

CANADIAN MENNONITE

June 7, 2021 Volume 25 Number 12



Germinating Conversations

New book brings together divergent views
on food and farming, pg. 16

PM40063104 R09613

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EDITORIAL

Growers and eaters

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive Editor



What do city dwellers and farmers have in common? They are all

eaters! And, in the Mennonite community, another important characteristic is their shared faith. Yet, despite those commonalities, country and city folk sometimes bring different points of view to the question of how our food is grown.

When your family plans a picnic, you hope for sunny weather. Yet, the farmer growing the vegetables to be served at that picnic table may be desperately praying for rain. How growers and eaters see the weather and the land depends on many—and sometimes conflicting—factors. These could include where they live, where they fall in the food supply chain, whether their financial well-being is tied up with food production, their family's history on a piece of land, and even their personal tastes in food.

Over the past months, *Canadian Mennonite* has published some perspectives of eaters and growers. In the March 29 issue, two city dwellers explored the question, “What would Jesus think about factory farms?” In the April 26 issue a young farmer wrote about his experiences on a small farm in Ontario. Readers from British Columbia and Manitoba weighed in through letters to Readers Write, offering more from the farmers’ point of view.

Mennonites have been talking about farming for quite a while. Paging through *CM*'s back issues, I came to the November 12, 2007, issue, with eight

pages dedicated to the topic. One article recalled a two-day conference on agriculture and the land held five years before, at Osler (Sask.) Mennonite Church. Attended by some 300 participants, “Making peace with the land: A country mouse and a city mouse talk about the pantry” led the Mennonite Church Canada assembly delegates to pass a resolution on the subject. It read in part: “Be it resolved [that] the General Board of MC Canada find ongoing ways to encourage and facilitate reflection and action, and the creation of new models, about the production and distribution of food, with a view to strengthening community and well-being.”

In that same issue, Laura Rance, then editor of *Manitoba Cooperator*, a provincial agricultural publication, argued that “Canadians have to renew the conversation between rural and urban folks, and that the church has a critical role in these issues.”

Years have passed since that resolution, and denominational structures and responsibilities have changed. In recent times, nationwide and regional conversations have focused more on questions around the larger climate crisis rather than on farming itself. But a group in Manitoba has kept the topic alive.

On pages 16 and 17 of this issue, senior writer Will Braun offers an essay originally published in a new book on the topic of farming and food. Titled *Germinating Conversations: Stories from a Sustained Rural-Urban Dialogue on Food, Faith, Farming, and the Land*, the book documents conversations that

have been going on in Manitoba since 2012.

The new book summarizes and reflects on that intentional dialogue initiative. This has been an effort to bring sometimes divergent views to a respectful and faith-based conversation. Inviting deep listening, organizers have sought to build trust and connections amongst diverse participants.

The book's introduction acknowledges that growers and eaters need to keep talking. “Our gatherings will continue with more listening, discerning, and dialoguing. Carefully, mindfully, we will discern other divides, develop new relationships, build more trust, and agree to talk.” They continue, “We pray that this conversation will continue in the years to come, and that one day we will be speaking not of ‘farm crises’ or ‘eaters’ complacency,’ but of renewed community and our vital reconnection with God, with each other, and with the land that sustains our lives.”

This magazine is committed to helping dialogue like that happen. What do you have to offer to the conversation?

Lament and actions

As this issue was being prepared for press, news broke about the discovery of an unmarked burial site containing the remains of more than 200 Indigenous children, near an Indian Residential School in British Columbia.

This is another painful reminder of Canada's past mistreatment of First Nations peoples. More investigation must happen there and elsewhere, and within our own hearts. For now, we can join in the lament, acknowledging the historic wrongs done as well as the systems that continue to perpetuate injustice. And we can heed the calls for action that are part of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation process. ☸



Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Canada

ISSN 1480-042X

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Will Braun, who wrote one of the articles in *Germinating Conversations*, is pictured with his son **Matoli** on their farm south of Morden, Man. Read his contribution to this new book on pages 16 and 17.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WILL BRAUN

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General submission address: submit@canadianmennonite.org

Readers Write: letters@canadianmennonite.org

Milestones announcements: milestones@canadianmennonite.org

Calendar announcements: calendar@canadianmennonite.org

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40063104 REGISTRATION NO. 09613

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

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

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

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One-Year Subscription Rates

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

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

Subscriptions/address changes

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FEATURE

All will be well!

By Brenda Epp

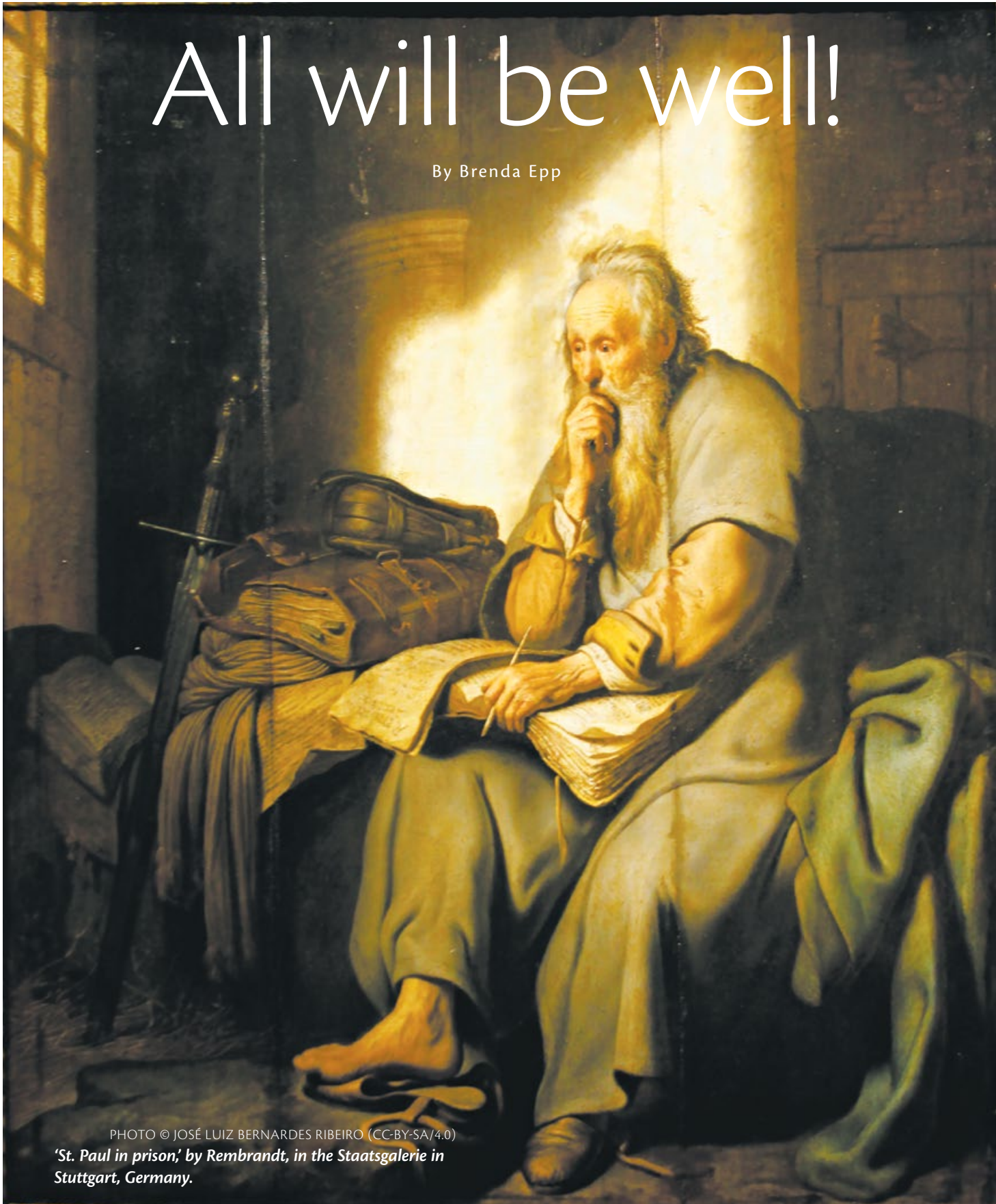


PHOTO © JOSÉ LUIZ BERNARDES RIBEIRO (CC-BY-SA/4.0)

'St. Paul in prison,' by Rembrandt, in the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, Germany.

Last September, at the school where I teach, the director noted the many restraints and restrictions staff and students were experiencing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It seemed that everywhere we turned, we were told we couldn't do something. Many excellent teaching practices were out of reach because we needed to maintain social distancing.

I started to reflect on what restraint and restriction meant in my own life and faith. What relevance do these limitations have to the way I relate to those around me and to God? I miss singing in a choir! We miss getting together with our families and friends. We need to wear masks everywhere, and so much communication is hidden behind the mask. In many places, there are restrictions, and this is difficult even though we know that these restrictions are for our good and for those we love.

Are there biblical examples we can look at? In Philippians 1:12-14, the imprisoned Apostle Paul writes: *"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear."*

Paul's imprisonment, far from ending his missionary activities, actually expanded them for himself and others; it broke bonds and barriers. Because he wrote these letters to the Philippians and other groups, we too can read them. We literally wouldn't have the New Testament as we know it if he had not been restrained and had to write instead of visiting those churches.

The most obvious example was Jesus himself. Paul goes on in his letter to write: *"Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a*

servant, being made in human likeness." It is difficult to contemplate what it means that Jesus took on the limitations of being a human being.

Visions of God

Julian of Norwich, a woman who lived in the 14th century, can also provide insight into our current situation. She wrote one of the earliest books in the English language.

As a young woman in Norwich, England, she likely was from a fairly wealthy middle-class family, married with several children. Then the Black Death struck. Her area was one of the worst hit by the plague, and estimates are that about 7,000 of the 12,000 people in Norwich died. Twelve years later, a second wave hit the town, and 23 percent of the population died, this time in a wave particularly hitting children. Some historians think that in one of these waves Julian's entire family died.

At some point, Julian herself was on the verge of death and received last rites. But she survived and later wrote that, while the priest held a crucifix in front of her face, she received 16 visions from God. The first draft of her book was entitled *Revelations of Divine Love*.

Later, she decided to become an anchoress. This was a form of withdrawal from the world and was meant to allow the person to spend her life in meditation and prayer. Anchoresses (or male anchorites) would be shut for life into a small room attached to a church, with three windows: one for servants to bring food and carry away waste; one window facing into the church, so the person could listen to religious services; and one facing the street, so the person inside could provide counsel to those in need. This was very serious decision, one taken for life. When persons were ready to move into seclusion, a requiem mass was performed and they were literally shut in for lifelong self-isolation.

Julian spent the next 30 or so years contemplating her visions and their meaning. It was then that she wrote the long version of her book. The combination of her life experiences, visions,

self-isolation and meditation led Julian to some remarkable, even revolutionary conclusions. Literature and art of the period often focused on death and hell, penance and vengeance, as did much of the church instruction she would have heard. But Julian reached different conclusions as to what all that meant, as expressed in the title of her book. She concluded that the central message of God is love.

For Julian, love emanates from God. To her, God is not on high, for humans to look up at. God is all around, in everything. She wrote, "There is a spreading outwards of length, and breadth, and of height and of depth without end, and all is one love." She wrote that God has always been present in everything, giving unconditional love. Human blindness makes this difficult to see.

The more she contemplated, the more this became clear. "And 15 years and more later, I was answered in my spiritual understanding, and it was said: 'Do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this? Be well aware: love was his meaning. Who showed you this? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show it? For love.'"

Julian was not naive; she had experienced suffering, pain, loss and fear. Yet she emphasized that God wants us to know we are strong enough to survive these things, because of God's unconditional love. She wrote, "He did not say, 'You shall not be perturbed, you shall not be troubled, you shall not be distressed;' but he said, 'You shall not be overcome.'" She comes to her most famous and optimistic conclusion that, because of the nature of the love of God, "All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well."

