

Stand by me



Families share ways to help people experiencing mental illness, pg. 27

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Caring for our family

A Mennonite World Conference education resource prepared by the Steering Committee of the Global Anabaptist Health Network

To the Anabaptist Mennonites and Brethren in Christ around the globe:

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant disruption, pain and loss.

We mourn with those who have lost loved ones and grieve the loss of livelihood for others.

We long to gather freely again, to share a meal, and worship without constraints, because this is who we are: a beloved community.

In the midst of this, we remember our faith in a God who comforts the suffering and walks with us through all things. In the words of Christ who has already conquered, *“Do not be afraid”* (Matthew 28:10).

Resist sensational stories

As members of the health-care community and as Christians, we recognize the fear and uncertainty. It is tempting to fuel these feelings with falsehood and sensational narratives of conspiracy. False stories gain our attention and grab our hearts like the words of false prophets. We should be careful not to bear false witness (Exodus 20:16).

The world gravitates to fear. But being motivated by fear is not the sign of following the way of Christ. We should reflect the faith to which we hold. The church should be known for love (John 13:35).

Care for the ill

We care for the ill and protect the vulnerable (Matthew 25:44-45). We honour those who dedicate their lives and efforts to combat this virus, a common foe.

By the grace of God, we have been given tools that lessen the transmission and mortality of COVID-19. We are grateful to our brothers and sisters' insights and hard work in science and in public health to provide choices that can meaningfully reduce sickness and death. We should accept their carefully considered advice.

We also honour those who care for the sick, bringing solace and healing into difficult moments. Many of our brothers and sisters provide safety and care.

Follow health recommendations

We support the recommendation to wear masks and social distance. Once we scrambled for masks to protect ourselves. Now we wear masks to love our neighbours, keeping our breath from infecting others if we are unknowingly harbouring the virus.

Maintaining physical distance for a time protects our communities. There is strong and consistent evidence that when we limit face-to-face interactions and avoid crowding, outbreaks settle and overwhelmed systems stabilize.

By following sound advice, our churches can counter the epidemic with truth and love, and reduce the fear we feel while doing our part to move past these difficult times (Proverbs 19:20). Let us work together to persevere in love and embrace the truth.

Accept vaccination when offered

We recognize that vaccines offer great hope for ending this pandemic. They offer personal protection and build resilience into our community and health systems.

Many of our brothers and sisters in

Christ have been working to bring about these interventions. They vigorously advocate for vaccination and accept it for themselves. Honour their work and example. Vaccination is a benefit that comes to us most powerfully if it is accepted broadly. We should also expose falsehoods about the harm vaccination could bring.

Although the world may seek self-protection out of selfishness, we embrace vaccination as a way forward in love, accepting in our own bodies the chance to protect our neighbours, brothers and sisters (Philippians 2:3).

Hope in God's grace

This is a time of much uncertainty; our faith and hope will help us get through. When the dominant motivation is self-protection, let us be known by the opposite: love for the other.

There is hope in God's grace; the path forward is together (Isaiah 40:31).

By caring for our brothers and sisters, our neighbours, and even our adversaries, the world will know we are Christians by our love.

By honouring those who have dedicated their lives to caring for the sick, and those finding the answers to the pandemic's complex problems, the church is acting, believing and demonstrating the way of Christ in all things.

This time of disruption is an opportunity for us, as followers of Christ, to let our faith, hope and love be known to everyone.

Keep the faith! ❧

Canadian Mennonite affirms this statement to the global church. It was signed by 15 Anabaptist medical professionals and health care providers from around the world. Their names and titles are available here: bit.ly/32WIB2f



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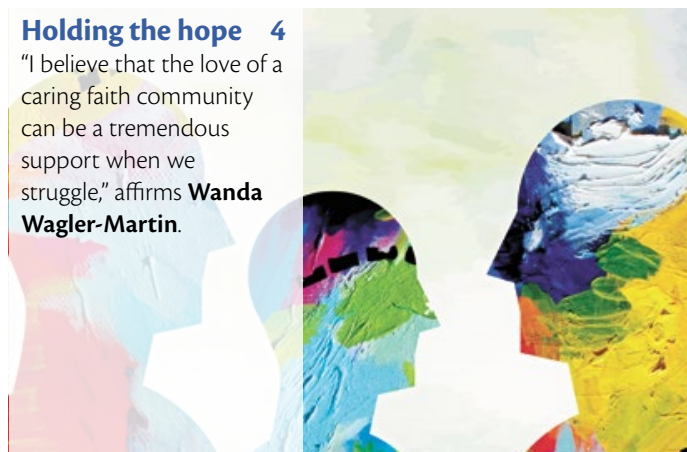
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FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH FEATURE

Holding the hope

Understanding and responding to mental illness

By Wanda Wagler-Martin

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

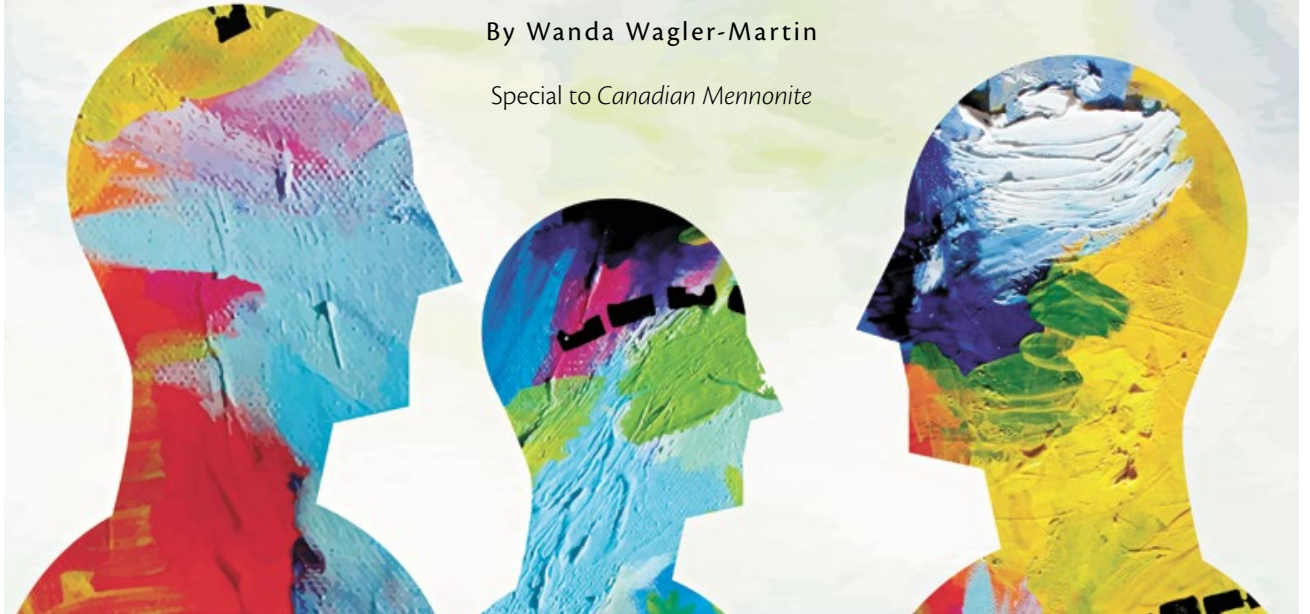


PHOTO BY DRAFTER123/Flickr.COM

Amidst the darkness and uncertainties of the past year, there have been some gifts in this pandemic time. One of these gifts has been increased acknowledgement of the existence of mental-health challenges, and of the reality that, for many, this is a profound struggle. Headlines this year have focused on the pervasive negative impacts of living with poor mental health or a diagnosed mental illness. Sometimes it takes the extraordinary to shine a light on challenges that have long existed.

Through 32 years of work in the field of mental health and well-being I have long sought to name and normalize the reality that we all deal with varying states of mental health and mental un-wellness, whether or not we are ever diagnosed with mental illness. And many, if not all of us, will be impacted by mental illness, personally or in the life of someone we care about. In my work, it has been a privilege to engage in conversation with individuals and congregations about our understandings and experiences of mental health and mental illness.

Exposing myths and misconceptions

Some of the myths and misconceptions that accompany mental illness may make us judgmental or reticent to share our struggles. The lack of clarity that accompanies

a diagnosis can make mental illness seem confusing. Some of the uncertainty comes from a lack of understanding, and we fear what we don't understand. When we feel uncomfortable with a person or situation, it is harder to trust in ourselves—to know what to do or say. It may be tempting to pull back, to avoid. But faith communities are called to understand and respond in supportive ways.

Mental illness ranges from one-time or time-limited

Struggles with mental illness impact us physically, and likewise physical illness impacts our mental health.

episodes, to chronic or long-term illness. How much mental illness defines our experience varies by the nature and intensity of the illness. While individuals may have some shared experiences, even with the same diagnosis they can have different experiences because of each unique story. Sometimes we seek to differentiate mental health from physical health when, in reality, the two are deeply intertwined. Struggles with mental illness impact us physically, and likewise physical illness

impacts our mental health.

We can also be in a great deal of emotional or relational pain without having a defined mental illness. The feelings of depression that may accompany a job loss or the end of a relationship may not reach the full scope of a clinical depression, but we might still experience significant distress—distress that interferes with the ability to function and prompts us to seek help. We all struggle at times. This means that whether we have a diagnosed mental illness or not, we need to acknowledge the reality of times of challenge and to take steps to care for ourselves.

Caring for ourselves often involves connecting with others, including a network of professional, social and spiritual supports. It can help us to realize that, whether we have a diagnosed mental illness or not, it is important to put energy into achieving and maintaining a balanced sense of mental health. Caring for ourselves from a place of compassionate reflection is a key component of a meaningful life, as is acknowledging that our quest for wholeness includes a complex interplay of both strength and struggle.

Unfortunately, we may blame ourselves when diagnosed with mental illness, thinking, “If only I had tried harder.” Parents may fault their parenting, children may worry their behaviour was the cause, and spouses may credit the quality of their marital relationship, wondering if they should have expected less of their depressed spouse. Yet when we consider that 20 percent of the Canadian population will have a defined mental illness at some point in their life, we realize that everyone is impacted.

One of the most harmful misconceptions, in the context of a faith community, is that grappling with struggles connected to mental health results from a lack of faithfulness or is rooted in sin. Mental illness evolves from a complex mix of biological, psychological and social impacts. *(See sidebar on right)* Christians are not exempt from struggles with mental

Sometimes when we are struggling with mental illness, or when we feel mentally unwell, we think we have to keep this struggle a secret, and this prevents us from reaching out for help.

illness; dedicated Christians experience mental illness because we're human. As part of the community of faith, we represent the diversity of human experience and, as such, we are not exempt from the challenges of life.

Sometimes when we are struggling with mental illness, or when we feel mentally unwell, we think we have to keep this struggle a secret, and this prevents us from reaching out for help. Counsellors hear people share their fear that, if others knew about their struggles, they would view them very differently. At times people do respond in less than optimal ways but, if we felt more comfort in sharing our struggles, we would also realize that we are not alone. The human experience includes times of struggle and challenge, whether we have a diagnosed mental illness or not.

Even in the church, we do not always know how to relate with someone experiencing mental illness and their

family members, or we don't feel safe to share our own struggles. When someone faces mental illness, they are still the person we know. They are experiencing an illness, and this illness does not define the whole of who they are. We limit others and ourselves if we allow a diagnosis of mental illness too large a voice in defining who we are.

The grace of creating space

One of the graces we can offer as a faith community is to create space for sharing our struggles. It may be tempting to avoid checking in with people who are struggling because of our own hesitancy and fear. We need to claim the courage to ask how someone is doing and to listen to his or her response, even if it is not positive. Here are some simple practices for responding when someone is struggling:

(Continued on page 6)

Components of mental illness

BY WANDA WAGLER-MARTIN

One in five Canadians will be diagnosed with a mental illness in their lifetime. Mental illness refers to a range of concerns, from anxiety and depression, to eating disorders, schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, adjustment disorders, personality disorders and psychotic disorders, and others. The term “biopsychosocial” is one way to describe mental illness, which is impacted by these components:

- **Biological:** our biochemical makeup, genetics, family history.
- **Psychological:** our personality factors and resilience, how we respond to stressors, how we make sense of what happens in our life.
- **Social:** our living conditions, life experiences, trauma and relationships—essentially what we have experienced or gone through.

