

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

October 25, 2021 Volume 25 Number 22

## What does it mean to be a Mennonite?

New film entertains while  
exploring Mennonite history  
and identity, pg. 24

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## EDITORIAL

# In the headlines

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER  
Executive Editor



**M**ennonites are in the news. Since late September, various articles in the secular press have brought attention to Mennonites living in Canada.

- **An Ontario production** company is producing virtual tours of a rural community, including a horse-and-buggy ride through “Mennonite country”
- **An exhibit in Kitchener, Ont.**, features photos of Muslim head coverings and Mennonite bonnets.
- **The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada** has plans for an exhibition to mark the hundredth anniversary of Mennonite emigration from Canada to Mexico.
- **A Manitoba couple** is reliving their settler-ancestors’ experience by travelling with a traditional ox cart while acknowledging the historical presence of local Indigenous peoples.
- **Manitoba youth from** several Mennonite groups go door to door collecting food for their community’s outreach programs.

But there’s a gloomier side to the news too. At the end of September, Mennonite Central Committee reported on investigations into its “historical entanglements” with Nazism. Mennonite publications carried the story as did the *Winnipeg Free Press*. This kind of news story keeps us humble and striving to learn from the past.

Then there’s the nationwide conflict over the COVID-19 vaccines—a conflict that is also troubling Mennonite families, churches and communities.

- **A Canadian Press** story reported on a

COVID-19 outbreak in a Mennonite community in Nova Scotia.

- **Numerous publications** picked up a story with the headline, “In a county with one of Alberta’s lowest vaccination rates, faith and freedom divide a Mennonite community.”
- **CBC Manitoba** reported on a community with a low COVID-19 vaccination rate, due to the objections of local Mennonites and other residents.

Although there are dozens of distinct Mennonite-Anabaptist groups in Canada, most of the news stories, both positive and negative, didn’t identify the specific group they were highlighting. In the mind of many readers, the various “shades” of Mennonites are indistinguishable. We might want to push back against those kinds of generalizations.

Even our own denomination, Mennonite Church Canada, has made the news. And outsiders are noticing. At the end of September, the executive ministers of MC Canada and its five regional churches released a statement clarifying the denomination’s stance in favour of COVID-19 vaccines, with vaccination seen as an act of love for one’s neighbour. This official encouragement comes because questions about vaccines have arisen within MC Canada churches. (See the statement on p. 7.)

*Canadian Mennonite* published an online version of the statement headlined, “No religious exemptions from COVID-19 vaccines: MC Canada.” It was posted on the website on Oct. 1, and, in the subsequent two and a half weeks, the piece garnered almost 14,000

page views, way beyond any other recent article. Indications are that it reached many beyond *CM*’s usual readership. A few readers submitted affirming comments, but more responded with negative comments promoting misinformation and questionable theology.

How do we respond to these media spotlights? The temptation might be to simply distance ourselves: “That’s not my kind of Mennonite!” But we could choose to accept the attention with openness and humility. We could see it as an opportunity to better live out our calling as followers of Christ in the Anabaptist tradition, for all to see.

This might be a time to learn about the perspectives of Mennonites who are different from us, to find points of connection in our faith and practices and to encourage each other toward greater faithfulness. Might we seek new ways of loving our neighbours both near and far?

While in the headlines, let’s heed the advice in 1 Peter 3:15-16: “. . . have reverence for Christ in your hearts, and honor him as Lord. Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect. Keep your conscience clear . . . ” (Good News Translation).

## Calling young artists

*Canadian Mennonite* invites submissions of art to accompany the Christmas feature article. We invite elementary and high school students in Mennonite schools and congregations to submit original art on the theme, “The Christmas Story.” This art will be considered for possible inclusion in the Dec. 6 issue. Preference is for high-resolution digital versions of the art. Paper versions are also acceptable, but all submissions must arrive by the Nov. 9 deadline. For more details, see the ad on page 28. ☘



Funded by the  
Government  
of Canada

Canada

ISSN 1480-042X

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PHOTO: PAUL PLETT / ODE PRODUCTIONS

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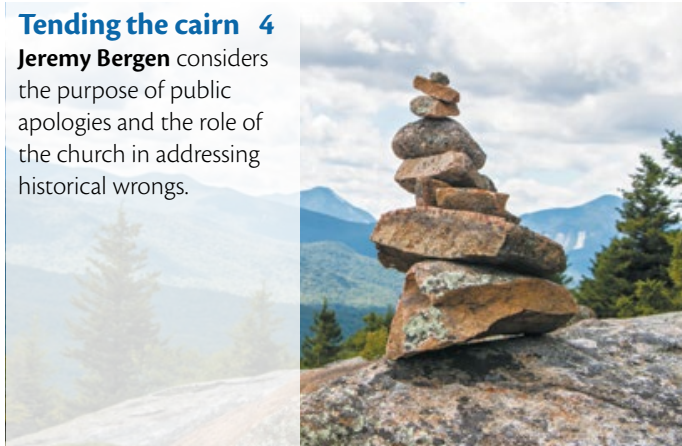
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### Please send all material to be considered for publication to

General submission address: [submit@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:submit@canadianmennonite.org)

Readers Write: [letters@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:letters@canadianmennonite.org)

Milestones announcements: [milestones@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:milestones@canadianmennonite.org)

Calendar announcements: [calendar@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:calendar@canadianmennonite.org)

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40063104 REGISTRATION NO. 09613

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

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

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

Board Chair, Henry Krause, [hakrause@telus.net](mailto:hakrause@telus.net), 604-888-3192