Life lessons

What does all this mean for us today? During the restrictions of the pandemic, we have had plenty of time to think, to contemplate and—while we are not locked for life in a cell—we are experiencing a form of isolation.

- **First, there is** clarity, and we see what

is most important, sometimes in seemingly small things. With the warnings of a second wave of COVID-19, I was not sure that I would be able to hold my granddaughter when she was born. I thought and worried about this for months. Now, I realize, in a way I never thought about before, what a gift physical presence is.

I no longer take gathering as a church family for granted. Many times in the past, I have gone to church, listened and contributed with perhaps a sense of duty. But losing the ability to gather with my church makes it clear how vital that gathering is for my faith journey.

- **Second, with slowing down** and increased clarity, I have found a greater ability to listen to God. I notice things that I never have before. While I gardened last summer, I had time to observe each stage of growth in plants, to revel in the abundance of flowers and produce and beauty there. It was such a feeling of accomplishment to eat a tomato sandwich with homemade sourdough bread and garden-ripened tomatoes.

In my daily walks and runs outside, I started paying attention to the beauty in the sunrise and in the night sky. I noticed the changes in the moon, where the stars and planets are. This gives me a sense daily that “all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.” The inevitable passage of seasons is reassuring when I slow down enough to notice.

Since I could speak, I learned to give thanks for my food and for those who made it. These words of thanksgiving have become much more real to me. People, often those paid poorly and disregarded in society, put themselves in danger, and many got sick, to make sure food was in grocery stores and on tables. I never truly thought about what this meant, or really listened to the words of the table grace, “God is great and God is good.” What a message to remember when I stop and listen.

- **Finally, I have** worked on my ability to trust in a new and real way. We have



PHOTO © EVELYN SIMAK (CC-BY-SA/2.0)

This mural of Julian of Norwich, Norfolk, Great Britain, was painted by Antony Allen in January 2020. Julian is believed to have been the first woman to write a book in English that has survived. It is entitled Revelations of Divine Love and is based on a series of 16 visions she received on May 8, 1373.

heard stories about our ancestors’ suffering, and we have all experienced sickness and death in our families, but now we have had to think about this as a group, as a community. Before, there were always food, jobs, doctors, and the

idea that we trust in God for all these things didn’t seem, in a way, to be necessary. Now, we do things to protect our loved ones and ourselves, and we trust that “All will be well, all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.” Do we believe that God is great, God is good, and all things will be well? This requires learning to trust.

For me, and maybe for others, the limits in this time has brought many gifts. The chance to slow down, to see what is truly important in life. The time and inclination to see, to listen, to notice. The challenge to cultivate trust in an uncertain time. May these life lessons not be lost after the pandemic is over. ☸



Brenda Epp attends Rosthern (Sask.) Mennonite Church and serves on the church’s worship committee. This is adapted from a sermon she preached there in November 2020.

/// For discussion

1. How has your life been changed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for separation from other people? In the past year of greater isolation, have you taken more time to reflect? Has it changed your sense of what is most important in life? Has your attitude toward suffering been impacted?
2. Brenda Epp writes that, after 30 years of self-isolation and meditation, Julian of Norwich concluded that “the central message of God is love.” Why is this surprising, given what is known about the life of Julian of Norwich? Do you think Christians of the 21st century accept this central message as true?
3. Julian of Norwich’s most famous conclusion is, “All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.” What do you understand this statement to mean? Why does this conclusion, from so many centuries ago, bring us comfort? Or does it?
4. What has your congregation learned about the importance of meeting together during the past months of pandemic restrictions? How might your congregation do things differently when the pandemic is over? What have we learned about being the church? Can you identify any gifts or life lessons that have resulted from the pandemic?

—By Barb Draper

See related **Simplicity and Contentment** resources at commonword.ca/go/2417

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/// Readers write

✉ Final letters responding to controversial vaccine letter

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

I applaud *Canadian Mennonite* for printing the letter because it highlights the diversity of thought that we find within the Mennonite communities.

I was employed in the pharmaceutical industry for nearly 40 years, so, contrary to the letter writer, I applaud the leaders who have come out for vaccination, although, to their credit, they have usually done so with restraint, allowing individuals to search their own souls. Vaccination has been a great advance in the last century, which saved many young people from deadly diseases, such as polio, measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever and smallpox.

I take great offence at the statement that our “fearfully and wonderfully made” bodies are sufficient to ward off COVID-19. Tell that to the families who are mourning loved ones who passed away too soon. The writer’s statements remind one that he is perhaps championing Charles Darwin in the concept of survival of the fittest.

I have tried to be a good neighbour and have received my first vaccine, and I am eagerly awaiting my second. I pray that God will keep my son and daughter-in-law safe (and all the other younger people) until their turn comes up.

NORMAN D. HUEBERT, SASKATOON

I know there are more people than this writer who have fallen for many of the extreme conspiracies.

In the past, we have received many vaccinations to protect our health and the health of others, and it boggles my mind why suddenly this one has become controversial and bad. A very good friend of mine contracted polio before a vaccine was available and has suffered ever since. We all took the polio vaccine, and polio has been eradicated. We also gladly take all vaccines needed to travel abroad.

This winter, the writer feels his fundamental rights were restricted. However, to have freedoms, we need restrictions. Why do we have restrictions like stop signs, traffic lights, speed signs and no-parking signs? They are all designed and regimented by the government for our safety and the safety of others on the road. We adhere to many other restrictions and laws to protect our freedom to drive, worship, prevent chaos, and have order in our homes and communities.

We, in our household—and our children and their households—have taken this isolation seriously and,

by the grace of God, have not contracted COVID-19. We are waiting for everyone to get vaccinated, so we can once again get together without restrictions and go travelling to many countries.

With freedoms come responsibilities to neighbours and our families. I would feel guilty if I didn’t take the vaccine and got COVID-19 and spread it to others who would get sick or even die.

How else are we going to eradicate this virus?
BRIAN DERKSEN, PLUM COULEE, MAN.

I admit I don’t know how to dialogue with people like this letter writer, who rejects vaccines and believes that COVID-19 provides better natural immunity.

I know what I saw, though. I saw what natural immunity looks like. Last year, in the first and second waves, Montreal was the epicentre of Canada.

I am a physician working in hospitalization, intensive care and administration. Together with my friends and colleagues, I worked seven days a week for months, in field hospitals, intensive care and COVID-19 units. I was part of the administrative team for a designated COVID-19 hospital, responsible for managing outbreaks and making decisions to redirect or cancel surgeries and cancer treatment.

I saw nurses and orderlies contract COVID-19 because they attended to sick patients without adequate protective equipment. Dozens of my own patients died and hundreds suffered.

The writer’s comments feel to me like a civilian telling a soldier who has seen action that war is not so bad. It’s natural. Cleansing.

Be that as it may, I don’t expect to change the mind of anyone who does not believe in vaccines or masks. They stand by their convictions. So be it. I am happy to play my role. And I am grateful to those Canadians of all faiths who are not on the front lines but who are doing everything they can to help people like me get back to worshipping in fellowship.

In the strange irony that marks our times, what will protect my minority rights and freedom to worship are not protests, court challenges, actions of civil disobedience against governments, nor even my own medical knowledge—but the actions of the majority who are willing to accept vaccines and choose, through prayer and reason, to abide by COVID-19 restrictions.

DUNCAN SCHELLENBERG, MONTREAL

“Walk a mile in my shoes” is a common way to say that it’s folly to judge someone until you know that someone’s life. “Seeing the world through others’ eyes” might be another way to put it. These things

are hard, but not impossible. We tend to assume that other people's shoes are like our shoes, that others see what we see, and so it's hard for us to understand why others do what they do, think as they think, see something different from what's obviously there.

In the Anabaptist universe, arms and the gospel can't be reconciled. In the veteran's universe, anyone who benefits from a country's largesse but refuses to defend it doesn't deserve citizenship. Both are completely logical assumptions—to their respective worldviews. But to actually listen to such opposing viewpoints with integrity is hard, really hard.

Henry Hildebrand is pastor of the Church of God in Aylmer, Ont., and is currently in trouble with authorities for continuing to hold unrestricted church services. His accent and demeanour clearly show two influences on his universe: a conservative Mennonite background with its emphasis on separation and piety, and North American evangelicalism. I listened to his defence of the “we serve God rather than man” stance, drawing on the religious freedom guaranteed in the Canadian Bill of Rights and in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It was delivered in Low German, on YouTube, obviously addressing the conservative Mennonites of southern Ontario.

His arguments were cogent, logical; his references to Canadian rights documents appropriately applied. Freedom that makes sense in his universe, though, probably doesn't make sense in yours and mine. The conundrum for those of us whose universe includes a flexibility on the word “freedom” in a time of crisis is the question, “What does it mean that we both shelter under the umbrella that is Jesus Christ?”

GEORGE G. EPP, ROSTHERN, SASK.

Congratulations to the *Canadian Mennonite* editor for publishing all seven letters in the May 10 issue that responded to a previous letter asking us to avoid COVID-19 vaccination. Two of the letters berated *CM* for publishing the letter in the first place, and the editor let us read them, too.

The freedom of dissent has a long history in Anabaptism. Already in 1524, B. Hubmaier argued that heretics should not be burned, as was the current practice, but avoided, and let go to rant and rave, as in Titus 3:10. In other words, persuasion, rather than force, is the way of Christ. The writer of *CM*'s original letter did us all a service by bringing forth responses that gave clear Christian rebuttals of his position.

In choosing to publish that letter, the editor acknowledged his right to dissent, and the response

benefitted all of us.

Should she ever refuse a letter? Of course, but there are laws about such things. I would hope that beyond that, the sole requirement be that the contributor must be part of the confessing Mennonite community. Anyone from outside that community is to be judged by the editor according to their letter's potential benefit to the community.

Thank you, *CM*, for sticking to your principle of free and open discussion. It works!

RUDY WIENS, ETOBICOKE, ONT.

The writer attends Mississauga (Ont.) Mennonite Fellowship.

I want to commend the editors for their courage to publish this controversial piece of writing. I personally like to know from “Readers write” what kind of people we Mennonites of the 21st century are.

I, and I am sure the editors as well, were expecting a number of responses. And there they are: from the political response, which we hear frequently now in the news, that “the editor should resign,” to the fact-presenting ones, which are meant to correct false information.

Looking at the way the letter is written, these responses will not likely change the writer's mind. He will likely consider them “fake news.” But readers who might have thought similarly can get the facts from the experts' responses and see the truth.

Perhaps all that we can do is pray for the writer, that God will open his mind and heart so that he can see the devastating effects of the COVID-19 virus from a more global angle, not only from his narrow, personal “human rights” view, and change his outlook.

When I read his letter again, I asked myself this question: Could I love the writer, who presents a perspective opposite from the way I think, as a neighbour, as Jesus meant it, if he were a member of my church?

HELMUT LEMKE, VANCOUVER

The writer is a member of Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship in Vancouver.

✉ Reader offers another alternative to factory farming

Re: “What would Jesus think about factory farms?” March 29, page 12, and “Digging into diet,” April 26, page 14.

The first article encourages us to abandon meat consumption entirely and support a complete plant-based diet. The second offers another solution

but suggests that his approach is not economically viable.

I'd like to offer readers another perspective. First, it would appear from the two articles that factory farming is the only solution found thus far to be a way of producing food for consumers in a way that offers a living to food producers. And factory farms conjure up images of animal abuse and environmental degradation.

There are many farms that don't fit into the image of factory farms. Many farmers make a living producing food, while caring for the land and for animals, while constantly thinking about sustainability and Christian stewardship.

In my area of Manitoba, many cattle are fed on hay and straw all winter, being housed in "loose housing," which shelters animals from the elements but allows them to freely roam an area of bush and frozen

grassland. In spring, the calves are born, and then with their mothers they roam a large area of bush and pasture until fall, when the calves are weaned.

Jesus lived at a time when people like us would "kill the fatted calf" and serve a great meal of meat and other trimmings. I believe the way many of us farm would meet with his approval.

