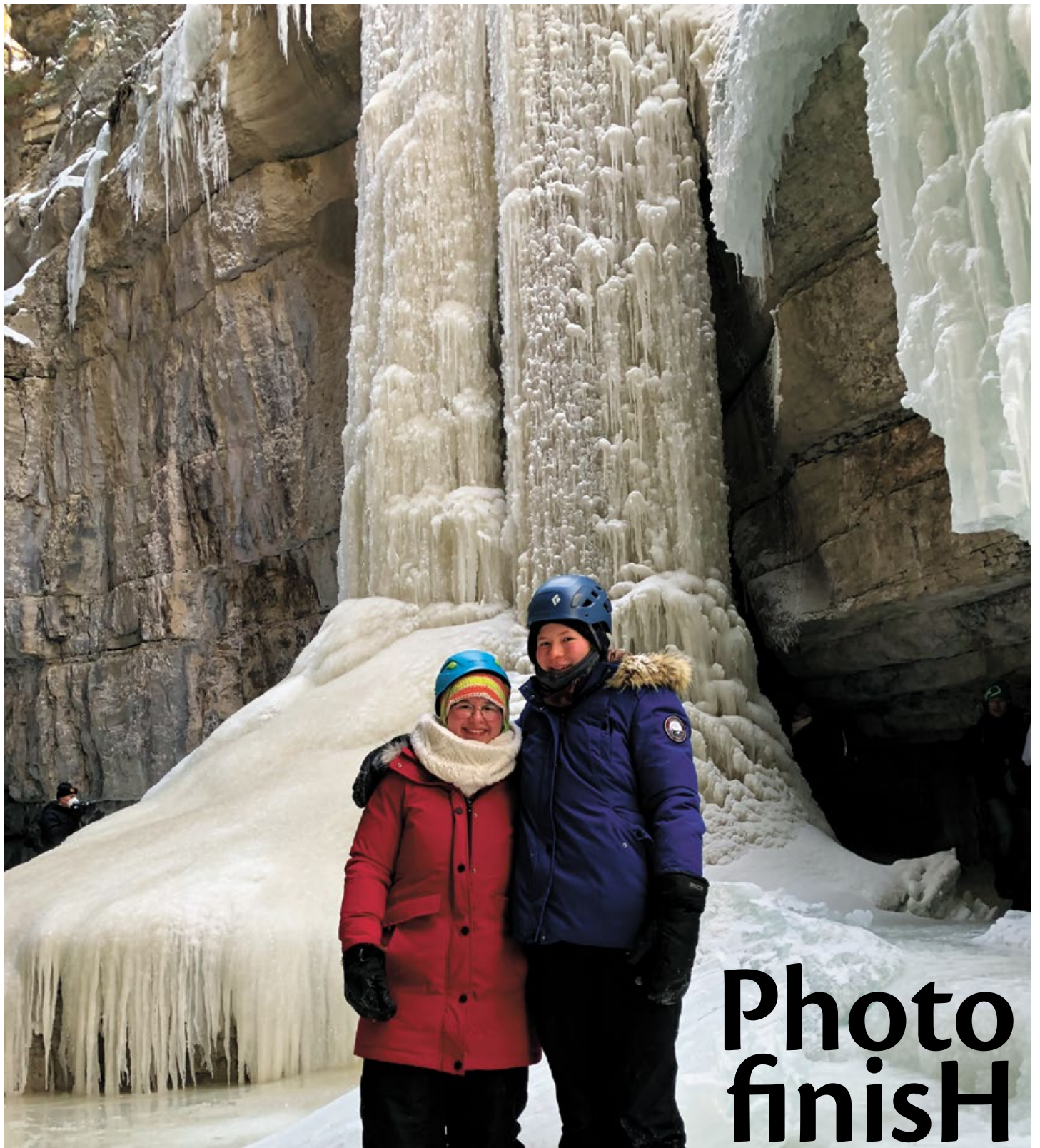


Photo finish

PHOTO BY JOANNE DE JONG

Edmonton Mennonite Voluntary Service members Madlene Nuerberger, left, and Dorothea Ruckh pose next to the “Queen’s boot” while on an ice walk in Maligne Canyon in Jasper National Park on Feb. 13. Ruckh of Michelbach, Germany, is volunteering for the year at L’Arche and Nuernberger of Werdau, Germany, is volunteering part-time at L’Arche and part-time at the Mennonite Central Committee thrift store in Edmonton. Both volunteers are serving with MVS through the German organization Christliche Dienste. They say the outing was stunning and they enjoyed it despite predicted morning temperatures of -44 C degrees with windchill.