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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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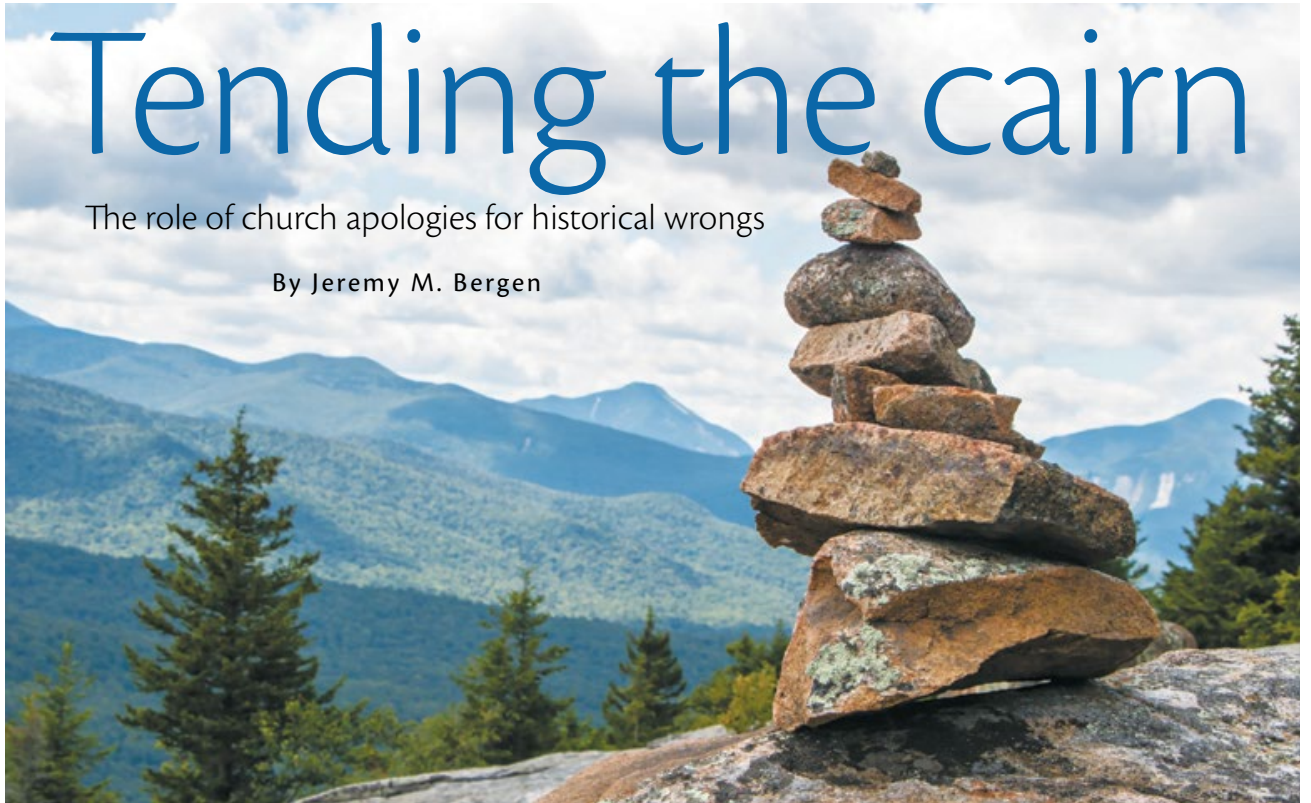
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## FEATURE

# Tending the cairn

The role of church apologies for historical wrongs

By Jeremy M. Bergen



ISTOCK.COM PHOTO BY JOSEPHJACOBS

A public apology is one of many ways that a church may address past wrongs and those persons who have been harmed. Right now, for example, even following the apology by the Canadian Catholic bishops, there remains a strong call for an apology by Pope Francis for residential schools in Canada and abuses that happened there.

It is helpful to step back and think about the meaning of such statements whether by a pope, a local congregation or Mennonite Church Canada. While I note some biblical and theological points of reference, I also believe there is no formula.

I am not addressing here any of the painful histories for which apologies may be called—Indian Residential Schools, displacement of Indigenous people from land, racism, antisemitism, sexual misconduct of leaders, or inaction on climate change, among others. A very different article would be necessary to argue how MC Canada, for example, should address any one of these very different histories and whether an apology should be part of the response. Because of the long and difficult work of living into an apology, apologies should not be made too often.

## What is the sense of an apology?

Does it even make sense for the church in the present to speak to something that happened in the past? Are we judging the past by the standards of the present? The church is constituted as a body by its head, Jesus Christ,

and it exists as this body over time. While it is important to avoid a self-righteousness of the present in denouncing past actions, it is also crucial to recognize that forms of oppression that exist today have roots in actions and attitudes of the past. These should be named.

In Ezra 9:5-15, Ezra makes a public prayer of confession for specific sins of his own generation and for generations past. For Ezra, naming past sins enables him to interpret more recent history (the exile and return) and is a basis for a call to specific actions, such as a new covenant (10:3). Ezra indeed speaks on behalf of a “we” that extends through space and time.

In Revelation 2-3, we read that some—but not all—of the seven churches are called to repentance by the Spirit. Discernment is needed. The church of Pergamum is called to repent for toleration of false teachers (2:12-17). The “lukewarm” church of Laodicea falsely believes everything is fine (3:14-22). And even though we know each member of the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia (2:8-11; 3:7-13) was a sinner, those churches were not called to corporate repentance at that moment.

A church apology is not primarily speaking for what individuals have done, but rather about particular patterns that came to characterize the church as a community. For example, in a case of pastoral sexual misconduct, any church apology should generally not speak on behalf of the pastor’s personal responsibility.

Rather, a church apology may be a way of naming and confessing a failure of a church system to see a pattern, stopping the abuse and holding an offender to account.