For those concerned about the use of fossil fuels, would it not make sense to be concerned about our leisure activities more than about food production? How much fuel is used in motorized pleasure craft of all types in the summer or in airplane trips to vacation destinations? And now space tourism is to become a reality.

HAROLD PENNER, ST MALO, MAN.

The writer attends Arnaud (Man.) Mennonite Church.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Thiessen—Lemmie Annemarie (b. April 25, 2021), to Andrew and Jennifer Thiessen, First Mennonite, Calgary.

Roworth—Myles James Harrison (b. May 14, 2021), to Shelley Lepp and Sam Roworth, Toronto Mennonite.

Yang—Lana (b. Jan. 2, 2021), to Sarah and Nick Yang, Stirling Avenue Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.

Weddings

Ramsay/Schellenberg—Douglas Ramsay and Christina Schellenberg (formerly of Steinbach Mennonite, Man.), in Pitts Meadows, B.C., April 10, 2021.

Deaths

Archer—Jim, 95 (b. July 25, 1925; d. April 17, 2021), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Bauman—Henry M., 87 (b. June 27, 1933; d. Feb. 25, 2021), Bethel Mennonite, Elora, Ont.

Derksen—Erika (nee Hildebrand) 84 (b. Jan. 30, 1937; d. May 15, 2021), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Hofenk—Eva (Neudorf), 81 (b. Oct. 5, 1939; d. Feb. 1, 2021), Emmanuel Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.

Janzen—Anne (nee Doell), 83 (b. April 28, 1938; d. May 9, 2021), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Klassen—Allan, 81 (b. Nov. 20, 1939; d. Feb 17, 2021), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Klassen—Ben, 89 (b. Oct. 27, 1931; d. May 1, 2021), Grace Mennonite, Steinbach, Man.

Penner—Gertrude, 82 (b. Oct. 8, 1938; d. April 21, 2021), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Penner—Peter, 95 (b. Aug. 21, 1925; d. Feb. 25, 2020), Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite, Rabbit Lake, Sask.

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

Reikman—Edith, 88 (b. June 11, 1932; d. Jan. 19, 2021), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Rempel—Hulda (Neuman), 96 (b. Oct. 27, 1924; d. May 18, 2021), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Roth—Mildred Veronica (Roth), 86 (b. July 7, 1934; d. May 8, 2021), Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Seemann—Sarah (nee Dyck), 90 (b. June 27, 1930; d. May 19, 2021), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Siemens—Bob, 73 (b. March 23, 1947; d. Jan. 22, 2021), Fiske Mennonite, Sask.

Smucker—David J. Rempel, 71 (b. April 9, 1949; d. March 12, 2021), Home Street Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Toews—Agnes (Boldt), 85 (b. Jan. 5, 1936; d. April 15, 2021), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Wagler—Elmer, 95 (b. Jan. 20, 1926; d. Feb. 25, 2021), Hillcrest Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Wagler—Laverne, 94 (b. Sept. 18, 1926; d. Feb. 23, 2021), Hillcrest Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Warkentin—Henry P. (Hank), 82 (b. April 4, 1939; d. May 10, 2021), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Woodsit—Irene (Willms), 91 (d. April 25, 2021), Faith Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Zacharias—Marrian (Wieler), 76 (b. Sept. 27, 1944; d. April 19, 2021), Charleswood Mennonite, Winnipeg.

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

Courageous stories

Cathrin van Sintern-Dick

We have gone to places yet unknown, trusting in a God who leads and a Spirit who prays when our own words cease. Mother's Day 2020 was the beginning of many outbreaks at the Leamington (Ont.) Mennonite Home, where I serve as chaplain.

In my role with Mennonite Church Eastern Canada as a regional ministry associate, I connect with the chaplains of the regional church. During this past year, I have heard courageous stories of chaplains and residents.

Sent home in the beginning of the pandemic, many chaplains connected with residents by phone, to pray with them and share Scripture, always aware that in every conversation three are present: resident, chaplain and God. In May 2020, I went back to work within the facility. It felt strange to enter a workplace that had undergone such dramatic changes.

Communal worship, once a place of gathering to listen, learn, and lean into each other and onto God, had ceased due to infection control. But God did not cease to be present in our midst. We



found creative ways to engage, encourage and bring the message of God to the people we serve.

Instead of gathering in groups, chaplains turned to new ways of reminding residents of the presence of God. Communion tables received wheels and rolled down hallways. The communion table became a visible reminder that we serve a God who travels and walks with us, reminding us that nothing can separate us from God. It gave us courage.

Donations of audio Bibles and headsets brought God's work to the vision-impaired people who missed the communal Bible reading. Pianos received wheels and the sound of a hymn coming down the hallway lifted the spirits of residents and staff. In time, congregations recorded worship and, for the first time in years, some residents joined their congregation in worship.

At times, chaplains performed duties outside of their regular routine, and they continued to serve the people, helping with meals, screening visits or calling families to tell them how their loved one is doing.

"Several people have moved for the sake of their spouse's needs, a decision made out of love, a commitment to walk with one another through whatever is ahead," a chaplain said.

Staff and chaplains meet them at the door and, through the layers of personal protective equipment, God's presence shines through.

Seniors have shown nothing but courage. They embraced the reality of wearing masks and endured endless restrictions. One resident said to me, "What would we do without our faith?"

We continue to travel on a road, unsure of where it leads us, into a new land. There have been many changes, but speaking of God never ceased. At times, it felt like a small triumph when yet another way was found to engage and bring good news to the people of God.

Thank you to the many chaplains of MC Eastern Canada and MC Canada who continue to serve in institutions, following the call to ministry and listening to God's voice. ❧

A moment from yesterday



We wish we knew more about George Hamm of Didsbury, Alta., and his egg collection. This photo was found in *The Canadian Mennonite* files from the 1960s, but it was not published in the newspaper. His collection was later listed in the Royal Alberta Museum inventory. Even in this side view, we sense his pride and passion for these marvels of the natural world. We share his wonder and we wonder more about his story.

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



archives.mhsc.ca

IN THE IMAGE

A sign of the presence of God

Ed Olfert

Several months ago, I bled spiteously about a diabetes diagnosis. That has moved forward well, managed by diet, exercise and pills. Alongside, however, has come a new struggle with balance, dizziness and nausea. (To you medical folks, no, it's not a sugar low.) A doctor and a therapist are working with me. Again, moving forward quite well.

Of course, a story comes out of that.

On a morning walk, which now includes a distance that requires country roads, I spotted an empty whiskey bottle. This isn't good glass in a field. I scooped it up and continued my stride.

As I approached our village, I could feel those balance issues coming on. My need of the road grew somewhat broader. Soon, I needed a quarter of the road width, lurching from side to side. I carried my phone, but no, I said to myself, I can do this.

A car came from a yard. It stopped well back, and as I staggered by, tightly gripping my 26-ounce jug of Wiser's Special Blend, I noted eyes wide and staring. After I passed by, the car slowly turned onto the road, making as wide a berth as possible, still with the shocked visage pointed my way. My journey

carried on, but now I was giggling maniacally, and hoping that the driver recognized me as a retired minister. I await juicy gossip.

That hour-long morning walk has become an important time of reflection. Come along with me as I walk, as I ponder.

As I have never attended a Mennonite-connected place of learning, and with only the tiniest measure of study at any theological institution at all (Anglican), I feel free to follow in whatever direction that I sense points me toward holiness. Again, a story.

On the same walk, last week. This is a good day. I need very little road width. I hear a vehicle approaching from behind. Normally, I wait till I hear gravel stones hissing, then raise my arm to greet the passer as they go by. But this time, there is no hissing. There is little indication of approach. I turn, and note, still some distance back, a tractor trailer unit coming at me. The operator is slowing, patiently going through most of the 18 speeds, no impatient "brapp" of the engine brake. By the time the truck goes by, and I see it is carrying three large tanks, presumably to nurse a field sprayer somewhere ahead, it is barely moving.

As that truck begins the slow climb back up through the gears, I sense the presence of holiness. I picture the driver, he or she, being aware that on this desperately dry road, the dust they raise is blowing my way. To reduce that thick wall of cloud moving south, the driver chooses to slow the heavy truck to a crawl.

A lifetime of living with receptors wide open has taught me that when kindness, consideration or respect is present, that is always a sign of the presence of God. There are no exceptions.

A little unorthodox, perhaps. The upside is that God can be experienced many times a day, accompanied always by a sense of awe. I didn't recognize the truck, but if and when I encounter that driver, we will have a conversation about blessings. ☿

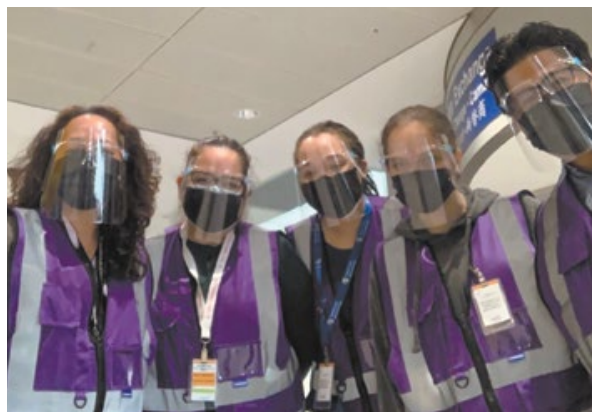


Ed Olfert (p2peho@gmail.com) gives thanks for moments of grace experienced.

Et cetera

Migrant workers receive COVID-19 support at airport

Kairos Canada is offering support to temporary foreign workers arriving at Toronto Pearson International Airport. With the help of multilingual staff, pictured at right, and an information kiosk, incoming migrant workers receive welcome bags with personal-care equipment, language-appropriate resources, and non-perishable food items. They are provided with information about vaccinations, COVID-19 testing and the process at the airport, and they are also connected to community and regional partners for support and emergency care while they are in Canada. This project receives funding from the Government of Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program.



MIND AND SOUL

Majority-world theology

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

It's too bad Christianity became a European religion. At the beginning of the seventh century, only about a quarter of the world's Christians were on that continent. The majority were strewn across vibrant communities in Africa and Asia. It's that way again.

The growth of Christianity in the non-European world over the past century is astonishing. At the start of the 20th century, two-thirds of all Christians were in Europe. Now three-quarters are outside that continent. The Global North is the minority. And it is not simply that missionary endeavours went hand-in-hand with European colonial expansion (which was often true, even for Anabaptist workers). At least nowadays, most of the global population has enough agency to pick their own religious faith, especially if they have a critical analysis of faith and history.

I am not embarrassed by evangelism. I am a Christian because of it, since I was not brought up in a church-going home, and I am very glad. I am also deeply embarrassed by the history of Christianity used oppressively. I believe any of us can learn much from cultures other than our own. Unfortunately, theology from the majority world is a minority strand in the global discourses

of Christianity.

I recently finished a book called *Theologies of the Land*, with chapters by a Cree Canadian, a Palestinian, a Black South African, a Honduran and a Chinese Malaysian. Each is a professional theologian. Each of them challenged something that I had unintentionally normalized. It goes without saying that all are firm in their beliefs in Christ. They all firmly denounce historical injustices perpetrated in the name of the faith, and the way that the Bible has often been weaponized against their people.

For instance, one chapter unpacked the theology of racial inferiority that laid the groundwork for apartheid as "God's plan." If this had been my first encounter with such a theology, I would have been aghast. It is diametrically opposed to my own understanding of Christian practice. We cannot dismiss such beliefs today as aberrant and abhorrent.

The latest book in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Shelf of Literature put out by Mennonite World Conference is about "mission." It begins by unpacking theologies of race that underpinned missionary efforts in Africa. Anabaptist theologian Drew Hart has now written two books about race in the church.

Racism, ethnocentrism and power relations of all types are more dangerous when they are subtle. Unexamined assumptions are impossible to deal with.

One never knows how the Spirit of God will work. During the sharing time at my church, I expressed my amazement at Hart's articulation (and sociological depth). During a potluck months later, one of the much-older fellows in the congregation approached me. He had now read that book and was gripped. Among his observations was whether the anti-Black racial supremacy described in American churches also operated in Canada. (Yes.) And whether Indigenous peoples in Canada faced similar theological suppression.