In understanding our struggle, we need to consider each of these components on the path to resumed well-being.

(Continued from page 5)

- Ask someone how they are doing and be prepared to listen.
- Take the pressure off yourself to have answers to the person's struggles.
- When someone shares with you, take their responses seriously and avoid the temptation to tell them they "shouldn't" feel as they do.
- If you don't know how to help, you might gently direct the person to those who can assist more directly. A compassionate ear is not enough if a person requires more formalized help. Support the person in connecting with a family member, pastor, family doctor or a counsellor. All of these are appropriate places to start.



When we are living with mental illness, we may be frightened by what we feel. Giving someone permission to talk about their feelings won't make them worse and may allow the person to name

the extent of their pain. Often the issues are complex and, while there may be no easy or simple answers, the church can play a vital role by being a safe and supportive community for those living with mental illness and for their family members.

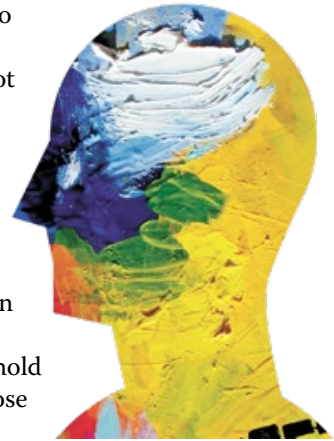
I believe that the love of a caring faith community can be a tremendous support when we struggle, but being part of this community doesn't ultimately prevent the struggle. I have heard many people say that invaluable components of their moving through a time of crisis were the love and support of their community, and others' continued belief in them when it was difficult to believe in themselves. At these times we have to "hold the hope" for those who cannot do so for themselves.

It is fitting and necessary to

encourage ourselves or another person who is struggling to seek professional help. When we create a climate in a family, congregation or workplace where it's okay to admit our struggle, we set the baseline for people to be open about what's happening in their lives. A context like this makes it easier to seek help when things are challenging, and it offers encouragement to get help before things deteriorate to a crisis point. Counselling, medication or a combination of both are most often key components of stabilizing symptoms and working at underlying issues. Counselling can be a safe place to name our struggles, work at understanding these concerns, and ultimately take steps toward healing and well-being.

The realities of mental illness have existed throughout history and are not unique to our current time. In Psalm 130, the psalmist frames so well the darkness that accompanies mental illness: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord." We are called to extend compassion to those who struggle in the shadow of

despair—both to others and to ourselves. To not be afraid of this space. To have the courage to seek the help we need. To recognize that doing so is a sign of strength, not failure. And to hold the hope for those who cannot. ❧



Wanda Wagler-Martin has worked in the field of mental health for more than 32 years and has been the executive

director of Shalom Counselling Services, in Waterloo, Ont., for the past 24 years. She is leaving this role in June 2021 and will be discerning her next vocational direction.

❧ For discussion

1. When in your life have you have struggled with despair, overwhelming stress or feelings of worthlessness? Has the past year, with its COVID-19 restrictions and isolation, made things more difficult? Where does it feel safe to express these negative emotions?
2. Wanda Wager-Martin writes that one of the most harmful misconceptions is the idea that, "grappling with struggles connected to mental health results from a lack of faithfulness or is rooted in sin." Why is this idea so harmful for a community of faith? Is this why we tend to hide our own struggles?
3. Wagler-Martin encourages us to share our struggles and to listen to others, saying we should "avoid the temptation to tell them they 'shouldn't' feel as they do." Why is it so tempting to tell others how they should feel? Why is it so important for us as humans to acknowledge or to express our emotions?
4. Have you ever been called to "hold the hope," while someone close to you struggled during a crisis? What are the important things to do in this situation? What are some ways that a faith community can express its care and concern for those who struggle?

—By Barb Draper

See related Mental Health resources at
www.commonword.ca/go/2151

CommonWord
Bookstore and Resource Centre

/// Readers write

✉ Venn diagram needs political domain

Re: “Avoiding an environmental shipwreck,” March 29, page 4.

Thanks for Tim Wiebe-Neufeld’s feature article. I applaud his call to both personal and congregational responsibility to make decisions based on environmental considerations.

While his colourful Venn diagram shows domains, all of them right and valid, that address a more responsible and environmentally sensitive lifestyle, I think he omits one important domain, that being political. I know that politics is ethically compromised and should never form part of an Anabaptist matrix but, in Canada at least, our politics is still responsive to the “body politic,” and our vote still counts for something.

Most of us Mennos still vote, and making our vote count for the environment ought to be part of that Venn diagram.

PETER ANDRES, CHILLIWACK, B.C.

✉ Keeping the main thing, the main thing

Re: three articles in the March 29 issue.

I had several different thoughts go through my mind as I read Tim Wiebe-Neufeld’s feature, “Avoiding an environmental shipwreck,” on page 4. The most prominent was, where on the list of priorities does Mennonite Church Canada and its congregations rank the issue of the environment?

It seems to me that *Canadian Mennonite* has had many articles on this issue. But how important are other topics, such as worship, community ministries, faith, evangelism, discipleship and youth, and how are they ranked?

Then there was the Earth Day article, “What would Jesus think about factory farms?” on page 12. As important as these issues are—as we are called to be stewards of this earth—I think they pale in comparison to abortion, and the trafficking of women and children. These violations are most grievous.

Then I came upon the article of Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia, “A life-altering gospel and simple faith,” on page 20. Their determination to remain faithful and grow as individuals and as a church, even in the midst of persecution, is a testimony to them and a challenge to us. Their commitment to discipleship is what we need to learn here in Canada.

I recently heard a speaker state that we are more

afraid of leaving our “secure” surroundings, and what we may encounter “out there,” than we are afraid of losing our Master’s approval of “well done.”

As Fanosie Legesse stated in the Ethiopian church article, “It made sense to give everything up and follow him to wherever he led me.”

Our calling is to keep the main thing, the main thing.

KEN BERGEN, OKOTOKS, ALTA.

✉ Controversial vaccine letter generates criticism

Re: “Reader calls on Mennonites to reject COVID-19 vaccines” letter, April 12, page 7.

In his letter to the editor regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the writer says, “I will refuse to accept this vaccine and pray that my choice will not lead to further restrictions of my fundamental human rights.”

It seems to me that those who focus on “my fundamental rights” tend to neglect the rights of other people, and the responsibility we all have to safeguard the well-being of each other.

If the writer wants to risk his own health by refusing the COVID-19 vaccine, I guess that is indeed his right. But he doesn’t have a right to endanger others with whom he might come in contact.

I trust that he will keep his vaccine-free body in complete isolation until the pandemic is totally over, many months from now.

As for his scriptural reference to our “*fearfully and wonderfully made bodies*,” there are also many Scriptures that affirm the frailty of our bodies, including, “*He knows how we are formed, and he remembers that we are dust.*”

MARK MORTON, KITCHENER, ONT.

I am astonished that the writer would suggest that we should reject the COVID 19 vaccine.

I also have faith that God protects us. Having said that, I also know that God has provided the medical profession with the knowledge about how diseases spread and preventative measures that can be used to curb their spread.

At this moment as I am writing, we are experiencing the highest number of cases in Ontario and Canada since the pandemic began. Our hospitals are stressed to the point where intensive-care-unit beds are in short supply to treat COVID-19 patients. Some patients are having to be transferred to other hospitals simply because there is no bed available in their local hospital for incoming patients.

It would be foolhardy to ignore the advice of the medical experts and risk an unimaginable crisis in the coming weeks and months. Surely, by not ignoring the advice being given, we can show the world that we truly love our neighbours. Christ said, “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” Would Christ deliberately ask or suggest that the advice meant to protect the general population be ignored and lead to thousands, even millions, of deaths? “*Think on these things,*” says the Lord!

STANLEY COOK, KITCHENER, ONT.

I am very disappointed that *Canadian Mennonite* chose to publish a reader’s argument against getting vaccinated for COVID-19.

By publishing this letter, *CM* has given legitimacy to the ideas expressed and contributed to the spread of dangerous conspiracy theories and outright disinformation.

Vaccine hesitancy is a very real threat to our collective effort to end this pandemic.

We all know that ideas like this can be found in online comment sections in abundance, but a reputable media source does not need to propagate ideas that are so obviously harmful to society.

If a published letter like this leads even one vaccine-hesitant person away from taking the vaccine, it will have been a disservice to public health.

BEN PLETT, WINNIPEG

A letter writer questions the legitimacy of the global pandemic and is urging us to reject all vaccines in the battle against the COVID-19 tragedy.

He states very emphatically that “our *fearfully and wonderfully made*’ bodies can give us a stronger and broader-based protection from every current virus and all future mutations.”

Can he please explain how the “*fearfully and wonderfully made bodies*” of three million global COVID-19 victims failed to protect them?

BUDDY ANDRES, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, ONT.

At this time I am thankful for scientists, epidemiologists, doctors, and all health-care workers during this pandemic.

As a retired nurse, I recall that smallpox, polio, diphtheria and tuberculosis have mostly been eradicated because of vaccines. In the 1960s, I personally nursed patients with tuberculosis as they coughed and struggled to breathe. Even rubella-measles can cause severe complications, such as meningitis in children. Vaccines have greatly reduced incidences of that childhood disease.

In my opinion, following the protocols outlined by the Ministry of Health and getting the mRNA vaccine to reduce the risk of COVID-19 virus is only prudent and wise.

At least three people who are known to me have suffered seriously with this coronavirus infection. Recovery is a long slow road.

So “A duty to love our neighbour,” March 1, page 18, is surely to add a layer of protection to self and others, by getting vaccinated.

RETA DERKSEN, HANOVER, ONT.

As I read this letter, I found myself asking if I agreed with the writer on some level, and I must confess I did.

Psalm 91 is my crutch in life, and it says that if I call on God no plague shall enter my tent. And I still believe that to be true.

But as a truck driver who crossed provincial borders and the American border, I also know what people like myself experienced, with limited eateries, port-a-potties and lack of shower facilities, and I became very appreciative of the people who ran the take-out at truck stops, made the coffee at the fuel bar, cleaned the showers, and the list goes on. These are the frontline people no one talks about, and that is a shame.

I researched the AstraZeneca vaccine as best I could, and at the age I am, it is the only one available to me at this time, and I am going for my shot this week. I am going because, if I love my neighbour as myself and want to thank those who have been there for me on the road over the last year, then I think that, as a follower of Jesus, I must not worry about fundamental rights, but act in thankfulness and love.

ROB MARTIN, ELMIRA, ONT.

Although I am not a proponent of censorship, I was disappointed that *CM* published the letter that rejected vaccines.

His comments question the reality of the pandemic and its severity, and attempt to raise doubt about the efficacy and safety of approved vaccines. His comments border on promoting harmful conspiracy theories, and I expect more from my church publication.

DAN BERGEN (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ **What two Mennonite farmers think about factory farms**

Re: “What would Jesus think about factory farms?”
March 29, page 12.

It seems that many readers of *Canadian Mennonite* are only a generation or two away from growing up on a farm. Why did they flee to the cities for an education and a better life?

When no one wanted to inherit unprofitable small family farms, bigger farmers bought them up. Now some wheat farmers own a township, and egg, milk and broiler farms have become huge enterprises. About 8 percent of us feed the rest of the country.

In Canada, stringent guidelines rule the industry and a farmer's profit depends on them treating animals well.

We have become used to inexpensive food. Without factory farms, how would we feed the people who live in cities? The grocery shelves might well be empty.

HELEN ROSE PAULS, CHILLIWACK, B.C.

The writer is a partner in a broiler farm.

As a farmer and a Mennonite I find this article troubling.

I have grown up in agriculture all of my life and have worked with large-scale pig, chicken and dairy operations. Most of my best friends are tied to animal agriculture in some form or another, and they are very proud to be so.

In all of my years in agriculture, I have yet to meet a farmer who is intentionally cruel to livestock in any way, shape or form. We take pride in the health and well-being of our animals while they are put in our care. Every step we take is for the benefit of the animals we care for.