Repentance is a rich biblical concept that entails a change of heart and a change of direction. It can be an inner change, but a public statement may also be an important way to promote accountability. Because churches that address their historical pasts often do so in public ways, they may use the more common language of “apology.” It is appropriate that apology has come to take on theological significance as churches give public witness in this manner.

### What does a public apology do?

**1. An apology acknowledges** that the past cannot be undone, and any statement is inadequate. An apology is never sufficient, but it may nevertheless be a necessary element, or even a turning point, in a larger process

**2. An apology names** a particular history “for the record.” It identifies what was wrong and sinful in that history, and confesses that the church as a body was responsible. Examining and understanding the history—how a likely mix of good intentions and bad intentions caused the harm in question—is crucial if you want to not repeat it. For a public statement of apology, the challenge is to not be too vague about the history, nor to be too detailed.

**3. An apology publicly acknowledges** the human dignity of those who were harmed. This requires careful listening and the cultivation of relationships. Thus, it matters not only what is said, but the forum and manner in which it is said.

**4. An apology expresses** a commitment to the future, and provides for accountability to the commitment. An “inner change” looks different for an individual than it does for a community. It isn’t only a question of whether the leader making a statement on behalf of a church is personally sincere, but

whether and how the church will truly change.

An apology may set a tone for difficult, ongoing work ahead. Structures, programs, finances and guidelines may be important for implementing change. So is ongoing prayer and discernment, new relationships and reminders of commitments made.

### Questions to ask when considering a public apology

Bearing in mind that an apology may not be appropriate in every situation, here are five questions for a church that is considering a public apology:

#### 1. Are we listening?

The churches in Revelation 2-3 were exhorted to listen to what the Spirit was saying, which was different for each church. In our time, this must include truly listening to the experiences of

those who have been harmed by the actions of the church. Those who are powerful in the church do not have the perspective to see what needs to be seen. Listening is the first step.

#### 2. Are we truly sorry?

Do not apologize if you are not convinced a particular history happened, that it was wrong and that the church was responsible. It will only make things worse. Some public apologies express regret that people were harmed, but don’t take responsibility for causing the harm. These seem apologetic but, because they do not reflect responsibility for that past, they are unlikely to be followed by meaningful action.

#### 3. Will we ask for forgiveness?

In many cases, it is best that a church not ask for forgiveness, as this can be a means for maintaining control. Asking

## Church apologies over the years

There have been many dozens of church apologies from regional, national and global bodies, including this sample:

- **Evangelical (Lutheran) Church in Germany, 1945:** “Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt.”
- **Pope Paul VI, 1963:** Speech to Second Vatican Council (for that church’s role in division among Christians).
- **United Church of Christ in Japan, 1967:** “Confession on Responsibility During World War II.”
- **Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1970:** “A Litany of Confession” to Indigenous People.
- **Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of the Rhineland, 1980:** “Towards Renovation of the Relationship of Christians and Jews.”
- **United Church of Canada, 1986:** “Apology to First Nations.”
- **Missionary Oblates of Canada, 1991:** Apology for Residential Schools.
- **Anglican Church of Canada, 1993:** Apology for Residential Schools.
- **United Methodist Church, 1996:** Apology for Sand Creek Massacre.
- **Pope John Paul II, 2000:** Day of Pardon (for sins “in service of truth,” sins against unity, sins against women, the poor, and the weak).
- **French Catholic Bishops, 1997:** Drancy Declaration (for complicity in the Holocaust).
- **Church of England, 2006:** Apology for Slavery and Slave Trade.
- **Episcopal Church, 2008:** Apology for Slavery.
- **Lutheran World Federation, 2010:** Statement on Lutheran Persecution of Anabaptists.
- **Pope Francis, 2018:** Letter on Clergy Sexual Abuse

— COMPILED BY JEREMY BERGEN

forgiveness of victims demands a response. This can shift the onus to those with less power to absolve the powerful. It creates a situation in which victims are expected to respond and, because of the power imbalance, may do so before they are truly ready.

Asking forgiveness of God (and usually declaring it granted) can function as a way of declaring the issue

closed. This is not to doubt God's grace, but to affirm that how we talk about that grace matters. We should not do so in a way that forecloses on the long process of being transformed.

There may be times when a request for forgiveness is appropriate, as was the case between the Mennonites and Lutherans, two global communions of relatively equal power, for past persecution and animosity.

#### 4. What actions are required?

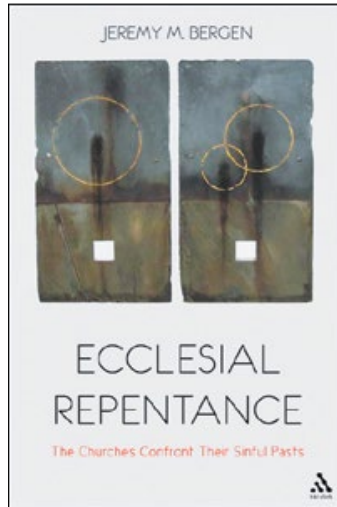
Being truly sorry implies not repeating an action and finding ways to repair the damage. An apology commits to walking in a new direction, but it isn't the walk itself. The walk will be long, difficult and costly.

#### 5. Are we prepared to not be in control?

Sometimes control takes the form of expecting that an apology will bring "closure" to the matter. If this is the expectation, the church is not yet ready to make any statement at all.

#### Tending the cairn

In his prayer, Ezra throws himself on the mercy of God. A public apology ought to remind the church that it depends for its very existence on Jesus Christ, and not on its good actions or intentions. (Good intentions may well have been part of the problem being acknowledged. And the church should also have the humility to recognize that future generations may need to repent



for our present statements of apology.) If a community is truly sorry, it must be open to change and transformation in ways it cannot yet see.