Of course! Mennonite Church Canada has a full-time staff worker for that very reason. "Indigenous relations" is not only the task for Steve Heinrichs. He is employed to help every congregation and participant on this path, partly by holding open doors for the rest of us to enter, learn and be in solidarity.

Majority-world theologians point out things that I might not have examined here in the minority world of the Global North. Without them, the practice of my faith would be poorer and God would be smaller. ☸



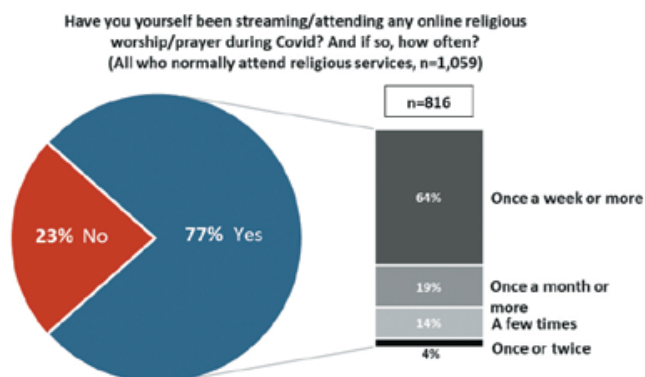
Randolph Haluza-DeLay
(haluzadelay@gmail.com)
is a former sociology professor now living in Toronto.

Et cetera

Yes to online worship services

In a survey conducted this spring, 77 percent of Canadians who regularly attended religious services pre-pandemic said they have streamed or "attended" a religious service online, most of them on a regular basis, and most praised it in the absence of no other alternative. More than three times as many said they would like online services to continue rather than discontinue them post pandemic (56 percent versus 17 percent respectively). One-in-four (26 percent) surveyed said their financial contribution to religious organizations has declined over the past year. More survey results at <https://bit.ly/34mdePo>.

Source: Angus Reid Institute



TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

False false prophets

Joshua Penfold

Are you ever afraid to say something because it might not be the popular opinion? Do you struggle to muster the courage to speak out within your congregation because you're worried you'll offend someone's well-intentioned but misinformed idea? Do you need encouragement to speak the truth in love, accepting the risk of having the things that were once held together by your silence be torn apart by speaking up?

Read the prophets, or maybe don't. They had a tough job as God's mouthpiece to the people, speaking the unpopular truth. Often, it wasn't well received.

As I've journeyed through Scripture, I've found warnings about false prophets: *"Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord"* (Jeremiah 23:16).

The false prophets were often more palatable; they had an easier time keeping their jobs because they said what people wanted to hear. They gave false hope and encouraged people to continue in their sinful ways with the delusion that their sin was okay.

True prophets were far less likable, speaking hard truths that made you squirm in your seat because their message

was convicting, difficult and true.

So I was surprised when I read the guest editorial from by the Global Anabaptist Health Network on page 2 of the May 10 issue that states:

"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)."

But false prophets don't gain our attention and grab our hearts; they soothe us and make us feel better about what we're already doing. In Scripture, a false prophet's message usually fell in line with the corrupted and sinful rulers. The true prophet's message was an unpopular, honest message that the majority found distasteful and sensational. It was true, even if the people didn't want to hear it, and it stirred up trouble for them.

The use of false prophets in comparison to COVID-19 conspiracists is a confusing, misused metaphor that misrepresents Scripture. It would actually better follow the biblical image to compare false prophets to the trusted professional opinion of the majority

endorsing the vaccine.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not discouraging vaccines or listening to professional opinions. I have received my first shot and follow public-health guidelines. I support and affirm the statement from Mennonite World Conference.

What I am concerned about is the article's muddled use of the false-prophet image. False prophets in Scripture were the opposite of sensational; that's why they were so dangerous.

Regardless of where one lands on the vaccine issue, what is sorely missing is constructive conflict between differing camps. Jesus was fantastic at fostering community amid the most dynamically different people; his disciples consisted of tax collectors, Zealots, prostitutes, Pharisees and fishermen. We, the church, are to embody this conflicting unity.

The punishment for false prophets was death. Let's not demonize those who think differently, even wrongly, wherever you stand. But let's learn to disagree enthusiastically, so that, as a song from The Brilliance says: "When I look into the face of my enemy, I see my brother, I see my sister." Then our humanity may be reconciled and our family expanded through grace.

Nobody wants to be a prophet. It can be dangerous to speak the truth, even when it's spoken in love. ❧



Joshua Penfold
(penfoldjoshua@gmail.com) is afraid to publish this.

Et cetera

Cycling for the climate

In an effort called Moving the Story, over a period of 59 days, 17 riders will bicycle 6,014 kilometres from Seattle, Wash., to Washington D.C., stopping at communities along the way to hear and share stories about climate change. The ride is organized by the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions, a U.S.-based organization that advances thinking and action in Anabaptist and other faith communities to mitigate climate change. The journey began on May 31, and the route, as well as regular updates and reflections, can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/3fQvHsm>.

Source: Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions



PERSONAL REFLECTION

Five lessons from the pandemic

Makadunyiswe Doublejoy Ngulube
Mennonite World Conference

During times of uncertainty, it is normal to be filled with doubt, fear and panic.

In this global pandemic, our routines have been disrupted and our future is uncertain.

In the midst of COVID-19, we have hope. Knowing that our eternal home is heaven, we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), and preach the gospel with urgency.

Our hope lies in God our protector. God will cover us with his feathers, and under his wings we will find refuge (Psalm 91).

There are many lessons to be drawn from this pandemic. Here are five I have taken to heart:

- **Cherish your loved ones and always tell them how much they mean to you.**

We never know what tomorrow brings, yet we live each day with hope for the next. Remember that one day, each of us will breathe our last. Cherish those around you and make the most of the moments you share with them. This gift we call life should be valued.

- **Trust in the Lord.**

This is not easy to do. Trusting God with all your heart means surrendering to his will and believing that he has the best plans for your life (Proverbs 3:5-6). It means trusting God even in the fire, knowing that he will rescue you (Daniel 3:17). It means trusting God even when your plans don't succeed, knowing that he has greater ones (Jeremiah 29:11).

- **Accept God's divine will.**

During these times, we may be filled with questions as to why bad things are happening. Instead, I encourage you to shift your perspective from asking why, to trusting God to sustain you through

challenges. Allow God to uphold you with his righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10), and comfort you as you grieve.

- **Self-sufficiency is a myth.**

Many of us felt financially secure, but some lost jobs and sources of income through the pandemic. We need to come before the altar of repentance for the times we believed in the lie of self-reliance. Reflecting on God's divine provision, ask how we have believed that we could do it all on our own.

Remind yourself that God will never leave you nor forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6).

- **Human connection and interaction are of utmost importance.**

It is easy to feel isolated during this time. Most of us have not been able to see our families or friends for a very long time. Reflect on the importance of human connection and interaction. Think of ways in which you can nurture these relationships despite the distance.

Young Anabaptists (YABs) Fellowship Week, held this year between June 20 and 26, is a time for young people to connect and interact, despite barriers of distance and time zones. It is a time for us to testify of God's love for us and to celebrate the diversity of the Body of Christ.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MWC

Remember when Jesus called Peter out onto the water: Peter took a few steps, but as soon as he looked at his circumstances, he was filled with doubt, fear and panic (Matthew 14:22-33).

I encourage young people from all Anabaptist-related churches to participate. Get together in your churches—this could be virtually or in a socially distanced setting—and join other young people in different parts of the world as we celebrate.

May the peace of Christ be with you. ☯

The author is the Africa representative on the YABs Committee. A member of Mount Pleasant Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe, she is currently in Canada, studying environmental science.



BOOK REVIEW

Children become disciples of Jesus by invitation, not demand

Raising Disciples: How to Make Faith Matter for Our Kids.
Natalie Frisk. Herald Press, 2019, 210 pages.

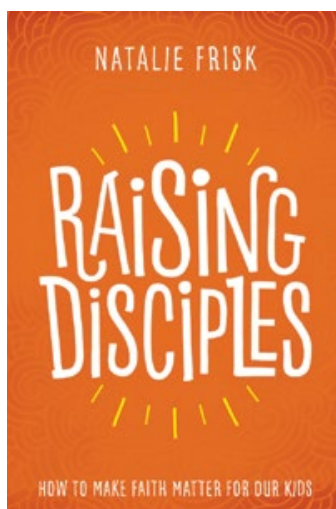
REVIEWED BY KEN OGASAWARA

Author Natalie Frisk brings her own parenting experience as well as years of pastoring children and youth into this engaging book, full of practical points on how to be intentional about teaching our faith to our children. She is the curriculum pastor of the Meeting House, an Anabaptist church with headquarters in Oakville, Ont.

She largely avoids writing about what to teach our kids; rather, she focuses on the how. This means that most parents on the wide spectrum of Christianity can learn and be encouraged by this book. She emphasizes in every chapter that at every stage of a child's development, we must keep pointing toward Jesus, what she calls "Jesus-centred parenting." She acknowledges that "[w]hile we won't be able to protect our kids from every speed bump or pitfall, we can set them up to have the very best opportunity to know, love and serve Jesus. That's what I believe it looks like to raise a disciple."

An important point Frisk makes at the beginning of the book, which I appreciated, was "the guilt trip clause," recognizing that there is enough parental guilt being experienced already, and she didn't want this book to contribute to more of it. In fact, being gracious with ourselves and our children was a recurring theme, with Frisk acknowledging the many challenges facing parents and kids today, in the various stages of their development.

True to her role as a curriculum teacher, Frisk ends each chapter with a "Try this at home" section with



questions, exercises or tips based on the preceding chapter. For example, at the end of a chapter called "Outsourcing Discipleship," where she cautions against relying exclusively on Sunday-school teachers or youth leaders to teach our kids about Jesus, she asks, "Think about who plays an important role in your child's spiritual growth. What are some intentional ways that you can connect and collaborate with them?"

One of the most important lessons I gleaned from this book was Frisk's reminder that, regardless of the thing we're trying to teach our child (praying, reading Bible stories, going to church), it must be an invitation, not a demand. She emphasizes the diverse ways that children connect with spirituality and church community, and how important it is to invite until we find a way that resonates for them.

Or, as she discusses in the later

chapters for teens and young adults, we have to give room for questions, for dissonance and even for rejection of the church, as frightening or discouraging that might be. But Frisk reminds us of the story of the Prodigal Son, of that patient father who continued to love, even as his son made decisions that pained the father. This is an encouragement to be ready to receive our child with love and open arms, not judgment. This was another beautiful reminder of the grace with which we need to view our parenting (and grandparenting), and our children, knowing that the spiritual journey is long and often difficult.

The author has succeeded in writing a clear, easy-to-apply book that is full of practical examples and insights into the unique spiritual needs of children at various stages in their lives, and how we, as parents, grandparents and mentors, can support them in their spiritual growth with love, patience and grace. %

Ken Ogasawara is a hope-filled father of two young daughters. He attends Shantz Mennonite Church in Baden, Ont., and serves as a communications specialist with Mennonite Central Committee Ontario.

Raising Disciples is the Common Read book for Mennonite Church Canada for spring and summer 2021. To borrow or buy a copy, download discussion questions or view an interview with the author, visit commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/20766.

NEWS

Germinating Conversations

New book brings together divergent views on food and farming

By Will Braun

Since 2012, the “Germinating Conversations” initiative has brought together small farmers, bigger farmers and urban folks who care about food.

At public and private events around Manitoba over the years, the goal has been to foster open dialogue on tough questions. The original impetus came from Kenton Lobe, an instructor at Canadian Mennonite University. Mennonite Central Committee and A Rocha have also provided institutional backing.

The lessons of the initiative to date have been compiled in *Germinating Conversations: Stories from a Rural-Urban Dialogue on Food, Faith, Farming and the Land*, a new 248-page book of articles, photos, quotes, lively email exchanges and more. With more than 30 contributors, the book is unique in that it offers a wide and divergent range of views within a single volume.