The so-called "factory farms" are not what people see in the hyped-up videos; 98 percent of farms are still family owned and operated by hard-working families who love what they do.

So I ask, before we lay judgment on farms and the families who operate them, have a conversation with them. We are passionate about what we do and how we do it. We take pride in feeding our community and world.

KARL DIRKS (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

Births/Adoptions

Bezooyen—Lyla Mae (b. March 9, 2021), to Beth and Tyler Bezooyen, First Mennonite, Edmonton.

Hunsberger—Isaac Warren (b. March 28, 2021), to Ruth and Eric Hunsberger, Stirling Avenue Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.

Klassen-Rempel—Finlay Joy (b. March 11, 2021), to Sarah and Phil Klassen-Rempel, Stirling Avenue Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.

Baptisms

Tianna Prior—First Mennonite, Edmonton, April 18, 2021.

Weddings

Kroeker/Puranen—Silvie Kroeker (Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg) and Antti Puranen, in Tampere, Finland, May 7, 2020.

Deaths

Boshart—Larry David, 62 (b. Dec. 5, 1958; d. April 15, 2021), Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Dyck—Helen, 88 (b. Dec. 27, 1932; d. Feb. 26, 2021), Zion Mennonite Swift Current, Sask.

Griffith—James Orville, 72 (b. June 25, 1948; d. April 15, 2021), First Mennonite Church, Calgary.

Heinrichs—Betty, 94 (b. April 30, 1926; d. Feb. 24, 2021), Zion Mennonite Swift Current, Sask.

Kendall—Ella (nee Doerksen), 91 (b. Jan. 6, 1930; d. Feb. 18, 2021), Erie View United Mennonite, Port Rowan, Ont.

Roth—Eileen, 93 (b. May 11, 1927; d. April 3, 2021), Crosshill Mennonite, Ont.

Tiessen—Margaret, 89 (b. Jan. 1, 1932; d. April 5, 2021), former congregant of Morden Mennonite, Man.

Wall—Martha, 93 (b. Aug. 4, 1927; d. Jan. 28, 2021), Zion Mennonite, Swift Current, Sask.

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

FROM OUR LEADERS

Dreaming of a good night's sleep

Andrew Haak

To some, rest is a four-letter word. There are a myriad of reasons why people avoid sleep: some restrict it in a counterproductive attempt to increase work output; others devalue sleep for the preference of entertainment; still others are reluctant to acknowledge their limits and they push through when their body signals it's time to sleep. After all, sleeping for one-third of our life seems like a waste of time!

For all the reasons why people wrestle with sleep, this is also near the top of the list: we are at our most vulnerable when we are sleeping. We can't control what happens after we close our eyes. Sleep, after all, is an act of trust and often a byproduct or sign of peace.

But what if we have had experiences that condition us to not trust sleep, experiences that interfere with our ability to get the rest we need?

During one of our recent worship gatherings on Zoom we found ourselves in Psalm 4: *"In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety."* I learned quickly how this passage can inadvertently come across as accusatory for those who don't

sleep easily. In our Zoom time together, person after person shared their struggles with sleep. Some shared how stress, anxiety or depression robs them of sleep; others disclosed how trauma they have endured doesn't make sleep safe; another shared a fear of resting because "letting off the gas" might mean missing out on something, or that God's call to rest implies something difficult is coming. Not for lack of trying or trusting God, peaceful sleep remains elusive for many.

A struggle to sleep is a part of my story, too. After my son died, there was a prolonged period when I resisted sleep. It wasn't that I avoided grief with busyness; on the contrary, my grief made sleep unsafe. There were times when I was nearly asleep or starting to wake, and my mind would play tricks on me. In my groggy, vulnerable state I would forget that my son was dead. That momentary spike of elation, followed by the stab of reality, felt like I lost him again for the first time. To combat this, I frequently starved myself of sleep. I stayed up late so that I would fall asleep instantly and avoid reliving the shock of grief.

If sleep is an act of trust, it stands to reason that sleep is spiritual. And yet some of us only dream of safe sleep. Those of us who frequently lie awake at night in fear or frustration know this all too well. In a time when many are languishing, struggling to maintain healthy rhythms and manage their mental well-being, sleep is a commodity in short supply.

For many, the factors that trouble our sleep are deeply personal and complicated. No well-meaning, trite cliché or condescending platitude will solve what we are up against. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and the journey from troubled to peaceful sleep doesn't happen overnight. So let's be charitable and choose a listening posture when we invite people to live into God's peace and rest. ☸



Andrew Haak is the interim lead pastor of Level Ground Mennonite Church in Abbotsford B.C. and he recently joined the

MC B.C. Leadership Board as the ministry leader for Cultivating Anabaptist Vision.

A moment from yesterday



To celebrate Manitoba's 150th birthday, the Trailblazer's Award was established. Helena Reimer (1905-1993) of Steinbach, Man., was a recipient. Reimer was a nurse, educator, administrator and a pioneer. She was one of the first nurses in Canada selected to participate overseas in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration during the Second World War. She is pictured in 1944 at a refugee camp in Tolumat, Egypt. In 1946, she was transferred to Taiwan/China, and in 1951 she worked with the World Health Organization in Cambodia. From 1953 to 1956 she was part of the University of Alexandria, Egypt. In 1957, she became secretary registrar of the Association of Nurses in Quebec. In 1974, she received the Order of Canada and, in 1977, the Queen's Jubilee Medal. She has been described as having "a voracious appetite for hard work. . . . Her creed was adapting yourself to your environment, improving conditions when possible, accepting those that could not be improved, then doing what could be done cheerfully."



Text: Conrad Stoesz

Photo: Helena F. Reimer Photograph Collection / Mennonite Heritage Archives

archives.mhsc.ca

IN THE IMAGE

Saying goodbye, then hello again

Ed Olfert

From 1992 to '95 I worked at Rosthern (Sask.) Junior College as dean in the men's dormitory. It was my first step away from the farm. I was 40 when I moved there, and the experience was rich and challenging. It was rich in that I was reminded that we are created in the holy image of God, that each one carries that core of goodness that waits to be recognized and affirmed.

However, after three years, the intensity of the experience caught up to me. My introverted nature in this vibrant community cause me to grow weary, and I was determined to exit while the experience was still a positive one. At the end of my third year, I prepared to depart, to seek new adventures.

Staff at the school were given regular opportunities to address the student body in a chapel setting. I decided that I would use my last chapel to announce my departure, to thank the staff and students for the trust, relationships and lessons offered. And I closed with words adapted from the final sermon of my minister-grandfather, as he bade farewell to his church, Superb Mennonite, at his retirement: "If there is anyone who carries issues toward me, anyone with pain that involves me, anyone who feels

wronged by anything that I have done or said, please come talk to me, that we might set it right."

As the students filed out past me, there were affirmative comments like "No way would anybody have anything against you, Ed!" My ego liked it.

Near midnight, after the dorm had been settled, as the deans relaxed in their office before making the final rounds, a knock came on the door. There stood "Ron" (a pseudonym).

Ron was a "throw-away" kid. That was my term, not the school's. He had been a late admission early in the school year. As I recall, Ron's dad had found a new partner, a partner that didn't appreciate Ron's presence complicating their lives. Boarding school seemed like the right solution.

Ron's school year had been challenging. He had absolutely no interest in matters academic. As such, his name came up often at staff meetings, as teachers vented their frustration at this boy who simply didn't care if his marks required only single digits. Nor did Ron express any interest in the Christian aspect of our school. The decision had already been made that Ron would not be a returning student.

In the residence, however, Ron

blossomed. It was as if he had never known such an open and safe community. Certainly there was some frustration corralling Ron into his room during study hours, as he had no interest in studying and so many relationships to attend to. Ron was congenial, a storyteller, a lover of cards, a social gadfly. We had got on well.

Now, at midnight, Ron stood in the doorway, looking at his feet, shifting. "What you said in chapel today . . ."

I recognized a crucial moment, and we found a corner for conversation.

Ron reminded me of a time, months earlier, when I had been urging him to get his daily responsibility done. He had held me off; there were more cards to play, more stories to tell. Later and later, until my frustration grew, and I physically picked him out of his chair and shoved him in the direction of his duties.

Now, Ron told me that he had been deeply offended by that. I affirmed his remembrance of that incident, then I apologized.

A dozen years later, after burning out as a minister, I worked for a warehouse that distributed fertilizer. Ron reappeared in my life as a truck driver. We shook hands, we laughed, we supported and encouraged each other. It was good. I was reminded of the shared qualities of God, uncovered in relationship. ❧



Ed Olfert (p2peho@gmail.com) gives thanks for lives honestly lived, for stories shared.

Et cetera

Pennsylvania-based conference grows

LMC: A Fellowship of Anabaptist Churches, formerly known as Lancaster Mennonite Conference, gained 24 congregations in the past two years, including six congregations in Cuba. The 247 member congregations are from various states in the United States as well as Mexico, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. More than half of the congregations are majority non-white. With roots going back to the 1700s, Lancaster Mennonite Conference hesitated to join Mennonite Church U.S.A. but did so in 2006. Citing cultural and theological differences, it formally withdrew and became independent at the end of 2017.

Source: *Anabaptist World*



LMC
a fellowship of anabaptist churches

MIND AND SOUL

Vaccination colonialism

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

Some of us are getting vaccinated against COVID-19, and more are on lists, anxiously waiting for supplies to become more robust, and hoping dearly that the end of the pandemic is in sight. Imagine being the Indigenous people of a land where the government doesn't provide for you to get vaccinated, but it provides for settlers.

But this is nothing new for you. It has become sickeningly routine to be evicted from land used in your family for generations, to watch children be killed by soldiers and to experience arbitrary rules that inhibit you from working and providing for your family and community. And sacred scriptures are even drawn upon to legitimize this oppression.

Details of that narrative could be the Indigenous peoples in Canada. It could be South Africa during its apartheid regime. It could be Jews in Europe during the last millennium. But it is Palestine now.

The nation-state of Israel always included Palestinian citizens. They now number around 1.8 million (20 percent of the population of Israel).

Then there is the rest of Palestine. According to modern international law, when territory is taken in wartime, it is to be considered a temporary occupation.

During this time, the human rights of occupied peoples are to be protected by the controlling nation, and that nation's citizens are not to be settled there.

But Israel has been moving Jewish settlers into Palestinian lands, and has since the beginning of its history. May 15 marks Nakba ("cataclysm") Day—the remembrance of the forced evictions in 1948 that has left some Palestinians permanent refugees. Settling one's people in villages, houses and land a military force has taken over is called "conquering." This fact turns Israel into a settler-colonial nation.

Israel has the highest vaccination rate in the world—around 63 percent of the population (ourworldindata.org). In the occupied Palestinian territories the vaccination rate is around 4 percent. Although the Palestinian Authority is responsible for health, control of the vaccine supply is in the hands of Israel. Under modern law, an occupying power is supposed to protect the health and other human rights of the people in occupied territories. The astonishing inequality of vaccinations is one among many reasons that human-rights agencies are increasingly using terms like "apartheid" in reference to Israel-Palestine.

Christian history makes it difficult to know what to do. Jesus sided with the marginalized, but Christians have not often done the same. Settler-Christians in North America decided they were doing good in "eliminating the Indian problem." Biblical justifications legitimized racial segregation in South Africa. Christianity has often been anti-Semitic.

It is not anti-Semitic to develop a theology of the land that is based elsewhere than the Joshua genocide narrative. In *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes*, Palestinian Christian theologian Mitri Raheb points out that his people are also descendants of the promise given to the patriarch Abraham. It is not anti-Semitic to hold Israel to its legal and moral standards.

Zionism perniciously privileges one ethnicity over others in the land. That was the error of Jonah: his ethnocentric religious nationalism had him reject his call to Nineveh because he could not imagine that the Creator of all was not solely for his people. May we all have equal access to vaccination! It is the wish of God that all flourish. ❧



Randolph Haluza-DeLay was the Alberta representative to the Mennonite Church of Canada's Palestine-Israel Network (mennonitechurch.ca/pin). He hopes to lead an online reading group of Raheb's book later this year.