Murray Sinclair, the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has spoken about reconciliation as a process in which we don't know where the path will go. If the church commits to this, it will need to trust the

Spirit.

In 1986, the United Church of Canada made an important apology to Indigenous people. An Indigenous group within that church acknowledged the apology, but did not accept it. They said an apology must be lived out. So an unfinished cairn of stones was erected in

Sudbury where the original statement was first made. From time to time, stones are added to signal positive developments in the relationship between Indigenous people and settlers in the church. Recalling the apology and tending the cairn thus calls for ongoing conversation and deepening relationships.

Tending the cairn is definitely not reconciliation itself. It is, at most, a marker of a promise to be truly open to transformation, and a focal point for ongoing listening to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. ❧



*Jeremy M. Bergen is associate professor of theological studies at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., and the author of Ecclesial Repentance: The Churches Confront Their Sinful Pasts.*

#### ❧ For discussion

1. Can you think of apologies that made an impact on you? Why were they memorable? Can relationships remain healthy without apologies? In what situations does an apology feel insincere?
2. How is a public apology different from a private one? Who has the authority to apologize or express repentance for a congregation or a church? How would you answer Jeremy Bergen's question about whether it makes sense for a church in the present to speak to something that happened in the past?
3. Bergen writes, "Because of the long and difficult work of living into an apology, apologies should not be made too often." Do you agree? What does it mean to live into an apology? In what situations is it important for a church to issue a public apology?
4. "Some public apologies express regret that people were harmed but don't take responsibility for causing the harm," says Bergen. Do you agree that this approach can end up causing more harm? Why is it inappropriate for a church to ask for forgiveness?
5. Bergen says good intentions are not enough. In what ways can good intentions be part of the problem? What does it mean to be "truly open to transformation"?

—By Barb Draper

See related resources at  
[www.commonword.ca/go/2585](http://www.commonword.ca/go/2585)

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## /// Readers write

### ✉ No religious exemptions from COVID-19 vaccines: MC Canada

Mennonite Church Canada's executive ministers released a statement at the end of September responding to inquiries from constituents regarding exemption from COVID-19 vaccines.

It states:

"For a religious exemption to be granted, rationale for exemption must be clearly indicated within our sacred texts or confessional statements.

"We wish to clarify that there is nothing in the Bible, in our historic confessions of faith, in our theology or in our ecclesiology that justifies granting a religious exemption from vaccinations against COVID-19.

"We have heard concerns from some members of our constituency regarding the vaccines. However, we do not believe these concerns justify an exemption from COVID-19 vaccinations on religious grounds from within a Mennonite faith tradition.

"From the earliest biblical writings, in the words of Jesus Christ and in ecclesial writings since Jesus' ascension, the command to love God and love our neighbour is paramount. Vaccinations allow us to live out this command. Not only do they reduce the severity of symptoms for those who become infected with COVID-19, but they reduce the risk of spreading the virus to those around us. We also note that individuals should make personal health-care decisions based on advice given by their doctors.

"We pray for unity among us in the Spirit of Christ, who calls us into this life of love, especially for our most vulnerable neighbours."

Signed by:

DOUG KLASSEN, MC CANADA

GARRY JANZEN, MC B.C.

TIM WIEBE-NEUFELD, MC ALBERTA

RYAN SIEMENS, MC SASKATCHEWAN

MICHAEL PAHL, MC MANITOBA

LEAH REESOR-KELLER, MC EASTERN CANADA

### ✉ Addendum from gallery founder/curator Ray Dirks

Re: "The end of an era at MHC Gallery," Sept. 27, page 24.

I thank Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe for this piece, but I have a couple of comments:

- **Ken Reddig** was integral in the beginning. Ken and I shared the dream of creating a gallery out of an underused space in the Mennonite Heritage Centre. We also shared the fundraising responsibility prior to the gallery officially opening in the fall of 1998.
- **At the time** of my interview, the gallery's tentative 2021 fundraiser date was Oct. 1. That changed in September to Nov. 12. A limited number of people will attend in-person and it will be livestreamed. Contact Selenna Wolfe at swolfe@cmu.ca if interested in the livestream link or in attending in the gallery.

I was always extremely thankful that Mennonite Church Canada was open to the vision of the gallery to be a place where artists from Mennonite communities would be heralded as God-gifted and worthy of support, and to be a place where all people of goodwill representing our increasingly diverse cultural and faith society could call home.

I thank Canadian Mennonite University for taking ownership in 2017, and my prayer is that the gallery continues as the unique institution it is.

RAY DIRKS, WINNIPEG

### ✉ 'Defund the police' movement embraces logical fallacy, writer claims

Re: "Defund the police?" feature, Sept. 27, page 4.

The "Defund the police" movement embraces one of the oldest logical fallacies extant. It is part and parcel of: doctors are responsible for sickness, ministers for irreligion, dentists for tooth decay, lawyers for crime, teachers for ignorance, librarians for illiteracy, etc.

When there is so much unresolved contention at a particular level, we can be pretty sure that the problem is higher up in the system. (That is, we are addressing the symptoms rather than the disease.) While the virulent strain of capitalism known as neo-conservatism is the driving force behind radical cuts to all social services, many of its tenets have been adopted by liberal/leftist administrations also, who find that social programs can only be financed by borrowing truckloads of money.