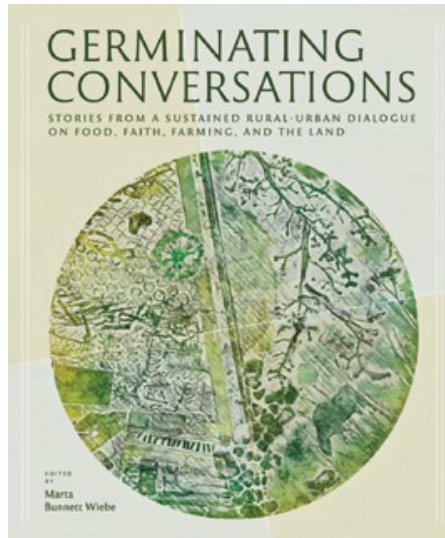
The following article is my contribution to the book. It is adapted from *Germinating Conversations* and reprinted by permission.

Dogma, Friendship and Purple Gas*

In principle, I believe it is important to dialogue across the craggy gap that separates small farmers and big farmers. But in practice, after a summer of spray planes overhead and subsidy announcements for the never-satisfied big boys, I feel a lot more like ranting than chatting.

Dialogue is tough. Sometimes it feels worthwhile. Sometimes it feels like a lot of work to get even close to the real issues. Sometimes it feels like civil difference of opinion that may or may not be worth the fossil fuels expended to get everyone in the same place. Maybe the current state of our climate and food system demand something more interesting than civility.

On one level, I have felt really good about the times I participated in Germinating Conversations events. As much as big



farmers get under my skin, I am genuinely curious about their operations and appreciative of their practicality. When I get face-to-face with people of differing views, I almost always realize they are less wrong, and I am less right than I felt previously. I have never regretted engaging in conversation with someone of differing views, and I have done it on a number of fronts in addition to farming.

But I came to a sour realization last February. I attended an Ag Canada focus group session for which I was randomly selected. I listened to several typical farmers for most of two hours. It was sad. Their disdain for any whiff of taxes was matched only by their dogmatic sense of entitlement to ever-more generous government subsidies. And, of course, they felt “the consumer” doesn’t understand them at all, and any hint of criticism is unthinkably unfounded. Their overwhelming concern was for one thing, and that one thing was not the health of Canadians or the vitality of the planet or their families’ quality of life.

I found it repulsive.

Not that it mattered, but I shared how my wife and I are proud to receive no government subsidies, and we have great relations

with consumers. On the question of what people in the room do to address climate change, I didn’t even bother saying that basically everything we do falls into that category.

Then they all swaggered off in their shiny 4x4s, or at least that’s what it felt like.

It is not as though I did not already know that farmers tend to resent taxes, are quick to the subsidy trough, and get suspiciously defensive in the face of criticism. I knew that, but hearing it so nakedly reminded me how big the gap in values really is between small and big farmers.

Again, these were not Germinating Conversations participants. But it was a candid look into the big-ag psyche, without the cushioning of a quasi-church setting. And it made me realize that, on a deeper level, the Germinating Conversations events were not entirely satisfying.

The focus group certainly didn’t make me want to sit down with more farmers. The big farmers around the Germinating Conversations table would not sound quite the same as those focus-group farmers, but they are willing participants in the same government-coddled, carbon-committed, profit-driven, health-oblivious food system that delivers obesity, unthinkable amounts of waste, unconscionable advertising aimed at kids, low prices to consumers and, above all, profits to shareholders—all of this whether or not an individual big farmer has a meaningful moment smelling the fresh earth crouched down in a field in spring. With its subsidies—including a direct subsidy for every ounce of gas and diesel consumed—and environmental externalities, it is a system that directly and effectively undercuts our efforts as small farmers, however imperfect our efforts are.

Is that how we talk at Germinating Conversations events? We have gotten close on occasion, but much goes unsaid. It takes frustratingly long to get to the crux. Or maybe my frustration is just that I am



PHOTO COURTESY OF WILL BRAUN

Will Braun, who wrote one of the articles in *Germinating Conversations*, is pictured with his son Matoli on their farm south of Morden, Man.

too chicken—no offence to chickens—to say what I need to say when I have the chance. Maybe it's just taxing to be an outlier watching a \$600,000 combine and a bulldozer of a food system drive by while I'm on my knees in the dirt.

Despite the sour feeling in my heart, I still believe dialogue is essential. Two reasons:

- **First**, we are all on God's good earth together, and we have to find a way to make it work. Polarization is perhaps the greatest threat, and the only way to address it is to listen genuinely to people of differing inclination. Sometimes there is something more important than being right.
- **Second**, small farmers and city foodies need to talk with big farmers, because without land there is no food, and big farmers control nearly all of the arable land. My guess is that it is slightly easier to win them over than buy them out. I don't see too many other options. We gotta eat.

I recognize my comments are raw. As a family we have put a lot on the line with our little small-ag lifestyle experiment. We have made many financial sacrifices. In so many ways we love what we do. To a large extent,

we eat what we produce and produce what we eat. It is an incredible privilege. Every plant that grows and animal that is born is a blessing. We are tremendously grateful.

This life also comes with constant reminders that we are outliers. Hundreds of times a year we see pieces of equipment drive right past our yard that are worth more than our entire property. Every church occasion includes food from the system we work so hard to replace. Every government program and announcement reminds us that we are on the fringe. Of course, the big farmers feel they are on their own fringe, too, hard done by in an urbanizing world with an enemy Liberal government.

The crazy thing is that, despite the harsh feelings I have about big farmers, if I were to run into one of the big farmers I have gotten to know through *Germinating Conversations*, I would be genuinely happy to see them. Just the thought of it now makes me happy. For despite whatever has been lacking or unsaid in the dialogue to date, just the coming close has created friendship. And I suspect there is something about friendship that supersedes any debate over glyphosate, purple gas, or wetland drainage.

Perhaps in winter, when the bombardment of sprayers has abated, I might feel more like talking. Hopefully. And hopefully the topic of their all-inclusive winter getaways won't come up. ❧

(In Manitoba, farmers have long used fuel that is dyed purple to distinguish it from regular fuel. This purple gas is not subject to the same taxes as other fuel.)*



Will Braun and his family live on a 3.5-hectare property south of Morden, Man. They raise purebred Icelandic sheep and bees

and tend a garden. They are part of Pembina Mennonite Fellowship.

Germinating Conversations is available from CommonWord.ca at <https://bit.ly/3oTBfGE>.



To read an interview with Marta Bunnett Wiebe, the book's editor, visit <https://bit.ly/GermCon>

During sickness, but in health, with joy, not sorrow

Pandemic forces couples to reassess wedding plans

By Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

The bride and groom may have hoped for a traditional church wedding with an entourage of attendants, surrounded by all their friends and extended family, followed by a fabulous catered wedding dinner. What they ended up with might have been a scaled-down gathering of fewer than a dozen people and a simple backyard meal with everyone wearing masks, or even a drive-by, no-contact reception.

The past year's coronavirus pandemic has dramatically changed these special once-in-a-lifetime events. Couples who have idealized their dream weddings have been forced to make hard choices: get married now without all the festivities and all the people they want to invite, or postpone the nuptials to an unforeseen date when things have become more normal again.

Three newly married couples from Mennonite Church B.C. congregations shared their experiences with *Canadian Mennonite* as they reflected on how their wedding plans changed due to the pandemic, and how they adjusted.

Katherine and Samih

A bilingual wedding at Peace Church on 52nd in Vancouver, on Thanksgiving Day, Oct. 12, 2020, was the third attempt for Katherine Kandalraft, who comes from Australia, and Samih Saltah, who comes from Syria, residents of Vancouver since early 2020. Their original plans to marry in Australia in December 2019 and in Vancouver in May 2020 both were thwarted. A Thanksgiving Day wedding proved especially meaningful as they realized they had much to be thankful for.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BRIDAL COUPLES

Despite the pandemic, Samih Saltah and Katherine Kandalraft managed to plan a special wedding in 2020.

"In terms of size, we actually had a larger wedding than we would have otherwise had," says Samih. "We were able to share our joy with many people from across the world that would not otherwise have been able to attend."

At the time, the province of British Columbia allowed wedding gatherings of up to 50 people. So, although none of their overseas family members could attend in person, many among their church family—Katherine had become a member of the 52nd Avenue congregation just the day before—were present for the celebration, carefully following safety protocols. The couple incorporated into the wedding ceremony recordings by faraway family

members offering blessings and prayer and reading Scripture.

"In some ways, the pandemic was the great leveller," says Katherine. "This way, we welcomed on equal terms family and friends from five continents and nine time zones to a livestreamed ceremony filled with joy."

Stephanie and Raymond

On March 28 of this year, Stephanie and Raymond (no surnames given) were married at Vancouver's Chinatown Peace Church, their home congregation. They had become engaged in 2019 and had hoped to hold their wedding in October 2020. When the pandemic hit, they postponed the date until May 8, 2021, then had to re-evaluate that when restrictions didn't ease over time.

"Ideally, we would have gone for May 8 and done all the traditional things: bridal shower, tea ceremony with family, a wedding party," says Stephanie.

The two went back and forth on details of how to proceed with a renewed plan, including only 10 attendees allowed by law.



With their parents as witnesses, Raymond and Stephanie are united in marriage by Pastor Tim Kuepfer at Chinatown Peace Church on March 28.

They considered an outdoor ceremony, a drive-by reception, a Zoom wedding, but none of those felt right.

Finally, the couple decided to hold a small wedding at the end of March, only about a week before the event. Because of the minimalism of the occasion, they could implement plans quickly. Wearing a simple dress and cardigan, Stephanie was escorted down the aisle by her father for the brief ceremony of vows, prayer and register signing. Only immediate family were present. As B.C. restaurants were still open at that time for indoor dining, everyone could celebrate afterwards at a local Chinese restaurant.

The newlyweds hope to have a more public celebration “when things get back to normal,” Stephanie says, probably sometime next year, at which the bride says she would wear a traditional wedding dress.

Stephanie says the change of plan has given her a different perspective on weddings. She admits it was hard not to include the many family members who had hoped to be there, as she and Raymond didn’t want to disappoint anyone. She thinks that perhaps the expectations about weddings in general may change now as people realize they don’t have to do things the traditional way.

“Weddings used to be a big deal; now [people say] there are more important things in life,” she concludes.

Nicole and Maxwell

Nicole Redekop, a member of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, and Maxwell Stow of Living Waters Church in Ft. Langley became engaged in February 2020, shortly before the pandemic started. They were married on April 10, 2021, at Canadian Memorial United Church in Vancouver.

The Stows had originally planned for a large wedding of 140 to 150 people, but COVID-19 changed that. The ceremony date remained fixed, but a large reception was postponed until a later date. The family was able to gather for an outdoor dinner at Max’s parents’ home after the ceremony.

“It was definitely a tough decision to go forward with the wedding without having all the people that we wanted to celebrate with there in person, but we didn’t want



Newlyweds Maxwell and Nicole (Redekop) Stow celebrate outside their wedding venue on April 10.

to keep rescheduling constantly with the changing restrictions,” says Max.

Working with a restricted number of 10 people, including bride, groom and officiant, was a challenge, but they managed to have family members act as wedding planner and livestream videographer, thus counting as venue staff and not part of the 10.

“We tried our best, given the limitations, to make it as close to a ‘traditional’ ceremony, with using music and so on, and it was also held in a church,” says Max. They livestreamed the ceremony through a private link and had a little over 80 households tune in, more than could have watched if not for COVID-19.