Et cetera

Ten Commandments for the digital age

As digital technologies permeate almost all areas of life, a new publication by the Evangelical Church in Germany offers guidance on dealing with the opportunities and dangers of digital technologies. The publication, *Digital Freedom: The Ten Commandments in Times of Digital Change*, is structured around 10 sections, each taking one of the Ten Commandments and exploring its insights as they relate to life in the digital world. More at bit.ly/3aOjiPu

—World Council of Churches



PHOTO BY CHILANGA CEMENT/Flickr.com

TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

Whoever has a nose, let them smell

Joshua Penfold

It was the first Sunday of Advent and we had lit a single candle in our living room as part of our online worship service. Our Advent wreath was neatly set up on the coffee table, safely away from anything flammable, and our children are old enough to know to be careful with fire.

Afterwards, my family transitioned from watching our service on the TV to a Sunday school Zoom chat on the laptop at the kitchen table. While we were all in the kitchen, our noses detected an awful burning smell. Still new to our house, I tried to imagine what unknown disaster we had inherited.

As I returned to the living room to investigate, the smell intensified, but it took my eyes and brain a few moments to clue in to what was happening before me. I realized the candle had been left burning, but it still stood there innocently enough, the flame still contained, with no immediate evidence that it was the culprit. Then, on the floor, I beheld strange, poofy, curled ashes that I couldn't identify or figure out their origin.

While I stared, perplexed, our cat Ember appeared from around the coffee table. Instantly, everything made sense,

when I saw her singed tail.

The name Ember, chosen for her black and orange colouring, now took on a new meaning. She must have jumped up on the coffee table and her tail had passed over the flame, instantly singeing her light, fluffy, tail fur.

Thankfully, there were no serious burns. In fact, she seemed oblivious to what had happened, but the stench of that burned hair lingered in our house for a long time.

Burning hair stinks!

"Now, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair.

When the days of your siege come to an end, burn a third of the hair inside the city. . ." (Ezekiel 5:1-2).

When Ezekiel was instructed to burn his hair, the smell alone must have gotten people's attention. Although I'm sure that a crazy prophet who had been eating bread baked over cow patties, and who'd spent the last year-and-a-half lying on his side in front of a miniature of Jerusalem, and who had just attempted to shave his head and beard with a sword, probably didn't blend in too well to begin with.

If you want your message to have

some punch and be memorable, this is one way to do it. God is getting Ezekiel to connect with all of Israel's senses. It doesn't say so directly, but I imagine this smell is meant to help Israel understand how their detestable practices smell to God.

In other places in Scripture the prayers of the saints are compared to sweet-smelling incense, but here the detestable idol worshipping of Israel is like the putrid smell of burning hair. Jesus says, *"Whoever has ears let them hear."* It's as if God is saying through Ezekiel, *"Whoever has a nose, let them smell."*

I find it interesting that, in both cases, fire is consuming something, but the object being burned changes the aroma. We all worship something/someone, but the object of our devotion changes the smell of our worship. I wonder how my worship smells to God. ☺



Joshua Penfold
(penfoldjoshua@gmail.com) senses something striking in the subversive, scandalous and sacred Scriptures.

Et cetera

God speaks in sign languages too

After nearly four decades of collaborative work among Bible translators, the American Deaf Bible Society and other organizations, the Bible has now been completely translated from original sources into American Sign Language (ASL). The translation team recorded a series of videos broken up by Bible passages with someone signing the text. This version of the Bible utilizes the distinct and dynamic vocabulary of sign language to bring scripture to life in a new way. Work continues to translate the Bible into an additional 275 global sign languages. (Pictured: the ASL sign for "I love you.")

—Religion News Service



PHOTO BY CHININIPRODUCTIONS FROM PIXABAY

PERSONAL REFLECTION

'My legacy blanket'

Melody Steinman

Its creation started off simply. I had extra time on my hands due to the provincial guidelines to stay at home due to COVID-19.

Since we were on shutdown, the thrift store was closed, so I could not buy yarn. So I asked myself, "What do I do with the existing yarn that I have?" I had lots of scraps from the teddy bears I had knit previously.

I decided to make an afghan. I soon changed its name to "my legacy blanket" because I realized that something deeper was happening inside of me as I began to knit its small blocks. I called the process and project "my legacy blanket" because it represents who I am and what I am about. I wanted something practical to remind others about my priorities and life lessons. I decided literally to incorporate "life liners" that resonated with me into the makeup of the blanket.

I made a panel with different colours and textures. It stated: "Life is about . . .

- **Knowing 'Jesus loves me';**
- **Loving God, self and others;**
- **Being just, real, grateful, mindful, true, kind, still, helpful;**
- **Letting go and hanging on;**
- **Making good out of its scraps, its imperfections and . . . moving along."**

Each of these statements was pivotal to my spiritual journey over the years on my road of self-discovery. The song, "Jesus Loves Me" was a felt reality when I was growing up. Now that my mother has dementia, I get her to sing the song with me even though she still claims she cannot sing. It's a way to remind both of us of this "inner knowing," even though so much else in our lives is changing.

Truly these instructional words of Jesus are simple and wise as they sum up the Christian faith, even though they take a lifetime to carry out. My actions

build my character, which is a natural outcome of my being. These are ones that I try to emulate.

I have learned to trust that God has been there through life's situations, especially when they are not going the way I want. The theological term for saving and making good out of scraps is "redemption," since nothing and no one



PHOTO COURTESY OF MELODY STEINMAN

Melody Steinman made her 'legacy blanket' during her down time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

is ideal and perfect.

It is also being satisfied with what I have. Beauty exists in everything. It takes intentional time to work through losses and pain. Living is a journey, not a destination. It is a process, not an end result.

Initially, I had no pattern or predetermined outcome; instead, its vision grew.

The colours hold meaning. White is unity with God; black is transformation; green is healing; blue is peace and wholeness; brown is ordinariness; grey is life's uncertainties; and purple is my favourite colour.

I also carefully considered the supplies that I used. The places and people of where and who I got them from have become a part of me. The most notable cloths were the blue knit, which was a sweater I purchased second-hand, as well as a white blouse and a flannel nightie of Mom's. The backing is a used bed sheet that I also bought at the Mennonite Central Committee thrift store.

I like being able to repurpose many items and draw from my Mennonite heritage and crafts Mom enjoyed doing. As I knitted, stitched and sewed, I paid attention not just to what I was making, but what I was feeling and thinking. I listened to myself talk. I prayed with my hands.

My craftsmanship is far from perfect. In many ways, I look at it and think it is sloppily done. I do not want to do that because the making of "my legacy blanket" gives me purpose and energy. It allows me to express my creativity and demonstrates a coming together of my inner and outer worlds, with a tangible result. I believe this emotional and spiritual work is necessary for each person, regardless of how it is carried out and expressed.

I hope "my legacy blanket" mirrors an intimate God who also knit me together in my mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-14), and a means to pass on my faith to others just as Lois and Eunice did to Timothy (II Timothy 1:5).

Truly, creating "my legacy blanket" has taken on a life of its own. I hope to be a conduit for, and ambassador of, a faithful God who is actively and positively at work despite the upheaval in the circumstances around me. ❧

Melody Steinman lives in New Hamburg, Ont., and she attends Steinmann Mennonite Church.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Accountant adds friends in the global church

Len Rempel

It was 10 years ago this past January when Mennonite World Conference (MWC) announced my appointment as chief operations officer (COO). I quickly received emails from several countries, including Paraguay and Zimbabwe. People whom I had not yet met enthusiastically welcomed me as part of the MWC family.

Three years later, after sharing the news of my mother's death, I again received messages from around the world, this time, of condolence and support.

Serving as accountant for the MWC family involves so much more than crunching numbers. Although it is my training, I have never considered myself a typical accountant, and it quickly became clear to me that working as MWC's COO is not a typical accounting role.

When I began my career, I had a vision of what it would mean to be an accountant, but I could never have imagined what it would be like to tend to the numbers for the global church.

The agenda at our annual meetings includes time to visit local congregations and meet the people who make up the church in the communities that host our meetings. We hear about how God is working through these congregations. Of course, there is time for discussing the finances of the organization, but that is only a small part of what we do.

As I look back over the time I have spent with MWC, I consider it a privilege to have met so many wonderful people and to worship our God together with them. I cherish many memories of meetings in Taiwan, Switzerland, Colombia, Indonesia, Germany and Costa Rica, but one that



PHOTO COURTESY OF LEN REMPEL

Len Rempel, centre, is pictured with Pastor Peter Okello and Peter Ongogo, a deacon of the Kenya Mennonite Church.

sticks out for me is from our General Council meetings in Kenya in 2018.

On Sunday morning, we gathered with a small congregation near Kisumu, near Lake Victoria. Our group consisted of some 40 General Council delegates and MWC staff. At first, we outnumbered the local church members but, as the morning progressed, the small building filled. Some who arrived later ended up participating from outside.

We all sang together and listened to Scripture and vibrant preaching. There were introductions all around. We were a diverse mixture of culture and languages brought together by the Spirit of God.

I had the privilege of sharing a few words to the congregation. Reading a portion from Revelation 21, I reflected on how this mix of people, gathered under this tin roof in rural Kenya, was a foretaste of what was to come.

I never learned about this type of "business" meeting in my accounting

training, and I never dreamed this is where my career would lead me, but I thank God for carrying me on this incredible journey.

Now I am leaving my accounting role for a pastorate in a local congregation. This may seem like a dramatic change, but it is the most natural next step. As I follow God's leading, I am not leaving the global church. I will always carry with me the people and churches I have met along the way. ☸

Len Rempel served as chief operations officer of Mennonite World Conference from January 2011 until April 2021.

☸ Staff change

MWC welcomes new COO

Jeanette Bissoon has been appointed as the new chief operations officer (COO) of Mennonite World Conference. She is a member of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont. She comes to MWC from the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, where she served as director of finance for the past 10 years. She has also worked in international development with Save the Children and Mennonite Economic Development Associates; supported new Canadians through English tutoring; and served as treasurer on the board of the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support. Through her work she has travelled to parts of Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia. "I look forward to working with people of Anabaptist faith from around the world who value peacemaking and service," she says. Bissoon takes over the COO role from Len Rempel, who is moving into a pastorate after 10 years serving MWC's operations.



—MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE

NEWS

'We are in darkness'

Mennonites in Myanmar are among those facing desperate situation

By Will Braun
Senior Writer

Amid mass protests, lethal military response and UN warnings of Myanmar becoming a “new Syria,” one Mennonite source in the country said, “We are in darkness, full of fear and with no hope for the future.”

Canadian Mennonite has agreed not to use the source’s name due to the threat to those who speak critically of the military.

A military coup on Feb. 1 sparked largely peaceful protests and general strikes. According to our source, and news reports, the military showed restraint at first but then began using live ammunition on peaceful protesters. More than 750 protesters have been killed by the military, including dozens of children.

Nearly 5,000 more have been detained, with reports of torture being used on some.

“The military torture the civilians, violently crack down on peaceful protesters, kill unarmed civilians every day, raid our houses, and cause chaos to people’s properties,” said the source via email from Myanmar.

The violence and fear come on top of the pandemic, which already had devastating financial impacts on many people’s livelihoods, with many work places shut down.

“We are struggling for our daily food to survive,” wrote our source, referring to the food crisis among hundreds of church families. “Our income generation is zero because of the impact of the pandemic and the political crisis.”

Referring to “ethnic armed groups,” the source said “at present, civil war is beginning,” a concern echoed by UN officials. Some states within the country have their own armies.

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) reports about 2,000 Mennonites in 50 congregations in the largely Buddhist country, formerly known as Burma.

The level of alarm and concern is very



PHOTO COURTESY OF JEHU LIAN AND MA BAWI

Jehu Lian, a Mennonite pastor, and his wife, Ma Bawi, show solidarity with the people suffering repression in Myanmar. The three-finger salute—adapted from the Hunger Games film—has become a common symbol of freedom, defiance and solidarity in Myanmar and among pro-democracy movements elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

high among the five Mennonite Church Canada congregations with close ties to Myanmar. Calgary Chin Church, Chin Christian Church in Kitchener, Ont., and Grace Christian Church in Ottawa are all made up largely of people who came to Canada as refugees from Myanmar. They worship primarily in the Chin language. Living Hope Christian Fellowship in Surrey, B.C., serves both Karen people—another language group from Myanmar—as well as other Canadians.