The result is that we stretch what remains of our social services beyond recognition. Thus, librarians are expected to deal on a daily basis with homeless people and drug addicts, for which they have no

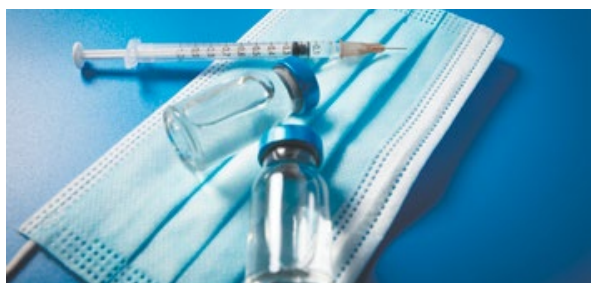


IMAGE BY RONSTIK / PIXABAY

training. Teachers are expected to deal with all manner of severely handicapped, behaviourally challenged, and downright antisocial students in overcrowded classrooms. Large numbers of employees find themselves having to muddle through multiple tasks for which they were neither hired to do, nor trained to do, nor given adequate time to complete during working hours. These all reflect a top-down society that simply does not care about ordinary people, let alone those in dire straits.

Unfortunately, those wishing to improve complex situations also suffer from similar deficiencies in training and analysis themselves. They take refuge in the hope that radical solutions will be effective, since hardly anyone wishes to bring reason to such polarized and hyper-emotional situations. However, when the voices of reason and logic are being shouted down everywhere, it follows that the voices of irrationalism and extreme rhetoric will win the day.

KEVIN MCCABE, ST. CATHARINES, ONT.

### ✉ **Our values ‘require creative reimagination’**

**Re: “Values that set us apart,” Sept. 13, page 2.**

It seems as though the values needed for world peace, for less violence in the world, whether person-on-person, nation-on-nation, or person-on-environment violence, are all furthered to some extent by a motto such as “more with less” if it is applied to all facets of our lives. This seems like something Jesus would do, and something Jesus indicated his disciples should do, as indicated by the Great Commission. Jesus was nonviolent in word and deed, although perhaps his actions/ministrations were token in nature.

To my mind, the violence of the missiological interpretation of the Great Commission, by imposing Christianity on non-Christian peoples and naming it as “winning people to Christ,” is the kind of pharisaical religiosity Jesus was trying to get away from.

However, the differences and “values that set us

apart” require creative reimagination to further the unity and world peace Jesus inspired us to strive for.  
PETER REIMER (ONLINE COMMENT)

## /// **Milestones**

### **Births/Adoptions**

**Dyck**—Jacob Henry (b. Aug. 29, 2021), to Rachel Krause and Alex Dyck, Hope Mennonite, Winnipeg.

**Ropp**—Eleanor Sunnie (b. July 16, 2021), to Scott and Callie Ropp, Poole Mennonite, Ont.

### **Weddings**

**Carr/Schlegel**—Mary Katherine Carr and Ben Schlegel (East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.), near New Hamburg, Ont., July 24, 2021.

**Hinds/Zehr**—Ashley Hinds and Josh Zehr (East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.), near Tavistock, June 26, 2021.

**Karn/Wagler**—Callum Karn and Taylor Wagler (East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.), near Woodstock, Ont., Sept. 25, 2021.

**Medeiros/Yantzi**—Tosha Medeiros and Marcus Yantzi (East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.), at Chesley Lake, Ont., June 25, 2021.

**Schwartzentruber/Valenta**—Blake Schwartzentruber (East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.) and Emily Valenta, near Petersburg, Ont., June 25, 2021.

**Vink/Witmer**—Alex Vink and Alaina Witmer (East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.), in Stratford, Ont., June 18, 2021.

### **Deaths**

**Froese**—Lynn Joanne, 70 (b. April 21, 1951; d. Aug. 4, 2021), Trinity Mennonite, Mather, Man.

**Hindmarsh**—Donna, 90 (b. Nov. 20, 1930; d. Sept. 2, 2021), Nairn Mennonite, Ailsa Craig, Ont.

**Penner**—Abe, 91 (b. March 27, 1930; d. Sept. 17, 2021), Sterling Mennonite, Winnipeg.

**Reimer**—David, 97 (b. Sept. 21, 1923; d. June 10, 2021), Crystal City Mennonite, Man.

**Warkentin**—Justina (Buller), 93 (b. Nov. 4, 1927; d. Sept. 29, 2021), Vineland United Mennonite.

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

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



## FROM OUR LEADERS

## No limits

Brenda Tiessen-Wiens

I walked into my curling club for the first time in 11 months and saw my team preparing to go out on the ice. I immediately teared up, telling them, "I'm so happy to be here, I think I'm going to cry!" We shared a laugh and hugs, and revelled in the moment of our mutual love of a sport and the camaraderie associated with it.

The moment of "all is right with the world" didn't last. After the game we stepped back into a different reality, where lists of noes and don'ts and crossed-out symbols face us at every turn.

I try to remember what life was like, what life felt like, before the pandemic. What carefree nonsense was it, when I could step outside without checking for a clean mask, or pausing to ensure my vax status was in hand? What did it feel like to share a room on a weekend getaway with friends? When an invitation to an evening out elicited an enthusiastic "yes" without first over-analyzing how many contacts I've had recently and if I should dial it back for a few days?

In the midst of these "grrrrs" of life, I read this line from John 10: "I came that

*they may have life, and have it abundantly."* God's abundance. Not a thing of the past, and not something to hope for in the future, but something to be lived, experienced and discovered right now.

We sometimes get caught up in the thought that abundance must be grand and expansive, like a Thanksgiving feast replete with table extensions and voices reverberating throughout the house; a vacation that includes an airplane and a multi-starred hotel; or a worship service that hits 100 percent capacity. Fullness and joy may, indeed, be found in these experiences. But our lives, more often than not, are filled with quiet and more mundane activities.