The couple believe there are pros and cons to wedding planning, whether or not in a pandemic, but in the end they feel satisfied with their scaled-down wedding. “Weddings will definitely be different for quite a while due to the effect that this has had on our lifestyles,” says Nicole. “We feel that we would definitely have done the wedding differently if it were not a pandemic, but considering everything, we were happy how it turned out.” ❧

News brief

Youth workers event explores innovative ways to do church

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada’s youth leaders’ virtual retreat on May 8 focused on the theme of “Courageous imagination: Journeying with youth, exploring new paths, and God’s calling in a changing world.” Four guests involved in innovative ways to do church shared as part of a panel discussion. They responded to questions about how they experience God in their work, and how God is calling the church in a changing world. Panellists included Wendy Janzen, who pastors two forest churches; Jessica Reesor-Rempel of Pastors in Exile (PiE), serving young adults inside and outside church settings; and Judith and Colin McCartney, co-directors of Connect City, an organization focused on church planting and leadership formation in Toronto, who have helped to plant Soul Church, which Judith pastors, and the Warden Underground, which ministers primarily among youth and young adults in the Black community. The panellists shared about spiritual practices that ground them, and how the pandemic forced the church to do new things: for example, PiE held outdoor “night church” by lamplight, and Bible study around a campfire. The four described how God surprises people into ministries beyond what they could have planned or imagined. Katie Goerzen Sheard, coordinator of youth events for the regional church, facilitated the event.

—BY JANET BAUMAN

The growing phenomenon of cohabitation

Workshops explore attitudes towards commitment and marriage

By Joanne De Jong
Alberta Correspondent

“What questions does cohabitation raise for you?” asked Irma Fast Dueck at a Portable CMU event hosted by Springridge Mennonite Church in Pincher Creek, Alta., in May.

The associate professor of practical theology at Canadian Mennonite University delivered a series of three workshops on Zoom entitled, “Without strings, without rings: Couples living together.” Springridge Mennonite invited Lethbridge Mennonite and Holyrood Mennonite to join in.

The workshops were divided into three parts: past and current trends, looking at cohabitation through a faith perspective, and relating as a community to those who cohabit. Stories included how living together before marriage used to be rare, with the dating pool consisting of young people from church, Bible school and Mennonite weddings. Younger participants talked about the anxiety of so many dating choices, made challenging through online dating apps, speed dating and greater mobility.

“Currently, a majority of young people think it’s a good idea to live together,” said Fast Dueck, adding, “Since dating culture is no longer oriented towards marriage, fewer people are choosing to be married.”

A common reason she hears for cohabiting is to “test drive” the relationship, although there is no statistical evidence divorce rates decrease after cohabitation, she said. Other reasons include cultural pressure, financial convenience, and mistrust of institutions such as government, the church or marriage. After witnessing a generation of broken relationships, fear of commitment can be an issue. Social factors such as contraception, abortion, and a longer period between



Irma Fast Dueck

puberty and marriage, also play a part.

While studies show that couples who cohabit have an increased chance of divorce, poverty, and abuse, she said, “Cohabitators with marriage plans are involved in unions that are not qualitatively different from those of their married counterparts. . . . Students say, ‘We believe in long-time, committed relationships, and that is good news,’” said Fast Dueck.

Another statistically significant pattern, she said, is that many congregants who cohabit leave the church, returning after marriage.

When searching for a biblical model of marriage, Fast Dueck said she asks her students to look through the Bible and identify the perfect Christian family. This proves difficult, as the Bible includes cultures who accepted concubines and polygamy. Four different sets of household codes are mentioned in the New Testament.

“Marriage is static and always has been,” she said, “but God’s Word is heard in every generation.”

Fast Dueck said she laments those who want to wait until they have money for a wedding or home, and she said, “This has nothing to do with marriage.”

She said she sees the world shaping people in ways they don’t even notice, with relationships no longer seen as having worth outside of self-interest, she cited American economist Victor Lebow, who blames capitalism on the commodification of relationships, where consumption is frequently seen as people’s primary role in the world and, if their needs are not met, the contract ends.

So, what makes a marriage “Christian”?

Fast Dueck gave three answers:

- A **marriage** is Christian in that it opens people up to God. She said that theologian Stanley Hauerwas pointed out that healthy sexuality requires vulnerability and connection, and that God’s love comes to people in vulnerability, birth in a manger, death on a cross and with arms outstretched.
- A **Christian** marriage is a covenant. “The mystery of God’s love is found in vulnerability and covenant,” she said. Christian love is God’s love. A lifetime promise. One quote shared was, “It’s not love that holds your marriage together, it’s marriage that holds your love together.”
- A **Christian** marriage begins with worshipping God in community. It is not a private affair, she said. Weddings today often seem more about the couple than the greater community and family.

When counselling a couple, Fast Dueck suggested, “Why not allow your church to plan the wedding?” It can be meaningful when friends are trusted with the decorations or choosing the Scripture readings. It was noted that when a marriage is not blessed by the church, the church doesn’t feel responsibility in the same way.

“What is a more radical witness than a promise of love and commitment?” she asked the participants. An act of will and discipline? According to her: “A Christian marriage is countercultural—an act of resistance. There is something about marriage that helps us to love.”

The workshops wrapped up with a challenge to create spaces where people can talk and listen to each other without fear.

Fast Dueck told of an event to which young people were invited to come and freely discuss multiple topics, such as purity, pornography, and how to break up with someone in a good way. After the event, she said one participant commented, “Boy, I’ve never had a chance to talk about these things in this kind of way.”

Another participant said that if people never hear the struggles others face in their relationships, they will not feel safe to share their own. ❧

Author, bookstore owner dispute 'censorship' claim

By Ross W. Muir
Managing Editor

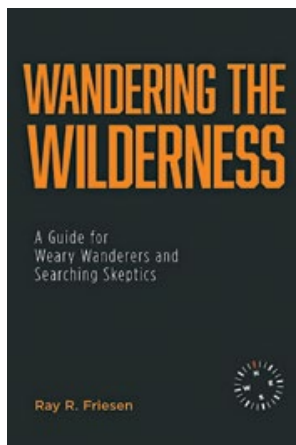
“Manitoba book store censors retired pastor’s book” was the title of a press release sent to *Canadian Mennonite* earlier this year by author Ray Friesen, a retired Mennonite pastor in Swift Current, Sask.

“Hull’s Family Bookstores in Winnipeg and Steinbach (Man.) recently pulled all copies of *Wandering the Wilderness: A Guide for Weary Wanderers and Searching Skeptics*,” the release claimed. “I was told one customer complained that the book says all gods are equal,” Friesen is quoted as saying. “I have no idea how the reader came to that conclusion. I believe in one God—with many names but one God—revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.”

Wondering if this was a regular practice at Hull’s, Friesen said in the release, “I think it is sad when a bookstore owner decides which Christian perspectives people should be reading and which are unacceptable. Christian faith and spirituality, and the good news of Jesus Christ benefit most when there is lively yet respectful debate among various viewpoints. One person or another, or one group or another, trying to censor all views but their own, is always harmful to the cause of Christ and the dream of God for us and our world.”

Friesen described his book as combining “the 21st century research of Dr. René Brown (*The Gifts of Imperfection*) with the teachings of the Bible on what Jesus called ‘Abundant Life,’ and then shows, using examples from [Friesen’s] own life and the lives of people he knows, how this ‘Abundant Living’ can become real. ‘It was as the result of my own journey, particularly with cancer and chemotherapy, that I came to believe more in God even as I believed less about God, the God who is mystery.’”

When asked to comment on Friesen’s release, Bruce Careless, president of Hull’s Family Bookstores, responded with a



nearly 2,000-word statement, casting the author as the problem, not the bookstore.

“When you read that Hull’s removed a ‘retired pastor’s book,’ technically, the statement is true, but it creates a very misleading impression . . . and is partially false marketing,” the statement reads. “While ‘informed by the Bible’ is also in his press release, it needs to be noted that, by his own admission (page 7, *Wandering the Wilderness*), [Friesen] says, ‘I do not believe that the Bible is the Word of God,’ although he says he believes ‘that God speaks God’s word to us through the collection of writings generally known as the Bible.’ This is a man who was kicked out of a Mennonite church for heresy (pages 208-209), ‘so theological conformity was no longer high on his [Friesen’s] list of priorities.’”

The statement, which listed a number of other problems with the theology of Friesen’s book, describes Hull’s as “a broad-spectrum, interdenominational but

solidly Christian company. We completely understand and respect the fact that both individuals and churches will look, equally sincerely, at the exact same Scriptures and come to different interpretations/understandings. . . .

“However, as a solidly Christian operation, we do look to what unites all true Christians as parameters for what we carry. We take the Bible as the ‘God-breathed’ . . . absolutely error-free and authoritative Word of God (II Timothy 3:16 and 17). . . .

“So when we decide whether or not something is available through Hull’s, the owners are not ‘trying to censor all views but their own.’ ‘Censoring’ is to try to ban something, to keep people from getting their hands on it. In today’s world, one can easily find anything you want to read/look at somewhere.” [Friesen noted in his press release that his book is still available on Amazon. Ed.]

“But it is completely fair and reasonable not to expect every store to carry every perspective. . . . Our niche is as a Christian outlet, so anything one finds here must be in some way compatible with/defendable from Scripture, and not contradictory to those truths Something may be challenging, but it will never make God out to be less than he is, nor teach values contrary to the Bible. . . .

“So naturally, if something potentially problematic comes to our attention, it is sensible to first pull the product, then investigate carefully, rather than leaving it available, pending results of a careful evaluation. Sometimes that may mean a product is returned to the shelves. However, if a product is found to be not in line with [Hull’s] values . . . then the author will, of course, be notified accordingly and the product returned to them. That is precisely what was done with Mr. Friesen’s books,” the statement concluded. ❧

The gospel is a seed buried within the church

Regina congregation learns about the connection between the Ethiopian church and the Book of Acts

Story and Screenshot by Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent
REGINA

Pease Mennonite Church gathers for Bible study every Tuesday evening. Since the pandemic began, the Regina-based house church has been meeting via Zoom, enabling members who no longer live in Regina to also attend.

Since Easter, the group has been studying the Book of Acts. Co-pastors Otto and Florence Driedger invited guest speakers to help the congregation connect the activity of the early church in Acts with what is happening in the church today.

Speakers have included Ryan Siemens, Mennonite Church Saskatchewan's executive minister; Doug Klassen, executive minister for MC Canada; and Arli Klassen, coordinator of regional representatives for Mennonite World Conference.

As they planned to study the story of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, Otto said, "Wouldn't it be great to have someone from Ethiopia [speak to us]?"

They found that someone in the person of Fanosie Legesse, who is intercultural minister of MC Eastern Canada. He joined the group on May 11 to explore Acts 8:26-43 and talk about the church in Ethiopia today.

"The scriptures are very important," said Legesse. "The good news of Jesus Christ was spread by the Scriptures." For Jesus' disciples, the Scriptures were what is now referred to as the Old Testament, which included the prophetic books.

Like the Ethiopian eunuch in the story, who doesn't understand what he is reading by the prophet Isaiah, people often neglect Bible study because they find the Bible difficult to understand, said Legesse. He encouraged participants not to give up their practice of studying the Bible.

"Let us live by what we understand," he said, "and work and pray together to understand what we don't understand." He noted that Philip and the eunuch do just that. In response to the Holy Spirit's leading, Philip approaches the eunuch's chariot and asks if he understands what he is reading. At the eunuch's invitation, Philip explains the Scripture to him.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been in existence since AD 340, and today about 60 percent of the population identify

The Roman Catholic Church accounts for less than 1 percent of the population, and there are also many Jews and Muslims in the country.

"In 1989, when I was 17, I became a Christian when I heard Christians preaching the gospel despite intense persecution," said Legesse. "They faced persecution from the government, from [African] traditional religion, and also from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church."

The believers who inspired Legesse



Fanosie Legesse, middle row, left, was guest speaker during one of Peace Mennonite Church's midweek Bible studies. Also pictured, from left to right, top row: Florence Driedger, Donna Schulz and Otto Driedger; middle row: Peter and Margaret Peters, and Peichen Gu; and bottom row: Eve and Rich White, Yao Che and Dario Hernandez. Zahara Alli and Eugene Laramee joined the meeting after this screenshot was taken.

as Orthodox. Many of those, including Legesse's parents, are nominally Orthodox but also adhere to African traditional religion, which includes practices such as witchcraft and animism.

to give his life to Christ were part of Meserete Kristos Church, a Mennonite World Conference church headquartered in Ethiopia.