Jehu Lian is a pastor of Chin Christian Church in Kitchener. The situation of his parents and brother and sister in Myanmar, as well as many others in the country, weighs heavily on him. “I cannot eat properly,” he said by phone, describing his state of concern.

Lian has worked extensively in church planting in Myanmar, much of it through Myanmar Missions International (MMI), a partner agency of MC Canada. MMI

has 86 churches and 169 missionaries in Myanmar. Lian serves as MMI’s assistant director.

He is hearing from his extensive contacts in Myanmar that people do not have money and are going hungry. “People cannot go to work,” he said. On top of the economic impacts of COVID-19, people now risk arrest if they go out.

Lian shared numerous videos and photos showing people who fled to the jungle, a child who was shot, military violence toward civilians and mass protests. He called the military’s activities “evil.” What is clear from the images and news reports is that the popular uprising is rooted in the general population, not just among activist groups.

Jeanette Hanson, director of International Witness for MC Canada, travelled to Myanmar in 2019 to join Lian, Norm Dyck of MC Eastern Canada and others at a ministry-training event. In a recent conversation with International Witness worker Tom Poovong in Thailand, Poovong told Hanson of the refugees crossing from Myanmar into Thailand, which is bracing for a possible wave of refugees.

Reflecting on the great joy and potential she witnessed in the opening of a new ministry-training centre in Myanmar in 2019, while people now must focus on the basics of food and safety, she said, “What does it mean to stand with global partners when you feel like your hands are tied?”

On April 15, MWC issued a pastoral letter to the church in Myanmar, acknowledging the suffering, and calling on God for mercy.

The source in Myanmar shared this message for Mennonites in Canada: “This is a special request for Canadian folks to pray for our country and particularly for the vulnerable families of our church. . . . We believe that prayer can make a difference. God bless you all.” ❧

Due to instability in Myanmar there is not currently a way to provide financial support to our sisters and brothers there. MC Canada does invite online donations to MMI at mennonitechurch.ca/myanmar.



Why not a letter?

The beauty of slow tech

By Christen Kong

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

“Let us consider how we may spur one another toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

What does biblical togetherness look like during a pandemic?

For Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church in the East-End of the city, there have been warm greetings, collective singing, sharing communion and post-service conversations through online worship. However, for many in the congregation, a sense of togetherness is missing, causing many to lament this loss.

The church was planted in 1979 by former pastor Winfred Soong and his wife, as a ministry for newly landed Chinese immigrant families. Today, it continues this legacy and has become a church consisting of three congregations—English, Cantonese, and Mandarin—with family members from all generations integrated in each community. The inter-generational nature of the congregation is unique and has been strengthened during the pandemic.

For some, technology has been a blessing, allowing congregational members to connect in new ways, but not everyone has had access to this. Many seniors from the church drop-in group, Kei Lok Yuen (KLY), suddenly found themselves at home alone. Without regular in-person gatherings, they quickly became discouraged and isolated.

The church began wondering how it could connect with its seniors and the community. What would be the most affordable technology? A thought percolated among church members of a return to slow technology: mailed letters.

Letter writing quickly became an integral part of the church’s ministries in reaching its seniors, and was inspired by a local initiative called “Letters of love for seniors,” a community project

led by Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, the local Member of Parliament, who recognized the importance of keeping seniors connected.

The church’s children’s ministry contributed to the 700 handwritten letters that were sent out, alongside 14 local schools, to seniors in the neighbourhood, including Toronto Chinese Mennonite’s KLY group.

Beka Ly, a Sunday school teacher, described the process as “heart-lifting when the children drew beautiful pictures and learned how to write encouraging notes and verses in Chinese.” These children’s letters were a reminder to the seniors that God loves them and that they were not forgotten.

It turned out that seniors were not the only ones feeling isolated. Many church youths felt the same, as they struggled to stay focused with long hours of virtual learning. Witnessing these challenges, the church decided to launch a mentoring project that paired students with adult members, who decided to extend the letter-writing campaign to their youth.

For some, letters became a meaningful approach to friendship and mentorship. Mentors have exchanged Bible verses and stories, and have offered encouragement.

Keira Hum, one of the church youths says, “When someone sends you a letter, it shows how much they care—the time and effort used—instead of a computer-generated message.”

Rediscovering the beauty and appeal of letter writing has been one of the ways the church continues to build trust and deep relationships. “Mail connects people. It’s like a present you can cherish and keep it as a memory forever,” she says.

Relational initiatives did not end there.



PHOTO BY GRACE HO

Jaxon Gin, a children’s ministry member of Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church, is pictured with a stained-glass cross he made.

Although parents were feeling connected with online church, they noticed their children were becoming less engaged each week. Kang Liang, one of the parents said, “Some children didn’t want to attend Sunday school anymore because online is challenging for them.”

Toronto Chinese Mennonite mobilized its efforts to assemble craft-kits with art supplies, materials and an occasional treat. Ly describes the craft-kits as a mystery. “We open up the envelop together on Sunday and dump out all the contents,” she says. “It brings excitement into learning virtually through artful creations made together.”

The children became increasingly involved and now often share their creations during virtual church events. Liang says, “Seeing the crafts on our walls and fridges reminds us that we are still together because God is with us.” ❧

Christen Kong is a member of Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church.

‘Courageous imagination’

MC Eastern Canada looks to where God is calling the church

By Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondent
KITCHENER, ONT.

How is the church like kimchi? At Mennonite Church Eastern Canada’s spring gathering, held virtually on April 23 and 24, many of the more than 250 in attendance tried making the traditional Korean dish while following Pablo Kim Sun’s demonstration from his kitchen in Toronto. Kim Sun, pastor of Toronto Mennonite New Life Church, described five ways that kimchi serves as a helpful metaphor for the church.

The spring gathering—the second to be held online due to pandemic restrictions—was based on the theme of “Courageous imagination.” Grounded in Isaiah 43:19, which is about God doing a “new thing,” it was an opportunity to give thanks for God’s faithfulness and hear from leaders about a year-long “Courageous imagination” journey. This strategic and spiritual process of exploring the regional church’s identity, while listening for God and discerning who God is calling the church to become.

According to Leah Reesor-Keller, executive minister, the “yearlong process of engagement” is a way of doing strategic planning that intentionally seeks to involve more people and “hear more voices.” Reesor-Keller and project coordinator Mollee Moua introduced the “Courageous imagination” web page, the guiding questions and an infographic to track the process. They also highlighted a new monthly podcast series that will feature people from across the regional church reflecting on how they listen for God, how they have experienced God at work, and how God is calling the church to respond and adapt to change.

The “Courageous imagination” journey began with a virtual prayer gathering in February in order to root and ground the process. Noting that “the journey itself is as important as where we end up,” Reesor-Keller said that, like a pilgrimage, this type

of shared experience will “transform us along the way.”

The leaders encouraged churches to find creative ways to engage with the materials, which will be provided in a variety of languages to facilitate intercultural engagement. Youth retreats will also focus on the theme this year. Leaders hope to have new identity statements and priorities identified after a year of gathering feedback.

The kimchi-making demonstration was



SCREENSHOTS COURTESY OF
MC EASTERN CANADA

Pablo Kim Sun preps ingredients for kimchi as he explores how the traditional Korean dish is a good metaphor for the church.

The cooking demonstration was part of MC Eastern Canada’s annual Spring Gathering, held virtually April 23 and 24. Participants were invited to follow Kim Sun’s cooking demonstration in their own kitchens.

of shared experience will “transform us along the way.” an opportunity to continue growing into what it means to be an intercultural church. Jinah Im, married to Kim Sun, described the history and cultural context of this versatile Korean side dish. She noted that, with its relatively inexpensive and plentiful ingredients, it is accessible and nutritious, and yet it varies a great deal, depending on geographical region. It is traditionally made communally, at the harvest, and is served in a variety of ways.

As Kim Sun measured, chopped and mixed cabbage, onion, garlic, fermented shrimp, Asian pears and seasonings, he described how kimchi is a good metaphor for the church:

- **It is** accessible to everyone.
- **It is** contextualized and embedded in the culture where it is shared.
- **It comes** from communal work, where different gifts are welcomed and no one dominates.
- **There is** a process of fermentation; over time, in stages, transformation happens because the ingredients are dynamic.
- **It has** its own mission; each ingredient offers its gifts to the whole, which combined, serve in a variety of unique ways.

Acknowledging that it “takes more effort to be in a church with more diversity,” Kim Sun said that the regional church needs to take this journey because it is “God’s vision for church and society.” He suggested five approaches to differences that are not helpful:

- **Homogenize** (ignore or downplay differences).
- **Colonize** (coercively “fix” or erase differences).
- **Demonize** (see differences as extreme, threatening and deviant).
- **Romanticize** (idealize differences).
- **Pluralize** (see differences but seek to homogenize them).

Encouraging individuals and churches to become more intercultural, Kim Sun offered a continuum for growth in that direction: moving from being segregated and exclusive; through passively accepting privilege; to making symbolic and then more substantive, structural changes toward becoming fully inclusive. He invited participants to discuss where their churches are at on the continuum and how they can move to the next stage.

Finances

Sean East, MC Eastern Canada’s financial manager, expressed gratitude for generous giving that continued in uncertain times. A government subsidy and reduced spending meant that the regional church ended the



Norm Dyck, MC Eastern Canada's mission minister, top left, welcomes new congregations and their pastors: Rheau Jean-Claude and Marjory Brutus of Ma Destinée, in Montréal, bottom right; and Fitsum Debesay and Habte Araya from Hiyaw Amalak (Living God) Evangelical Church in Ottawa, bottom left and top right, respectively.

year with stable finances. To balance the books, it was necessary to draw on the Faithful Steward Fund that serves as a reserve fund. All financial commitments to over a dozen partner agencies and organizations, like schools, camps and service agencies, were met.

East described the spending plans for the next fiscal year as a "placeholder budget," with no significant changes to

programming, and the pandemic still a factor for several more months. It is also a time of waiting for the "Courageous imagination" process to inform where the regional church goes next, which may impact its finances.

In pre-recorded videos provided ahead of the virtual gathering, leaders shared developments in various MC Eastern Canada ministries, including how pastors were provided with resources during the pandemic, how church growth and support of international missions continued, and how churches are journeying toward becoming an intercultural church.

Milestones at MC Eastern Canada

Several milestones were celebrated as part of the spring gathering. Famille Assemblée de la Grâce (10 years), a small congregation in Montreal that worships in Haitian Creole, has been a provisional member of the regional church since 2018.

Community Mennonite Church, Stouffville, Ont., (25 years), began in 1996 as an outreach from Hagerman Mennonite Church in Markham, Ont.

Norm Dyck, mission minister, welcomed two congregations into provisional membership status. Hiyaw Amalak (Living God) Evangelical Church in Ottawa, began more than eight years ago, serving Eritrean and Ethiopian immigrants. The church of around 50 people worships in Tigrinya, but it offers youth and children's ministries in English. It is led by pastors Fitsum Debesay and Habte Araya.

Ma Destinée, in Montréal, formed from new believers among recent Haitian immigrants. The church of 25 people increased attendance during the pandemic, and it has an active prayer and Bible study ministry. It is led by pastoral couple Rheau Jean-Claude and Marjory Brutus.

The pastors of the new churches offered prayers.

Two churches closed this year. One was the Commons, a church in inner-city Hamilton, Ont. The other was the Network, a house church in Kitchener, Ont. ✎

For more photos, visit canadianmennonite.org/2021-spring-gathering.



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'This community still exists for us'

Zoar Mennonite closes after 111 years

By Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent
WALDHEIM, SASK.

"It was not a sudden oh-my-goodness-what-are-we-going-to-do conversation," says Liz Baerwald of her church's decision to close. As she sees it, the conversation began more than a decade ago.

When long-serving pastor Barry Lesser left Zoar Mennonite Church in Waldheim in 2007, the Waldheim congregation hired interim ministers to help them through the transition. Through this process, the church developed a mission statement that included the idea of being called to be "a beacon of hope" in the community.