My journey of God's abundance is sprinkled with seemingly contradictory experiences. Some days abundance is grandiose, found in a mountain hike where I'm filled with awe of all that God has created and the wonder that, within this expanse, there is a place for me. Some days it's found in my backyard Adirondack chair, watching the leaves fall. I have found abundance in the hubbub of a crowd of strangers enjoying a shared concert experience, and also in

the anticipation that comes with opening the first page of a new book.

While the path to spiritual well-being may be largely individual and introspective in nature, the journey isn't complete without a response that turns us outward. Receiving and giving, gratitude and generosity are two sides of the same coin. The peace and joy of living in God's abundance comes with a call to reciprocate, to share, to give and to live freely and generously.

While restrictions to our movements and activities are likely to remain for the foreseeable future, there are no limitations to experiencing God's abundance, and there are no limitations to exploring creative and generous ways of sharing the goodness that we've received. ❧



*Brenda Tiessen-Wiens is moderator of Mennonite Church Alberta and a member of Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary. Exchanging hiking shoes for curling shoes is one of the joys she finds in the changing of the seasons.*

## A moment from yesterday



Look way off in the distance behind the North American Mennonite and Brethren farm boys (looking rather dazed at their surroundings) and you will notice the ruins of ancient Athens. These young men volunteered to tend horses and other livestock on ships sent to Europe to replenish herds following the Second World War. This particular group, from the voyage of the Plymouth Victory in 1947, formed strong bonds and continued to hold reunions well into the 1990s.

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing  
Photo: Joseph Vale /  
Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

## THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

# Is that not us?

Arli Klassen

I am pondering yet again the “Mennonite” label, and what it means for us today in Canada. There are three things that recently provoked these questions.

First, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) funded historical research on its historical relationship with Nazism. MCC is bravely facing new understandings of its own history. However, MCC’s connections to Nazism from the 1920s to the ’40s are not in isolation from Mennonite churches. Is that our own history? Who were those Mennonites? Is that not us?

Second, Mennonite communities in some parts of Canada are the communities currently with the lowest COVID-19 vaccination rates. Journalists and the public do not seem capable of distinguishing between “those Mennonites” and Mennonite Church Canada, which recently released a statement saying that there are no religious exemptions for COVID-19 vaccinations in the Mennonite church (*see page 7*). Our stance with those unvaccinated Mennonites is often to distance ourselves from them and explain that those Mennonites are not us.

Third, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation brings to light better

understanding of the multigenerational harm of residential schools to Indigenous children and their families. The church—mostly Catholic, and some other denominations, with a few Mennonite schools—played the primary role in implementing governmental and societal desires to “take the Indian out of the child.” Again, is this not us?

I have extended family members who are choosing to stop identifying as Mennonites. That is one response.

How do we, as a Mennonite church, look to our past and also to our future?

Germany, as a country, has chosen an intentional path of educating its children and adults about Nazism in its history. The grassroots movement is to place *Stolpersteine* (“stumbling stones”) in the pavement all over Europe, marking the places and spaces of Jewish people and others who were killed in the Holocaust. There are many large memorials in Germany, so that people know, understand—and don’t forget—the wrongs that were done nearly a century ago. History informs the future.

Canada is just beginning to do the same in regards to the wrongs done to Indigenous communities over the centuries.

There is so much more to be done.

As a Mennonite church faith commu-

nity, we need to better understand and acknowledge the harms in which we participated, whether actively or passively, historically or currently. We need to accept our responsibilities, as part of the wider church and as part of the Mennonite church, for the wrongs that were/are committed in our name. We need to know our history in order to acknowledge harm and inform our future.

MCC and various historians are doing important work in understanding our historical relationship with Nazism. We all have a responsibility to learn more, particularly to understand why so many Mennonites were drawn to this worldview. We need to acknowledge harm and inform our future. We have work to do.

Mennonites in Canada have Indigenous-settler working groups along with staff in Winnipeg, who help us to acknowledge harm and to take actions that reshape our future. We have work to do.

And the culturally conservative Mennonites who are so wary about COVID-19 vaccinations? Where are the church-to-church relationships where discussions can take place about theology and worldview as Mennonites? We have work to do. ☸



*Arli Klassen’s family has a complicated history with Nazism, government schools for Indigenous children and culturally separate Anabaptist groups.*

## Et cetera

### WCC congratulates 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureates

As the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to journalists Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov, the World Council of Churches’ acting general secretary, Ioan Sauca, congratulated them and expressed solidarity with their ongoing fight for justice and peace. “This award underscores the critical importance of freedom of expression and information as pillars for democracy, justice and peace,” said Sauca. “The courageous work undertaken by Ms. Ressa and Mr. Muratov exemplifies the ongoing struggle to secure and protect these values, and to insure freedom of the press.” The pair were given the award at a ceremony on Oct. 8 “for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace.” The two journalists are standing for freedoms that are essential for an informed public discourse, said Sauca. “We pray that this award will be an encouragement not only to Ms. Ressa and Mr. Muratov, but for all those who work for transparency and for truth,” he said.

Source: World Council of Churches



ILLUSTRATION BY NIKLAS ELMEHED /  
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*Maria Ressa and Dmitry Andreyevich Muratov, the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureates.*

## LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

## Into the woods

Troy Watson

**T**omorrow I'm driving to a log cabin in remote northern Quebec to spend a month in the woods by myself. That said, I'm not exactly roughing it. The cabin has electricity, a kitchen, a bathroom and what looks like a comfortable bed. The purpose of this adventure isn't to prove I can survive in the wilderness without basic creature comforts for four weeks, but rather to

this opportunity.