Prior to that, Legesse had been a follower

of the Marxist-Leninist teachings of Ethiopian president Mengistu. “He did a lot of good that made sense for us,” he said. “But the communists forced everything by gun. That made sense to me until I read the book of Acts.”

Mengistu persecuted the country’s Christians, forcing its 5,000 members underground and confiscating the schools and clinics they operated. But this didn’t stop the spread of the gospel. Church members would cut pages out of their Bibles and hand them out to people passing by, said Legesse.

“Christians were praying, studying the Bible and loving each other,” he said. “When someone’s house burned to the ground, we would build it the next day.”

This practical discipleship became irresistible, and even some of Mengistu’s own party members became Christians.

Legesse described the gospel as a seed buried within the church. He recalled how, at one time, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church taught more about the saints than about Jesus. But the seed of the gospel was, nevertheless, buried there.

“As soon as people start praying, the seed starts to grow,” he said.

Legesse said that today, in spite of persecution, Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia numbers around 600,000 and is the largest Mennonite church in the world.

“The gospel is powerfully preached and practised,” he said. “If you believe it, you live it out.” He added, “Mennonites in Ethiopia are feeding the hungry, caring for orphans and preaching the gospel.” And they are doing this within the context of 80 to 85 competing languages and the lingering effects of colonization, he noted.

“Throughout the struggle,” said Legesse, “the kingdom of God is advancing. . . . It all started because of Philip’s preaching the gospel to the eunuch.”

Peace Mennonite was established in 1986 as a daughter church of Grace Mennonite, also in Regina. At first, the church rented space in a school, but when six core families left the city for job opportunities elsewhere, the remaining congregation, which includes international students, former refugees, retirees and ex-offenders, began meeting in the Driedgers’ home, until the pandemic came along. ❧

Children’s book tells Mennonite immigration adventure

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

Manitoba Correspondent

When MaryLou Driedger uncovered a forgotten family story, she knew she had to write about it. What followed was *Lost on the Prairie*, her first novel for middle-school readers, published by Heritage House on May 28.

The story follows Peter, a 12-year-old boy who gets separated from his family on their journey to Canada in 1907 and goes on a big adventure to find his way back to them.

The book is inspired by Driedger’s own grandfather, Peter Schmidt. Her great-grandparents, along with a large wave of Mennonites, emigrated from Kansas to Saskatchewan at the turn of the last century. Journeying by train, Driedger’s grandfather and his brothers were each assigned to a boxcar in which to watch the livestock and belongings.

“When the train arrived in Humboldt, Sask., the car that had my grandfather in it and the family’s horses had disappeared,” Driedger says.

She read about this drama in her great-aunt’s memoir, which she discovered in 2014 while helping a relative move. The two pages describe the parents’ worry but don’t reveal more information, although Peter did reunite with his family. With no living relatives able to fill in the blanks, most of the book is Driedger’s imagination of what might have ensued.

But behind that imagination is extensive research. She dug into old train records to figure out the route of her grandfather’s train. She travelled to the Lake Traverse Reservation in South Dakota, Peter’s first train stop in the book, where she spoke with a Sisseton Wahpeton elder and a historian. She pored over local newspapers from 1907 and connected with a cultural reader to ensure her manuscript was culturally and historically accurate.

Driedger comes to the research and

writing process with a lot of experience. Originally from Steinbach, Man., and a member of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, she has written for children’s curricula like Jubilee and Shine, and



THE CARILLON PHOTO BY JORDAN ROSS

MaryLou Driedger’s new novel is inspired by her grandfather’s immigration from Kansas to Saskatchewan in 1907.

contributed to *The Mennonite Mirror* magazine and the *Winnipeg Free Press*. She has been a columnist for 36 years at *The Carillon*, Steinbach’s local paper. When she retired from teaching, she decided to start writing for children.

She hopes adults will read this novel, too. Post-pandemic, she plans to visit seniors homes with the book, which will bring back memories for many residents.

The novel demonstrates the value of documenting family stories. “This whole book came out of the fact that my great aunt took the time . . . to sit down and write these brief memories of her life,” Driedger says. ❧

A virtual book launch (<https://bit.ly/3wFQV3j>) will be held on June 16 through McNally Robinson Booksellers.



Investigation reveals misconduct by influential Mennonite leader

Canadian Mennonite

Two Mennonite organizations have reported findings of inappropriate sexual behaviour by influential leader Frank H. Epp.

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCC) announced on May 27 that they cooperated on an investigation conducted by an independent team, based on a disclosure that was decades old and was recently brought forward again.

Epp, who died in 1986, served in a variety of leadership roles in the Mennonite community in Canada. He also served on the presidium of Mennonite World Conference and ran for public office in Canada in 1979 and 1980.

Both organizations report that an original complaint was brought forward in the 1990s, about Epp's actions while he was a credentialled Mennonite pastor and was also serving as chair of MCC's Peace Section and a member of MCC Canada's board and executive committee. However, the organizations now recognize that their past policies and procedures did not appropriately address sexual violence. "We acknowledge that our policies and response at the time did not meet our current standards," says MCC's statement (<https://bit.ly/2R22B0U>)

Epp was ordained in what is now MC Eastern Canada and served as part-time pastor of four Mennonite congregations in Canada and the United States.

In February 2021, a formal misconduct complaint was submitted to the regional church. The investigation was based on the current denominational protocol, "Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures" (commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/16285) and reported a finding of ministerial sexual misconduct.

The regional church recognized that its past policies "were restrictive to both the complainant and MC Eastern Canada's potential action." The statement says:



PHOTO BY DAVID L. HUNSBERGER,
MENNONITE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

Frank H. Epp

"[MC Eastern Canada's] Executive Council and Leadership Council deeply regret the harm that was caused to the survivor and the survivor's family by [our] actions and inactions. We are sorry that our response so many years ago caused more harm and did not communicate that we took your experience seriously" (<https://bit.ly/2R2NbjQ>).

The MC Eastern Canada statement explains, "Though the investigators acknowledge that lacking Epp's version of events creates a deficit in information gathering, through many interviews and historical documents they found sufficient and compelling corroboration for the allegation of ministerial sexual misconduct . . . The nature of the misconduct was in the form of sexual advances and sexual touch, which included hugging, kissing and sexual intercourse."

Leah Reesor-Keller, MC Eastern Canada executive minister, said, "As a community of faith, we are on a heart-wrenching and sacred journey of coming to terms with harm committed by trusted leaders. As more cases of historic ministerial sexual misconduct come to light, [MC Eastern Canada] is continuing to learn and grow in best practices for investigations and for reporting on the findings. We have learned from survivor advocacy organizations that naming the form of the misconduct provides clarity on the magnitude of the findings so that they cannot be minimized or inflated if left to the imagination."

MCC's investigation also reflected its current policy and determined that the complaint of sexual harassment was founded. The statement reads, "MCC grieves the pain and loss experienced by the victim survivor through the harmful actions of a trusted leader. We affirm the victim survivor's courage and resilience for stepping forward."

A representative for Epp's wife and daughters offered this statement to *Canadian Mennonite*: "As family of the late Frank Epp, we acknowledge and accept the findings of the investigation, by Mennonite Central Committee Canada and Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, into allegations of sexual misconduct by our husband and father. We recognize the suffering of the victim and their family. We hope and pray for healing for all those affected."

Epp was a professor at Conrad Grebel University College at the time of his death. He had previously served as president there from 1973 to 1979. In an official statement (<https://bit.ly/34yNlpS>), Grebel president Marcus Shantz said, "Since this misconduct occurred outside the scope of Epp's employment at Grebel, the College was not a party to the investigation." He added, "One of our responses will be to conduct a third-party search of

our archival files to determine whether Grebel is in possession of any information relevant to this matter.”

Epp was the editor of this magazine’s predecessors *The Canadian Mennonite* (1953 to 1967) and *Mennonite Reporter* (1971 to 1973). *Canadian Mennonite* was not part of this investigation and is not aware of allegations related to Epp’s tenure at this publication.

The organizations acknowledge the pain of those harmed by sexual misconduct and encourage survivors to seek

counselling and to report any acts of abuse, violence or trauma:

- **MC Eastern Canada** says reports of misconduct by a credentialed leader can be sent to Church Leadership Minister Marilyn Rudy-Froese at mrudyfroese@mcec.ca. It also offers a confidential venue through Carizon Counselling Services, phone number 519-743-6333, ext. 1 or email intaketeam@carizon.ca. Callers should reference the MC Eastern Canada Sponsored Program.

- **MCC invites** email reports of incidents involving MCC personnel, to be sent to safeguarding@mcc.org.

- **In addition** to these, Grebel points to the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office at the University of Waterloo for reporting incidents, past or present, that involve Grebel. Call 519-888-4567, ext. 40025 or email m23ross@uwaterloo.ca.

- **For incidents** involving Epp’s role at *Canadian Mennonite*, contact publisher Tobi Thiessen at publisher@canadian-mennonite.org.

Pastor of Manitoba church graduates from AMBS

By Annette Brill Bergstresser

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary
ELKHART, IND.



Joshua Janzen, originally of Aurora, Neb., and currently residing in Altona, Man., was honored during the May 1 commencement service of

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS). He anticipates graduating in December 2021 with a master of divinity degree with a major in Christian faith formation.

Janzen, who has completed part of his degree at a distance through AMBS’s MDiv Connect program, plans to continue in his current assignment as associate pastor of youth ministry at Berghaler Mennonite Church of Altona. He previously earned a bachelor of arts in Bible and religion and biology from Bethel College in North Newton, Kan. He is married to Stephanie Janzen.

“AMBS pushed me, shaped me and challenged me as I grew deeper in my relationship with God and my relationships with others,” Janzen says of his time at the seminary. “I came to AMBS straight from college; AMBS is the place where I grew up.”

Twenty-one graduates were honored during the May 1 commencement service, which was held in the seminary’s Chapel

of the Sermon on the Mount with limited attendance to follow Elkhart County’s COVID-19 safety guidelines. The event was also livestreamed; a recording is available at ambs.edu/commencement.

Cyneatha Millsaps of Elkhart—a 2008 AMBS graduate who serves as executive director of Mennonite Women U.S.A., co-pastor of Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, and chair of the board of directors of the new Tolson Center for Community Excellence in Elkhart—gave the commencement address.

Fifteen graduates earned master of divinity degrees; two earned master of arts in Christian formation degrees; and two earned master of arts: Theology and peace studies degrees. Two students received a graduate certificate in theological studies.

The graduating class comprised 13 men and eight women from seven countries—Argentina, Canada, Chile, Ethiopia, France, India and the United States—on five continents. Eight of the graduates completed at least part of their seminary studies at a distance

through the Master of Divinity Connect program or the graduate certificate.

Eleven of the graduates are serving in pastoral ministry roles or are seeking pastoral assignments; three are discerning future options for ministry, mission or service work; four plan to be involved with education or research; two are engaged in social work; two plan to pursue further studies or training; and one is serving a church agency. %



AMBS PHOTO

Twenty-one graduates were honored during the May 1 commencement service, which was held in the seminary’s Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount with limited attendance to follow Elkhart County’s COVID-19 safety guidelines. The event was also livestreamed; a recording is available at ambs.edu/commencement.

PEOPLE

Public-health nurse postpones retirement to work in northern Ontario

It was a 'life-giving' learning experience

By Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondent
KITCHENER, ONT.

After more than 40 years as a nurse, Lily Hiebert Rempel was starting to ease into retirement. That is when COVID-19 hit, and the health-care system needed more nurses, not fewer. She was not prepared to go into full-time critical care nursing but, with her public-health experience, she did have much to offer.

At the beginning of the pandemic, she was working part-time for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) as a liaison for Low German-speaking Mennonites, connecting with their health units and service providers. Prior to that, she coordinated MCC's Low German program.

A call from her professional nurses association for COVID-19 surge public-health nurses in northern Ontario caught her attention.