Around this time, the church sponsored a refugee family from El Salvador. Several other Spanish-speaking families from Colombia also arrived in the community. In 2012, Zoar hired Ben Pauls in the hope that his fluency in Spanish would draw the newcomers to their congregation.

When this hope did not become reality, says Baerwald, it led to "a moment of reckoning for us as to what was happening between us as members."

Baerwald, who has served as Zoar's chair



PHOTO BY ANNA PENZ

Liz Baerwald estimates that Zoar Mennonite women and men donated more than 5,900 comforters to Mennonite Central Committee since 1962. In the foreground, Liz and husband Greg knot a quilt together, while, in the background, Erna Funk, left, and Pastor Andrea Enns-Gooding work on another.



PHOTO BY ANNA PENZ

Following a service of release and blessing, Zoar Mennonite congregants visit together in the church foyer.

for the past 15 years, says the congregation considered closing in 2017, when Pauls left, but they decided unanimously to hire Andrea Enns-Gooding instead. It was a hope-filled decision, but one that was tempered by realism. The congregation would see how far this new relationship would take it.

When COVID-19 arrived, Zoar had already laid plans for Enns-Gooding's ordination and for the church's 110th anniversary. In June 2020, despite these hopeful events, church council voted to close the following year, giving congregants time to process the decision and prepare themselves for the event.

Zoar traces its origins to 1892, when Mennonite families from Kansas, Minnesota, and North and South Dakota settled in the rural areas that would eventually become the communities of Langham and Waldheim. The General Conference Mennonite Church in the United States sent Nicholas Toews to help these families establish centres of worship.

At first, small clusters of families worshipped together in each other's homes and in nearby one-room schoolhouses. Eventually, these clusters formed into

two groups, both of which bore the name Zoar. According to the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, the two groups became distinct congregations when Zoar Mennonite divided in 1960. In 2018, the Langham congregation changed its name to Langham Mennonite Fellowship.

The Waldheim congregation constructed its first church building in 1912, with the first baptismal service being held in 1914. In his 1980 history of the congregation, Ed Schmidt writes, "A lot of boys were getting baptized to help them with their conscientious objector [status]."

As early as the 1920s, the language of worship was English, but when a dozen families arrived from Russia, following the Russian Revolution, the congregation reverted to using German.

Membership grew steadily during the 1920s and '30s, peaking in 1935 at 254. But, as Schmidt writes, the Great Depression dramatically impacted membership, as families left Waldheim for the promise of a better life elsewhere. By 1940, membership had dropped to 181.

In the late '40s, Waldheim experienced a spiritual awakening. Schmidt writes



PHOTO BY ERICA BAERWALD

Zoar Mennonite Church gathers for a group photograph following its closing worship service on April 11.

that the revival began when teenagers asked their high school principal, George Thiessen, to become their spiritual counselor. All of the community's churches had large baptisms in 1949, with Zoar baptizing 36 candidates.

In 1960, the congregation split over issues related to language, paid versus lay ministry, and denominational conference versus non-denominational missions. Between 60 and 75 members, including several lay leaders, withdrew to form Grace Mennonite Mission.

Not long after, the congregation hired its first full-time, salaried minister, Henry Funk.

In recent years, Zoar has had an average Sunday attendance of 22, and most are over 65. Those in leadership positions, like Baerwald, have continued to do their jobs for many years.

On March 25, regular congregants met at the church for a service of release and blessing. As they walked through their church building, they shared memories of their life together.

They held their final worship service on April 11, with 58 people attending, including some former members and non-resident members.

An unwelcomed surprise in the process of closing has been the discovery that the church has title to a small cemetery located south and west of Waldheim. Known as the Schmidtsburg Cemetery, it is situated near the site of the former Schmidtsburg School, where some of the earliest

congregants met for worship. Baerwald says the congregation is still trying to figure out what to do about this property.

The church building, which was constructed in 1984, has been sold to the Town of Waldheim. It will house town offices and meeting spaces and will continue to be home to the Waldheim preschool.

Baerwald says most members haven't decided where they will attend church in the future. Some may choose to attend Rosthern Mennonite, others will likely go to Eigenheim, and still others may make Laird Mennonite their new church home.

"Even though we're not meeting together, this community still exists for us," says Enns-Gooding. ☞



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Finding a way forward

Working Group on Indigenous Reconciliation stands in solidarity with land defenders

Story and Screenshot by Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondent

In July 2020, when Foxgate Developments began developing the 218-home McKenzie Meadows subdivision in Caledonia, Ont., Skyler Williams and other members of the Haudenosaunee First Nation set up a camp on part of the 10-hectare site.

The self-described land defenders claim sovereignty over the land they call 1492 Landback Lane. It lies between Caledonia and Six Nations territory, an area with a long history of unresolved land concerns.

There was “no lawful surrender” of that land over its history, according to Adrian Jacobs, who grew up at Six Nations.

Injunctions to remove the land defenders were granted to the developers, leading to raids by heavily armed tactical police using stun guns and rubber bullets.

Williams, who was arrested and charged, calls actions like this the “criminalization of Indigenous people standing up for their rights.” The land defenders put up a blockade in October 2020, after the second raid.

The Mennonite Church Eastern Canada Truth & Reconciliation Working Group on Indigenous Reconciliation has explored several ways to stand in solidarity with Indigenous neighbours like Williams and Jacobs.

Since September 2020, the group has hosted an online storytelling series called “Treaty as Sacred Covenant: Stories of Indigenous-Mennonite Relations,” shining light on the history of broken covenants [and] illuminating pathways of hope to a more just future for all nations on this land.

On April 12, Williams, along with ally and friend Eric Lankin, told a group of around 170 people from across Canada about the police raids and arrests, and the court procedures now underway. They

maintain this is a “peaceful occupation,” Williams said. “There have never been weapons here of any kind.”

When asked about upholding the rule of law, Williams pointed out that there is a historic “divide between Indigenous people and the judicial system,” and years of oppression that governments need to answer for.

Lankin added that “every step of colonization has been legal,” so appealing to the rule of law sounds like protecting privilege.

Lankin sees Mennonites, with their spirituality of nonviolence, as uniquely situated to “find a way forward.” He said Mennonites have to “say no to the



During a ‘Treaty as Sacred Covenant’ storytelling event hosted by the TRC Working Group on Indigenous Reconciliation, Skyler Williams, right, and Eric Lankin describe events at 1492 Landback Lane, where a group of Haudenosaunee land defenders have claimed sovereignty over a piece of land slated for development.

genocide of Indigenous people,” and develop “community-to-community relationships.”

In an earlier storytelling event, Jacobs said, “When you stand up for what matters to us, then we know we matter to you.”

The land defenders have reached out to provincial and federal governments, seeking a peaceful, negotiated resolution.

Rachelle Friesen, Canadian coordinator of Christian Peacemaker Teams, has been standing in solidarity with the land defenders. She says the silence of the federal government on this matter is “astonishing.” Outstanding land claims are “a federal responsibility.” They should be negotiating this “nation to nation,” instead of dragging it out through the courts.

She also criticizes the “heavy hand of the state,” calling the police response “disproportionate.”

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission working group has also connected with an ecumenical group of clergy and laity that organizes support for the land defenders, in the form of hot meals. Groups from Stirling Avenue, Waterloo North and St. Jacobs Mennonite churches have prepared and delivered hot meals to 1492 Landback Lane.

Friesen says that, for some, providing hot meals is a practical and tangible way to express solidarity. For others, it is seen as nonviolent direct action and a “concrete way to contribute to the resistance” on a “big justice issue.”

During the online storytelling event, Williams and Lankin expressed gratitude for the food and the support.

The land defenders recently removed the blockades they put up in October, prompting the MC Eastern Canada Working Group to write a media release and a letter calling on governments, courts and police to “honour . . . Haudenosaunee sovereignty at 1492 Landback Lane,” and “start real and substantive dialogue to resolve long-standing issues,” in order to “bring a peaceful, just and prompt resolution to this conflict.”

Fearing that the land defenders are now more vulnerable without the blockade, Working Group members say they will be watching to make sure there is no “colonial violence,” something that occurs with “tragic regularity across Canada.”

According to a March 20 APTNnews.ca article, “OPP spent more than \$16 million policing 1492 Land Back Lane: Records.” The Working Group learned that the money spent on this police operation between July 2020 and January 2021 included salaries, round-the-clock

overtime, food, hotels, travel costs, supplies and equipment.

Constable Rod LeClair, told APTN: “The OPP is committed to public safety and security, and has maintained that objective throughout. Having sufficient resources on hand to ensure the safety of the public, the police and the demonstrators was paramount. It would be inappropriate for

me to comment on operational details which include staffing and/or resources deployed to assist.”

But Scott Morton Ninomiya, the Working Group’s chair, says, “This is startling proof that militarized colonialism is very much alive and well, and that we are paying for it. I think Mennonites will be particularly disturbed by the amount

of money that’s being pumped into the government’s militarized responses.” ❧

The Working Group’s full media release, as well as links to the storytelling events, can be found online at mcec.ca/programs/truth-and-reconciliation.



Looking for applicants . . . and donors

Company of 1000 fund seeks to equip pastors through forgivable loans and tuition grants

Mennonite Church Canada

Mennonite Church Canada is renewing its call for applicants to the Company of 1000 Study Reserve Fund and also for people to become regular donors to the fund.

The Company of 1000 fund provides forgivable loans to students planning to join ministry after they graduate from a post-secondary school. It also provides grants that cover 50 percent of tuition for current pastors or ministers taking post-secondary courses while they work.

Over the years, six to 12 applicants normally applied to the fund per year, but that number is now significantly lower. MC Canada’s Church Leadership Ministers administer the fund and want to see that number increase.

“We have made the eligibility criteria more flexible and adaptable for congregational leaders who wish to continue their studies from home, while at the same time fulfilling their ministry responsibilities,” says Rick Neufeld, church engagement minister for MC Manitoba.

Hyejung Jessie Yum is a doctoral candidate in theological studies at Emmanuel College at the Toronto School of Theology. She is a recipient of a Company of 1000 forgivable loan.

“The direct financial support for me encourages me to do innovative and courageous forms of Mennonite theology and ministry,” she says.

Yum’s dissertation is on postcolonial Mennonite peace theology in a



Hyejung Jessie Yum, left, a recipient of a Company of 1000 forgivable loan, is a doctoral candidate in theological studies at Emmanuel College at the Toronto School of Theology. Kevin Koop, right, a recipient of a Company of 1000 tuition grant, is taking courses from Canadian Mennonite University while pastoring Carrot River (Sask.) Mennonite Church.

multicultural context. She is also a licensed minister of MC Eastern Canada and has launched Sowing for Peace, a peace-based ministry in Toronto. She says sources of income and scholarships for international students are limited.

“Company of 1000 has been a helpful financial resource for the last four years to sustain my life as an international student and a self-supporting minister,” she says.

Kevin Koop is the pastor of Carrot River (Sask.) Mennonite Church. He is working towards his masters of Christian ministry degree from Canadian Mennonite University’s Graduate School of Theology and Ministry.

So far, he has taken courses on pastoral

care and wisdom literature in the Old Testament and is looking forward to a class on New Testament letters in first-century and Middle Eastern perspectives in the spring.

“I don’t know that I would be able to prioritize graduate-level seminary education if it weren’t for this fund,” says Koop, who also receives support from his own church for his degree.

He says his learning in the classroom has already impacted his ministry. “While I was taking the pastoral care course, I was visiting a parishioner involved in a unique medical crisis. Having limited experience with the particular care dynamics involved, I asked my class for help. I followed their advice the following day when I met with this individual in the hospital.”

Forty-nine people donate annually to the Company of 1000 fund. MC Canada is also inviting people to join this community of support for current and future pastors.

“One of the most critical tasks in the life of the church is to recognize how God has gifted people and calls them to use their gifts in leadership,” says Doug Klassen, MC Canada’s executive minister. “The Company of 1000 initiative has done this for decades and, with the continued support of donors, will do so for years to come.” ❧

To apply or donate to the Company of 1000 Study Reserve Fund, visit mennonitechurch.ca/company-of-1000.