I realize that not everyone understands or supports sabbaticals for pastors. I get it. It's not like pastors are the only ones with demanding jobs.

Why doesn't everyone get sabbaticals? I don't know. Perhaps we all should. What I do know is, at this point in my life and ministry, this feels right, providential even. And I'm very grateful

**When you pastor non-stop for decades, eventually you get out of touch. Out of touch with people who don't go to church. With the people you pastor. With who you are besides a pastor.**

unplug and re-centre in solitude and silence. Just nature, the Spirit and me.

I'm both excited and apprehensive. I've done many silent retreats in the past, but never for this long. A month is a long time to be by myself. Some people assume silent retreats are like a relaxing holiday.

To those people, I say, "Go on a silent retreat, and then we'll talk."

Yes, it's restful and rejuvenating to be in nature, but being fully present with yourself without the distractions of smartphones, Netflix, news updates, social media, sports highlights and conversations with other people is no small feat. Try it for a month. A week. Even a few days. I double dog dare you. It's not as easy as it might sound.

So it is with some trepidation that I embark on this journey. Yet I know I need it. It's been a long time coming. This hermitage marks the beginning of my first sabbath season (sabbatical) in 23 years of pastoral ministry. I'm extremely grateful to Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, Avon Mennonite Church in Stratford, Ont., and my family for providing me with

to be part of a denomination and church that values this restorative practice for pastors.

Why do I need this? It's not just that I'm tired. Who isn't these days? I think I need this because I've lost perspective. When you pastor non-stop for decades, eventually you get out of touch. Out of touch with people who don't go to church. With the people you pastor. With who you are besides being a pastor. With the divine Spirit who is beyond the church and Mennonite theology. With your family, because you're stuck in "Pastor Dad" and "Reverend Husband" modes. With your true calling, gifting and passion. With why you became a pastor in the first place.

A few years ago, there was a series of Febreze commercials about nose blindness that featured people living in spaces that smelled like fish or cats or hockey equipment, but the inhabitants no longer noticed because they had been living with the smell for so long.

We all get used to the smell of our own space. We can't smell it anymore. But others can.

This happens to us as individuals and as churches. Over time, we no longer smell the soiled, rotting, toxic stuff in our midst because we've gotten used to it. Others notice, but we don't.

And the problem isn't that our unique "aroma" is an acquired taste that is mildly off-putting to others at first. The problem is that sometimes our odour is selfish, racist, sexist, prejudiced, hateful, paranoid, exclusionary, superstitious, delusional, idolatrous or worse.

Someone once told me, "We become what we tolerate." I think this is true for individuals and churches alike. Getting away from it all can help us see what we've been tolerating in our lives and in our churches.

But it's not only the negative stuff we lose sight of. We also become blind to our gifts, strengths, passions . . . our calling. We can become so overcome with our shortcomings and imperfections that we lose sight of all the good and beauty in our lives and in the church community.

I think this is why this sabbatical is important for me. (This and finally finishing my book.) I will step away from church, pastoral ministry and my routine to renew my perspective. To see the negative stuff I've been tolerating in my life, ministry and church, as well as the positive things in my life, ministry and church that I've lost sight of. Like when you go away from your house for an extended period of time and, upon returning, you get a whiff of what your house really smells like. ☘



*Troy Watson is not out of the woods yet.*

## VIEWPOINT

# 'I'm calling the police'

Ron Toews

I read with interest the “Defund the police?” feature and the accompanying “Four police voices” article, Sept. 27, pages 4 to 7. My perspective is slightly different, but wholly connected.

I grew up in the home of a conscientious objector and, after completing an undergraduate degree majoring in criminology and minoring in religion, I spent two years as a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer youth counsellor at a rural youth detention facility near Warburg, Alta., which sought to teach young offenders life and work skills.

Later, after I obtained a law degree, my professional career found me at various times responding to such questions from fellow Mennonites as, “How can you defend someone that you know is guilty?” and then later, as a Crown prosecutor, “How can you reconcile your Anabaptist beliefs with the prosecution and state-sanctioned violence implicit in correctional facilities?” These were excellent queries, but I find the narrative espoused in “Defund the police?” to be woefully naive and inadequate.

The current reality of modern society is that hiring more social workers and counsellors, building more affordable housing, funding more youth and young-adult programs will not protect those that we are morally obligated to protect. Contrary to the assertion cited from a *Winnipeg Free Press* article, the empirical evidence shows that policing initiatives in areas such as impaired driving enforcement have not only saved lives directly, but have changed the societal narrative dramatically for the better.

I was an inquest counsel for two separate incidents of police shootings. The evidence at those inquest hearings disclosed that both of the deceased posed a serious imminent threat to the

safety of everyone around them, in one case swinging a machete at passersby, Winnipeg Transit riders, and a security officer and staff at a Manitoba Liquor Control Commission outlet, before charging at responding police officers with the machete brandished above his head. If police were defunded, I would ask those advocating defunding who would be there to respond and ensure the safety of everyone who was in the path of the assailant.

I agree that there are serious limitations to using an armed paramilitary-structured institution to respond to every social ill. As a victim of multiple property crimes, I did not expect police or the criminal-justice system to be an effective response and, even though I was a highly invested participant in the criminal-justice system, I did not report any of these crimes to police.

Nonetheless, the presence of police, or the prospect of a police response if observed, is a powerful deterrent to all crime, including property offences. Furthermore, current police institutional structure and training is both effective and necessary to provide investigative and apprehension skills to officers to combat sex crimes, child pornography, driving offences, homicides, serious assaults and other offences that will not disappear with the reallocation of resources away from police to social service agencies.