Unfortunately, a cycling accident in April 2020, that resulted in a concussion, put a halt to the idea, but only for a while. The idea kept on coming back and, when her concussion symptoms eased, she applied to Indigenous Services Canada. She went through an interview process and online learning for nurses, in preparation for working as a public-health nurse in the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LILY HIEBERT REMPEL

Lily Hiebert Rempel inside the nurses station at Sandy Lake First Nation in northwestern Ontario, where she worked as a public-health nurse on three different occasions during the pandemic.



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Sandy Lake First Nation, a community of 3,500 people, northeast of Kenora, Ont.

Travelling to the community meant a 14-day quarantine before leaving, and then taking a charter flight from Toronto to Thunder Bay and then to Sioux Lookout with other health-care providers bound for northern communities.

In Sandy Lake, basic health care is provided by a team of around a dozen nurses working out of a nurses station. Two work full time. Most others came in for four-week rotations during the pandemic. There is no full-time doctor or dentist in



The nurses residence at Sandy Lake First Nation, where Lily Hiebert Rempel and other nurses stayed during their four-week rotations in the community doing public-health work.

the community, so people travel to Thunder Bay, Winnipeg or Sioux Lookout for other medical services. Hiebert Rempel says it is challenging for people in the community to develop a sense of connection with their health-care provider.

She completed three, four-week rotations in Sandy Lake, one in June 2020, then one from mid-July to mid-August 2020, and most recently this March. She said she felt like a new nurse again, with so much to learn.

She provided community education about COVID-19 transmission and followed up with people returning to the community from medical appointments in other cities. She also did some prenatal and postpartum public-health work, making a few home visits to support mothers and babies.

She was struck by the limited services in the community and the crowded housing, to the point that people had to take turns sleeping. There were no paved roads, and food was expensive. On top of that, the tap water was unsafe, so drinking water was supplied. Work on a water treatment plant is underway.

A new nurses station was also under construction, so the residence for it was used as an isolation centre. People returning from the city needed space to quarantine for two weeks.

The high school was also used for quarantine, giving each family who needed the space a classroom to stay in. A structure was also built next to the nurses station

that served as an assessment centre for testing. With these protocols in place, the nurses were able to contain the few cases of COVID-19 that did occur. By this March, more than 90 percent of the adults were vaccinated.

Hiebert Rempel stayed with other nurses, many of them much younger than her, in the apartments attached to the nurses station. She said they had a wonderful relationship and did some hiking and canoeing together.

She was very aware of being a white nurse from outside the community. One experience highlighted the need for cultural sensitivity. On her second stint at the nursing station, a man came into the office, closed the door and told her why he was not glad that she was back.

He explained that, during her previous visit, she had gotten into his personal space, which triggered a flashback from his residential-school experience. She was grateful for his strength and courage in letting her know about the incident that had inadvertently caused discomfort.

That incident reinforced for her that non-Indigenous people need to be well informed about the trauma of the residential school experience and the policies of the Indian Act. "We are learning more, and we can begin to speak up more," she said. "We cannot remain silent."

She said she is "deeply grateful" for the opportunity to work in the Sandy Lake community, having found the experience "life-giving" and providing a chance to experience something new. As someone with freedom and flexibility in her life right now, she saw this opportunity as a responsibility, even an obligation to do what she could.

She is also helping with vaccination clinics at Six Nations at Ohsweken, Ont. She plans to return to Sandy Lake for another rotation. ❧



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Making space for grief

CMU student completes degree focusing on death

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

When Kari Miller tells people her major in university, they either look uncomfortable and walk away, or begin sharing deeply personal stories. That's because she studied thanatology—the study of death.

"Death is a fascinating subject, but also a very scary one for many people," she says. "I think a lot of us fear death and the pain and grief that comes with it, and don't always know how to engage with it."

Miller, originally from Portage la Prairie, Man., graduated this year from Canadian Mennonite University with an interdisciplinary degree. She decided to focus on thanatology after the untimely death of a close friend. As she worked through the heavy loss, she realized that she wasn't equipped to face death. "The question kept arising, 'How do we grieve well?'" says the 23-year-old, who attends Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

She was fascinated by the question of what it means to be human, to live and die well. Reflecting back on courses she had taken so far, like introduction to sociology, pastoral care and counselling, children's literature, and philosophy of biology, she realized that almost all of her final papers incorporated the theme of death.

She learned that society isn't structured to make space for grief.

"It felt like the question of what do we do with suffering wasn't able to be met in our society, where we're so focused on what we can achieve and accomplish," she says. "Any room for pain and for sitting with people in sorrow, and for saying the sorrow is actually valid . . . wasn't there in a culture that's always going on to the next thing. . . ."

"What I'm trying to do with my degree is make space for conversations around pain and grief, in the hopes that we can transform and grow through them, and turn them into a new source of life."

People can learn from the cycles of life and death acting all around them in nature. Green shoots in spring and summer follow fall and winter decay.

"Even in compost, where you've got such nutrient-rich compost coming out of death, . . . we can see that narrative in the life of Christ and the death and resurrection," Miller says.

Connecting with creation, from which the digital culture has distanced people, can help them learn how to grieve and know they "are part of a greater circle—this beautiful world that God has created," she says. "If we can feel God in creation and understand that God is there, then we can also see that God is present in life and in death."

Miller works with A Rocha Manitoba, a Christian environmental stewardship organization, helping engage people with

creation. She organizes day camps for children and recently hosted a virtual panel discussion on ecological grief and hope.

Holding grief collectively is also important, she says, adding: "I think often when I talk about my responses to death and to grieving, central to that is the act of solidarity and being with other people. . . . [It] is essential and, in a sense, that's also where the presence of God can be felt."

This year of COVID-19 has made death a constant presence in the collective consciousness.

"Looking at COVID and the pain people are suffering, and the trauma that's happening, my question becomes: 'What does it mean to find new ways of wellness and how do we hold this grief well with each other? What are ways we can deal with our grief now, so that we're not focusing on just waiting for it to be over?'" ❧



PHOTO COURTESY OF KARI MILLER

Kari Miller recently graduated from CMU with a degree in thanatology, the study of death.

Called to care, equipped to serve

How YAMEN put this doctor on the path she'd always hoped for

By Jason Dueck

Mennonite World Conference / Mennonite Central Committee

Dr. Ela Castro always knew she wanted to spend her life serving those in need. By all outward appearances, this is what she was doing.

She'd studied for years to earn her medical degree. She was working at a health-care clinic. She was helping people—but something was missing. She felt her heart calling her to serve, not just to work for a steady paycheck.

But it wasn't until she took a step of faith that she truly felt like she'd found her purpose.

Through a connection at her home church, Iglesia Menonita Central in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Castro heard about YAMEN (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network) and



CASA DEL MIGRANTE PHOTO BY SAMUEL GAITAN

Dr. Ela Castro, left, a 2019-20 YAMEN participant, worked as a doctor at Casa del Migrante (Migrant House) in Guatemala City, Guatemala, in January 2020. The client's name is withheld for security purposes.

decided to try a one-year term of service. The joint program of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite World Conference (MWC) offers young adults from outside Canada and the United States an opportunity to leave what they know for a year to serve, grow and learn in an international placement.

Castro's education and experience made her a perfect candidate for a placement providing medical care to migrants being supported by an MCC partner in Guatemala City, Guatemala.

She says the experience was confirmation that she was moving in the direction for God's call on her life.

"YAMEN is a great place for people
(Continued on page 30)

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Exploring 'Germinating Conversations'

Mara Bunnett Wiebe, editor of the new book *Germinating Conversations*, talks about food, faith, farming and land.

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God works in digital ways

Members of the Mennonite World Conference Executive Committee reflect on their most recent meetings, held via Zoom in April.

canadianmennonite.org/digitalways



Watch: Great grey owls of Camp Valaqua

Learn about great grey owls in the latest installment in a series of short videos showcasing the nature surrounding Mennonite Church Alberta's Camp Valaqua.

canadianmennonite.org/greyowls

(Continued from page 29)

to confirm their gift and their call, and for me it was proof that I can do something different than other doctors are called to do," says Castro, 30.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ADALINA CASTRO

Dr. Ela Castro and her mother, Domicila Castro, prepare to distribute medication in December 2020 to people who were injured or ill following hurricanes Iota and Eta. The doctor and her mother were part of a group through Iglesia Vida en Abundancia, a Mennonite Church in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, that distributed medicine provided by Mennonite Central Committee, and administered medical care to those affected by the hurricanes.

Migrant House (Casa del Migrante) provides shelter, food and medical care to thousands of migrants passing through Guatemala, as well as deported Guatemalans. Providing care to people on the move is challenging and incredibly rewarding, says Castro, but there is one story about a young girl that she carries deep in her heart.

"There was a nine-year-old girl who was a migrant, and she was vomiting—she was not doing well," Castro says. "We didn't have all the medicine we needed at the shelter to treat her well."

Castro wanted to bring the girl to a hospital, but the girl's parents pleaded with her not to, because they had been treated very poorly by other doctors in the past. After a few hours of Castro's care, the young girl recovered.

"They really thanked me more than I expected and needed because it wasn't me, it was God working," Castro says. "That same day was a celebration at the Migrant House and the girl was hanging around with me until she was ready to go to bed.

Digital issues for the summer slowdown

FROM

Canadian Mennonite

The magazine will print one issue in July and one in August during our annual summer slowdown, but subscribers are eligible to receive a digital issue by email in two-week intervals.

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I told her I was going to keep her in my prayers all my life and through her life, and I've continued praying for her even after I left."

Castro looks back at her service with YAMEN as a pivotal time in her life, and one that prepared her for one the most challenging years she had ever faced. When she finished her YAMEN term in June 2020, she returned home to find her parents both sick with COVID-19. Her father passed away from the disease just weeks after her return.

While caring for her mother at home before deciding what her next step was, Castro, her boyfriend and her sister also contracted COVID-19. They all recovered, but a few months later hurricanes Iota and Eta struck Central America. Castro, and her mother joined a group run by a local Mennonite church to offer medical attention and relief to those suffering from the impact of the storms.

Her time in YAMEN providing medical care in challenging environments had prepared her perfectly for such a time as this. She also says her time in YAMEN also played a pivotal role in her faith formation and in planning what is next for her life.

"It was my Gethsemane," says Castro. "It was an opportunity for me to experience my faith by myself without the support of my mom and dad and closer family. I didn't know that after I came back from Guatemala that I wouldn't have my dad with me."

Castro recently got married and is providing medical care locally through home visits or phone calls, as she determines the next step for her path to helping people who need it most. //

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Calendar

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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.

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



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PHOTO BY ELEANORE WOOLLARD

Suzanne Gross, right, Mennonite Church Alberta's representative on the Mennonite Church Canada Palestine-Israel Network and her partner, Robert Kirchner, join a human chain on May 23 at Hawrelak Park in Edmonton, to show solidarity with the Palestinian community. More than a thousand people attended.

Edmonton Mennonites show solidarity with Palestine

By Joanne De Jong
Alberta Correspondent

Hundreds of concerned citizens, including Palestinians, Jews, members of the Black Lives Matter movement, and Mennonites, participated in multiple rallies over last month to show solidarity with Palestine.

Concern over escalating conflict between Palestine and Israel resulted in a desperate call for a cease-fire that finally occurred May 21 between Israel and Hamas.

A thousand-car rally, held on May 15,

included an estimated 3,000 people.

Another event was held on May 23 at Hawrelak Park in Edmonton. Suzanne Gross, the Mennonite Church Alberta representative on the Mennonite Church Canada Palestine-Israel Network and member of Edmonton First Mennonite Church, said the goal was “to form a human chain in solidarity with Palestine.” A thousand people attended this rally.

At both events, a biodegradable balloon

was released for every child who died during the 11-day conflict in the Gaza Strip. Rallies are expected to continue across the province to bring attention to the situation. ☯

Link to CBC article referring to Mennonite support of Palestine at rallies <https://bit.ly/3uyPIpc>.