PEOPLE

'I'd never thought of myself ever sculpting'

Mennonite artist explores his faith through scrap-metal sculpting

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

Old agricultural equipment left to languish in junkyards or alongside highways gets a second life in Don Engbrecht's workshop. He has created approximately 200 works over the 20 years he has been sculpting in Boissevain, Man., with scrap metal and welding tools.

After seven years, he has finally completed his most recent masterpiece. The project, "Shalom," is inspired by the the book *Fingerprints of Fire, Footprints of Peace* by Noel Moules, a founding member of the Anabaptist Network U.K. Back in 2013, Engbrecht attended the book's launch and was captivated by Moules's writing on shalom, the holistic peace and well-being of all things. After reading the book several times, Engbrecht knew he had to process it through art.

Creating a frame within a wheel rim, he shaped various symbols, like a heart, fish and people, to represent the physical, spiritual and relational pillars of shalom. He will be presenting it to his congregation, Whitewater Mennonite Church in Boissevain, this summer

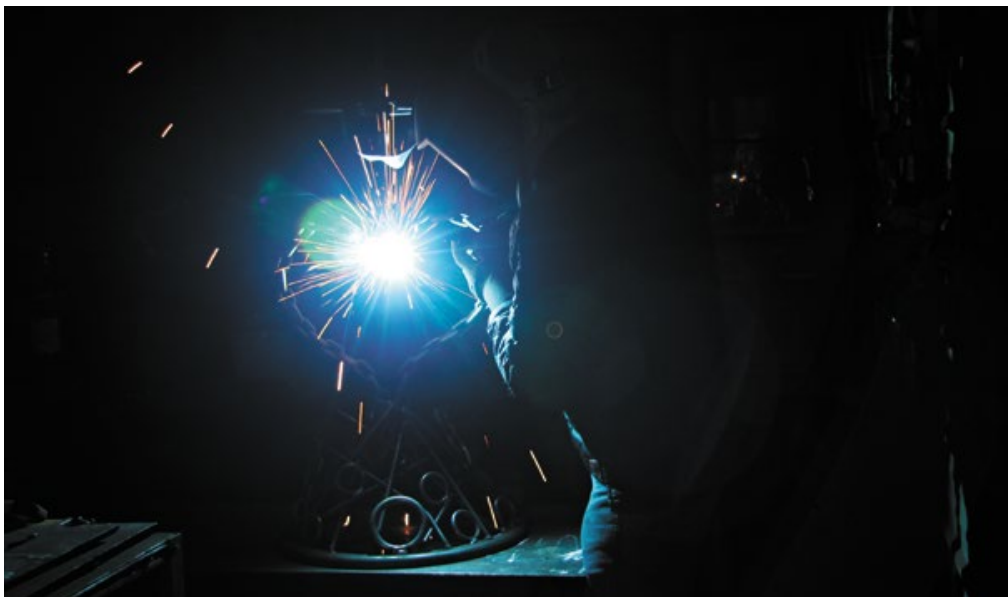
Engbrecht's foray into scrap-metal sculpting all started in the late 1990s, when he and his wife Betty transformed their farmyard into Anchorage Gardens, an art gallery-garden hybrid. For 15 years, the couple toured approximately 2,500 people through the gardens. Groomed paths wove between flowerbeds and scrap metal sculptures. Soft petals of purple and red bobbed in the breeze next to steel blooms made from bolts and washers. The Engbrechts showed tourists a new project each year, but they consistently used recycled materials and incorporated agricultural themes.

Engbrecht has always been one to save everything and fix things himself. "My cliché would be 'waste not, want

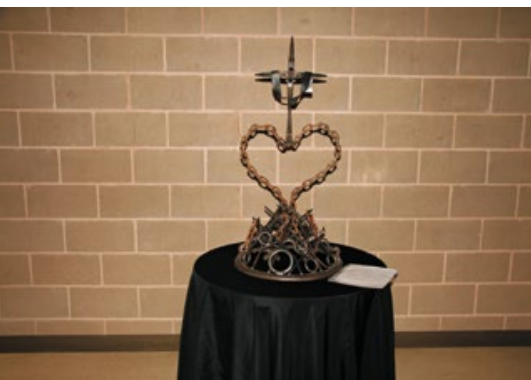


PHOTOS COURTESY OF DON ENGBRECHT

Don Engbrecht has built around 200 works, including this Easter sculpture.



Don Engbrecht has been sculpting and welding scrap metal for 20 years.



This special Easter sculpture now sits in Whitewater Mennonite Church in Boissevain, Man.

not’—that’s biblical,” he says. “I believe that recycling and repurposing materials is fundamental to good stewardship of what has been entrusted to us.”

Anchorage Gardens tours explored the journey of life through the dozens of galleries on the property, each with a different name and story. Even the paths between the sites, straight and curved, stone and wood, symbolized how varied people’s life trajectories can be.

The paths echo the journey of Engbrecht’s own life. He farmed for 12 years, raising cattle and growing crops, but when the recession hit hard, he went into agricultural retail sales. He then worked in social services for 16 years, serving as executive director of an organization working with adults with mental disabilities.

He slowly started experimenting more in his shop and, when he retired, he developed his career as an artist. “It’s interesting in life how certain things push people in certain directions,” he says. “I’d never thought of myself ever sculpting.”

Yet Engbrecht’s structures are everywhere. Several are installed at Whitewater Mennonite, while 30 are spread throughout the town of Killarney, Man. He has done private commissions and public works, and he is currently in conversation with the International Peace Gardens in Boissevain about an outdoor gallery. His current project for a new assisted-living facility in Boissevain is a sculpture and a five-metre archway built from the chain of a Caterpillar machine, entitled “Life’s

Journey.”

“Scrap-metal sculpting is a challenge because you are working with predetermined shapes,” he says. While he does alter the pieces he finds, he works more with the shapes that already exist. During the hours he spends gathering scrap metal, his trained eye is searching for shapes that he will be able to use. But the creative inspiration for the design of those materials doesn’t always arrive as planned. “Sometimes I walk around steel and nothing happens and, a few years later, all of a sudden something hits you . . . it’s just there in front of you.”

This was the case when the idea for an Easter sculpture climbed into Engbrecht’s head and announced itself during a midday nap three years ago. He went straight to his workshop and copied down the exact design.

The base of the sculpture embodies the chaos that occurs throughout life—harrow tines represent people caught in the crossfires, rings remind them of their busy lives running in circles, and chains symbolize their vices. But growing out of this are two question marks, representing the questions to which people have



The outer circle of the Shalom sculpture indicates wholeness, while each segment represents an aspect of shalom: physical wellness, right relationships and healthy spirituality. The pattern of threes symbolizes stability and harmony.

answers and those to which they do not, that together form a heart. This is the heart of God, whose love sent Jesus to die and rise again on Easter, visualized in the cross at the top of the sculpture. “That was a real special one for me,” he says.

Engbrecht has enjoyed hearing people’s interpretations of his art and connecting with artists who do similar work. He is looking forward to years of “further inspiration in creating meaningful art sculptures from worthless metal.” ❧



One of the sites in the Engbrechts’ Anchorage Gardens.

New poetry book explores many forms of the body

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

In her third collection of poetry, *Essential Tremor*, Mennonite writer Barbara Nickel reflects on the body and its many manifestations: world, human and divine. Publisher Caitlin Press launched the book virtually on April 24, with the author reading several poems from the collection to more than a hundred people participating from across Canada.

Nickel, originally from Saskatchewan, now resides in Yarrow, B.C., and attends Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BARBARA NICKEL

Barbara Nickel introduces her new book of poetry, *Essential Tremor*, that explores the body in its various forms.

“This is a collection of poems that has been in process since about 2007, about the time that my last collection was published,” says Nickel, who calls herself a “slow poetry writer,” but who found herself writing one to two poems a week during the early weeks of the pandemic. She explains the title by saying, “*Essential Tremor* is also the name of a medical condition that is uncontrollable shaking without a known cause.”

The book’s cover appropriately depicts

the nerve endings of a neuron, as the title poem in the collection is about one spouse caring for the other with such a health disorder.

When COVID-19 hit in early 2020, Nickel felt inspired to express her feelings about the stress, uncertainty and isolation she was experiencing, using the 14-line sonnet form. She thought of the sequence of a “crown of sonnets,” in which the last line of one sonnet becomes the first line of the next, and the final sonnet’s last line then makes a full circle back to the beginning of the first sonnet.

It seemed a natural fit, with images of how “one sonnet touches another, the way we can’t right now,” says Nickel. “With the virus, everything links.”

She also noted how sonnets have traditionally been used to react to current events, and the sequence of sonnets seemed particularly appropriate to add to her collection.

Although most of the book had been completed, her publisher allowed Nickel to include the 13 “Corona” poems to the book, which also includes stand-alone poems.

Nickel is an award-winning author who writes for both adults and children. Her two previous poetry collections are *The Gladys Elegies* and *Domain*, and her children’s books include *The Mozart Girl*, *From the Top of a Grain Elevator*, *Hannah Waters and the Daughter of Johann Sebastian Bach* and *A Boy Asked the Wind*. Another novel, *Dear Peter, Dear Ulla*, is to be published this fall. ¶

For more information on *Essential Tremor* and Nickel’s other works, check her website at barbaranickel.ca. *Essential Tremor* can be purchased online at caitlin-press.com.



News brief

David Friesen turns 100



David Friesen, left, of Edmonton First Mennonite Church, turned 100 on April 12. He is pictured with Alanna Nielsen, his great-granddaughter.

David Friesen of First Mennonite Church in Edmonton turned 100 on April 12. Due to COVID-19, no in-person party was planned. Instead, the family encouraged friends and acquaintances to send cards and letters wishing him a happy birthday. He was born on April 12, 1921, in the village of Reinfeld, near Winkler, Man. While in Manitoba, he was a member of Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church. During the Second World War, he was a conscientious objector. He married Melitta Warkentin in 1948, and they had three children: Vincent, Adela and James. He was a farmer and teacher at the Winkler high school until 1966, before moving to Edmonton, where he was a professor at the University of Alberta. He has had a lifetime of serving the church, both at the local and provincial level. He has also had a long history of working with Mennonite Central Committee Alberta. He is still enjoying life, reading many books, watching sports and entering political debates when the occasion arises.

—STORY AND PHOTO BY VINCE FRIESEN

FOCUS ON

Mental Health

COVER STORY

Stand by me

Families share how to be helpful in the mental health struggle

Story and Photo by Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

With one in five Canadians experiencing mental illness in any year, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association, it is likely that most people might be called upon to support a loved one with a mental illness. But many people are at a loss as to how.

Diana and Erika (all names in this article are pseudonyms) have both watched their adult children cope with mental illnesses for years.

Diana's daughter has experienced an eating disorder, thoughts of self-harm and self-identity issues that have profoundly affected not only her, but the entire family's relationships. Watching their child live with many layers of mental illness has profoundly affected Diana and her husband as they constantly wonder how best to be of support and to remain positive.

Their daughter's illness is not something they share with many people. "You keep your circle small, whom you tell," says Diana. From those they have shared with, she says empathy is the most helpful response. She appreciates hearing things like, "I'm sorry you have to go through that," rather than being offered platitudes or unhelpful advice. "The biggest thing is just to listen," she says.

The prayers of friends and family have been especially appreciated, says Diana, adding, "I have definitely been strengthened by God's grace, and [have] seen answers to prayers even in the midst of it all."

Erika and her husband have also watched their son live with mental illness for many years. They continue to question choices he makes while having to stand back and let him live with those choices.

"Mental illness can be torture for the person suffering from it and gruelling for the family," says Erika. "It can continue on and on for many years. I have determined to keep my eyes wide open for all the beauty and goodness in my son. I have celebrated every small or big achievement of his, no matter that it has usually come at a glacial pace."

Erika has talked about her family's struggles in a more public setting, such as at church. But she has found it disheartening not to have people respond—she believes because of their own discomfort—so more recently she has not been as open. She has appreciated when individuals have taken the time to relate to her son on a one-on-one basis and have treated him normally.

Leonard has battled post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for decades, beginning with trauma from his upbringing in a dysfunctional, alcoholic home, and culminating at age 15 when he says he was "dramatically crushed by an event that has affected me all my life." The event was so traumatic that he has told it only to a few people, mostly mental health professionals. He has also experienced depressive moods off and on for most of his life.

Relationships have been difficult for him. "The biggest effect has been my quickness to anger and heightened sexuality," he says. "People who are 'normal' would ask me what was wrong. I was the squeaky wheel, I was the bothersome friend, I could never be who I was."

A neighbour who took Leonard under his wing, a youth organization that gave him a sense of belonging, and the person who led Leonard to Christ in young adulthood and introduced him to



Walking alongside people with mental illness includes offering a listening ear and a non-judgmental attitude, say family members.

a nurturing church, also played significant roles. That same spiritual mentor gave Leonard hope with the promise of redemption in Joel 2:25: "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten."

Leonard also found that his own intellect's hunger for knowledge was a help to him. "Managing my own circumstances and intellectual pursuits helped me work through my own brain processes," he says. "Learning helps to put order in chaos."

"I think the church, as a whole, has been a positive force in terms of wanting to see me healed," he says. "But the church is not very well-equipped to deal with psychological issues. It's not helpful to hear things, like 'Get over it,' by people who don't understand mental distress, or having them ask, 'Have you had counselling? Have you had prayer?' I've had enough prayer to rub the hair off the top of my head. If people think their duty to a mentally ill person and/or their family begins and ends with prayer, they're not realizing there's so much more they could do on a day-to-day basis. Putting things in God's hands is an excuse people use sometimes not to do anything practical themselves."

Erika offers practical lists of things to do and to refrain from doing when relating

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

to those experiencing mental illness or their families:

Helpful actions

- **Take the person** out or extend an invitation for coffee or a meal.
- **Invite the person** for a hike, walk or run.
- **Include the person** in a circle of friends for some activity.
- **Greet and join** in friendly conversation in social settings.
- **Acknowledge the person's** strengths and gifts by providing opportunity to

- use those strengths and gifts.
- **Check in** with the person's family.
- **Ask the family** what would be helpful.
- **Respond to** a hospital stay with a card or a gift basket.
- **Accept the person** for who he or she is.
- **Hold the person** accountable when necessary.
- **Provide alternative** shelter temporarily.

Unhelpful actions

- **Avoid or ignore** the person.
- **Avoid the person's** family.

- **Jump to** conclusions about unusual behaviors or statements.
- **Criticize the person/family** for something that appears out of the norm.
- **Pray for** evil spirits to leave or go out of the person.
- **Get bogged** down with the person's anxiety or depression.
- **Assume the person's** condition will never change.
- **Overuse labels** that end up defining the person.
- **Use "boundaries"** as walls. ❧

'A fine line between surviving and falling apart'

Alberta pastors talk about their mental health during COVID-19

By Joanne De Jong
Alberta Correspondent

Over the past year, everyone—pastors included—found themselves in situations requiring problem solving and emotional fortitude. Pastor Ken Tse, from Edmonton Christian Life Community Church, talks about the stress of seeking ways to minister to an older congregation that was not tech savvy. He worked to make sure that each member received training on Zoom, so everyone could participate in online activities.

Before COVID-19, the mental health of pastors was already a concern, but now there is so much more possibility of burnout. When talking about clergy mental health during COVID-19, Mennonite Church Alberta pastors made comments like, "It's been brutal on pastors' mental health," "I'm just trying to survive," and "There's a fine line between surviving and falling apart."

A 2015 Lifeway research project surveyed 1,500 pastors; 54 percent said they found the role of pastor frequently overwhelming—and that

was pre-COVID—while 84 percent said they are on call 24 hours a day; 80 percent expected conflict in the church, and 23 percent left their previous church due to conflict. Demands put on pastors place them at far greater risk for depression

than in other occupations. While caring for clergy is vital for congregational health, the project found that 71 percent of churches do not offer a periodic sabbatical.

While experiences vary widely, all eight MC Alberta pastors interviewed expressed love and appreciation for their congregations. They recognize this is a difficult time for everyone, yet, as Pastor Ryan Dueck of Lethbridge Mennonite Church said, "Pastoring is exhausting in unique ways."

Everything pastors do is public. Even their personal lives are public. Now that they are "so much 'on'"—all through a camera—everything feels like a performance," an unnamed pastor said.

Ministers carry the weight of questions like, "How do I show pastoral care to my congregation when we can't meet in person?" "How do we maintain community when everyone is in a world of malaise and apathy?" and "How will we get people to re-enter into meaningful community when people say they love being on Zoom



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALEB KOWALKO

Pastor Caleb Kowalko relaxes at the MC Alberta pastors and leaders retreat, held last November at the King's Fold Retreat and Renewal Centre, west of Cochrane.

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

because it's easy and doesn't require any real responsibility?"

Pastors are expected to be strong, yet they have a lot to carry as the face of the congregation. "I'm supposed to be the person people rely on, but I need someone too," said another pastor, adding that it's hard to speak up for fear that members will feel their pastor is inaccessible or complaining when others have bigger struggles.

Pastors can feel discouraged when members would rather take a break from church than learn the technology. They can feel discouraged when members start to quote other church pastors they have heard online, who do not share treasured Anabaptist teachings. Discouragement can set it when pastors have worked so hard to build a different kind of community but now people are gravitating toward multi-media worship.

It is tough when church members do not agree on whether to tighten or loosen restrictions. One pastor spoke about a member who wanted a pastoral visit in

(Continued on page 30)



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**ONLINE NOW!**at canadianmennonite.org**Making connections through paska**

Last month, Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon came up with a creative way to celebrate Easter and care for their congregation at the same time.

canadianmennonite.org/paskafaspa

**MDS-MCC project 'shows God's leading'**

Mennonite Disaster Service recently completed a special project for Mennonite Central Committee in Timmins, Ont.

canadianmennonite.org/mdstimmins

**Peace Africa nurtures relationships**

Learn about an initiative involving Mennonite churches and organizations in seven African countries, and from Canada, the U.S. and France.

canadianmennonite.org/peaceafrica

**Let's talk about generosity**

Stewardship consultant Lori Guenther Reesor talks about her new book, *Growing a Generous Church: A Year in the Life of Peach Blossom Church*.

canadianmennonite.org/peachblossom

(Continued from page 29)

the member's home and became upset when the pastor said no, even though the visit was against pandemic regulations. Some members want their pastor to help them make sense of the pandemic in the sermons and others don't want it mentioned.

Even though it is impossible to please everyone, pastors feel the burden to bring everyone together. Will there now be a whole new thing to be divided about? Can relationships between members be healed?

The role of pastor is unlike other occupations, in that clergy are called to love. It feels different when people ask, "So, what do you do all week?" one said. And is the question being directed to the person or the employee? The question can assume the pastor is working less, during COVID-19, when he or she might actually be working more. Even if the pastor is working less, he or she might be more drained than ever and might carry the weight of guilt for not doing more. Hour-long conversations take energy and now the pastor's home is also the office, making it hard to create a separate space for rest.

All of this takes a toll on the mental health of pastors, who love their people and want to see them grow as disciples of Jesus.

Who pastors the pastors? How can they be supported and avoid burnout?

MC Alberta pastors are finding ways to sustain their spiritual health. Their restorative practices include flower arranging, MC Alberta evening prayer, family time, pickle ball, daily cleaning practices and time with friends.

Pastor Will Loewen of Trinity Mennonite in DeWinton has taken advantage of the free accommodation for personal retreats offered by Camp Valaqua. Pastor Caleb Kowalko of Calgary First Mennonite Church was energized by the MC Alberta pastors and leaders retreat held last November. And the MC Alberta pastors council has been meeting together more frequently since the pandemic began, as a way to encourage and support its members. ❧

CANADIAN MENNONITE

Contract Opportunity Advertising Representative

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

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

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

Calendar

Nationwide

May 18: The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (of which MC Canada is a member) and Youth Worker Community are co-hosting an online book discussion, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. EDT. Beth Severson, author of *Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults*, will take part in a panel discussion. Participants will discuss the book in small groups, then engage in a live Q&A with the author. To register, visit bit.ly/3ebT3sX.

June 3-5: MC Canada is offering to sponsor 20 people from across the nationwide church community to attend this year's virtual NAIITS symposium, whose theme is "Treaty and covenant: Creating space for hope." For more information, or to register, visit: bit.ly/39WyeiC.

Ontario

June 8-22: Ninth International Conference on Aging and Spirituality, a virtual conference hosted by Conrad Grebel University College. Theme: "Vital connections: Claiming voice and learning to listen." Seven 90-minute conference sessions will take place between June 8 and 22. To learn more or to register, visit uwaterloo.ca/ageing-spirituality/

International

July 1-4, 2022: Mennonite World Conference's Global Youth Summit, in Salatiga, Indonesia. Theme: "Life in the Spirit: Learn. Serve. Worship." To learn more, visit mwc-cmm.org/gys.

July 5-10, 2022: Mennonite World Conference's global assembly, in Semarang, Indonesia. Theme: "Following Jesus together across barriers." For more information, visit mwc-cmm.org/assembly/indonesia-2022.

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

For more Calendar listings online, visit canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.



Classifieds

Employment Opportunities

Illustrator wanted for 10 drawings of a person with Down Syndrome for book to be published. Compensation given. Contact Melody at write.on.begins@gmail.com.




Employment opportunity
Lead Pastor
Calgary, Alberta

Foothills MC is a multi-generational urban church of 169 members. The fellowship was established in 1956 and is a member of Mennonite Church Alberta and MCCanada.

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.ca. Foothills MC is an Anabaptist faith community that desires to embody, share and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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.



Employment opportunity
Associate Pastor 0.5 FTE

Wellesley Mennonite Church is a progressive and community-oriented congregation. We are seeking a person to fill a 0.5 FTE position to minister alongside our lead pastor.

The successful candidate will work to inspire and articulate the congregation's vision, goals, and mission. This individual will be enthusiastic, sensitive, a caring and confident leader who will inspire the congregation to expand and develop their gifts. The candidate will be flexible, creative, demonstrate strong organizational and communication skills, and possess musical skills. The candidate will have a Christian understanding of our Anabaptist Mennonite faith and core values. The successful candidate enjoys working with people of all ages and will be involved with music, Children and Youth Ministry and Christian Formation.

For more information please go to the Mennonite Church Eastern Canada website: www.mcec.ca/ministry-opportunities or contact pastoraltransitions@mcec.ca.

www.wellesleymennonite.ca



Employment opportunity
Church and Community Relations Associate

Working closely with the Communications team, Program team, and Executive office, this salaried full-time position (37.5 hours per week) oversees both the strategic development and implementation of engagement strategies and relationship building efforts between MCC in Ontario and our constituent churches. As time allows, the secondary focus will be on building community connections, beyond the churches. This is a one-year contract role.

Applications close date: Jun 4, 2021
Start date: August 3, 2021

For full job description and to apply, visit mcco.ca/serve.
For more information, contact Sheryl Bruggeling, 519-745-8458 ext. 265.

SCREENSHOT BY JOANNE DE JONG

In March, Mennonite Church Alberta sent every congregation calla lily or tulip bulbs as a visual reminder of the regional church's Year Two action plan: "Encountering, Embracing, Embodying Christ in Community." Planting the bulbs, clockwise from left: Kate Janzen of Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary, Leona Janzen of Springridge Mennonite Church, and Debbie Radke of Edmonton First Mennonite Church.



Photo finish



PHOTO BY CHANI WIENS / TEXT BY CHARLEEN JONGEJAN HARDER

*'He's alive! He's alive! The rocks cried in praise!' Children at North Leamington United Mennonite Church in Leamington, Ont., explore the Easter story in a new way—from Mary's perspective with poetic rhythms borrowed from St. Nicholas. Pages from *Twas The Morning of Easter* by writer Glennys Nellist and illustrator Elena Selivanova were mounted on stands around the church building, with activities and challenges for the children and an Easter treat at the end. Congregant Chani Wiens brought her neighbours, and everyone was grateful for the opportunity to celebrate as a family. Pictured from left to right: Julianne and Emmett Wiens, and Maci and Lyla Rutgers.*