Unfortunately, history has also shown churches to be woefully inept in protecting women and children from acts of violence perpetrated by those in power within the church itself. Much too often, offenders within the church have successfully used the power of the church to avoid detection of their offences and prosecution from secular authorities. To assume that, because current Mennonite churches have bent

themselves into intellectual pretzels to define themselves as “socially progressive,” that crime within the church and the community at large will disappear is the height of undeserved Mennonite hubris.

That is not to say that churches have no role to play in criminal-justice issues. Mennonite efforts and involvements in prison ministries, community development and mediation services are all laudable efforts to break cycles of criminal dysfunction.

The narrative advocated by many of those quoted in the feature ignores the practical reality that communities collectively strive for security. If public funding for police in the current model is significantly diminished, and the public experiences a commensurate loss of confidence in the adequacy of state-funded police, examples from other jurisdictions show that communities will band together to create other avenues of security.

For the wealthier segments of society, that may entail the creation of gated communities with privately funded security firms, accountable essentially to no one. For racialized and economically distressed communities, security is obtained through extortion by criminal organizations or by participation in the criminal organizations themselves.

As a youth, I briefly aspired to become a police officer. But after 33 years of involvement in the criminal-justice system, with thousands of interactions with several hundred police officers, I am grateful I chose a different path. Police officers are subjected to myriad abuses and disrespect, not only by offenders, but by the very society members they are attempting to protect.

I can say this with certainty, if I observe or experience a violent crime, or am following an impaired driver, I'm not calling any of the earnest ideologues, academics and intellectuals quoted by *Canadian Mennonite*, I'm calling the police. ❧

*Ron Toews lives in Brandon, Man., where he is a member of Grace Mennonite Church.*

# ‘We need to tell the whole story’

*Indigenous elder leads series on history and reconciliation in southern Manitoba*

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe  
Manitoba Correspondent  
MORDEN, MAN.

This fall, a collective of people in southern Manitoba working at Indigenous-settler reconciliation, called the Truth and Action Working Group, is hosting a series of talks with David Scott, an elder and policy advisor from Swan Lake First Nation.

The group is made up primarily of people from a handful of churches in the Morden-Winkler area of Manitoba, the majority of them Mennonite, but it welcomes all people. Started out of a desire to get to know their Indigenous neighbours, the group has been running for around three years and has hosted speakers and screened documentaries.

Scott has dedicated his working life to Indigenous history and treaty research. He was chosen to relate with the community when the chief and council of Swan Lake decided to work on developing understanding with their neighbours more than 10 years ago.

Scott has been visiting schools and churches in southern Manitoba ever since, teaching the history of the area and the current realities Indigenous people face today. This summer, he led a program for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth to work together in nature, identifying trees, testing water samples and learning about climate change.

He says that currently Indigenous relations are most often discussed in the political sphere, “but that is somebody else’s job. Mine is to try and figure out how we co-exist in this time of reconciliation.”

While Scott’s sessions begin as presentations, they always end in conversation with the audience. “I want to know what they think,” he says. “I want to know what their expectations are and they want to know how do we work these things out.”

“Many of us grew up in a community and education system that didn’t inform

us very well, some cases [not] at all, about the fuller story of colonialism and the effects on Indigenous people,” says Kevin Drudge, pastor of Covenant Mennonite Church in Winkler and a member of the working group. “Mennonites, I think, have been very good about telling the story of Mennonite settlement and celebrating what that meant for the Mennonite people to come to a new land, and all the benefits of that which, we’re grateful for, but we

personal connections. And working groups can often lose momentum, needing validation from him to move forward, rather than taking these initiatives on their own, he told the *Winkler Morden Voice*.

Yet Scott says non-Indigenous people need to keep pushing forward. This learning series is only one small action.

Drudge suggests putting out an appeal to people in one’s area to form a group, researching who one’s neighbours are, and



PHOTO BY DENISE THIESSEN

**A large group gathers for David Scott’s first talk on Sept. 28 at Morden (Man.) Mennonite Church.**

need to tell the whole story.”

Despite these efforts, Scott is concerned the reconciliation process is stalling out. He says the recent discoveries of thousands of children’s graves on residential school grounds and the acquittal of the white farmer who killed Colten Boushie, a Cree man, caused setbacks as Indigenous communities dealt with grief, anger and fear. Doing Zoom engagements during the pandemic also made it difficult to maintain

considering “how might we take cues from our Indigenous neighbours as to what next steps might look like.”

The first session took place on Sept. 28 and looked back at Canada’s “Indian Policy.” On Oct. 26, he will cover treaties and the Indian Act. On Nov. 30, he will discuss the situation of Indigenous people today. All sessions will be held at Morden Mennonite Church at 7 p.m. ❧

# Violence in Myanmar, prayers in Canada

By Will Braun  
Senior Writer

**W**hat for many of us may be a fleeting headline about strife on the other side of the world is for others within our faith family a heartbreaking reminder of a painful past and ongoing hardship for relatives in their country of origin.

Such is the case with news from Myanmar, limited though it has been. The country of more than 100 ethnic groups has barely had a break from civil war in 70 years. A military coup last February led to the killing of nearly a thousand peaceful demonstrators and renewed violence against ethnic groups that the military dictatorship sees as a threat.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said an “urgent” international response is needed to prevent the situation in Myanmar from turning into a “catastrophe.”

Aung Mya Thein is a pastor of the congregation of Karen ethnic people from Myanmar at Living Hope Mennonite Fellowship in Surrey, B.C. “Most Karen people in our congregation have family and friends back in Myanmar, as well as in refugee camps in Thailand, and in the displaced camps in Myanmar,” he says.

In the part of Myanmar that most of his congregants come from, Thein says people experience hardships like “houses being burnt down by the Burma Army, household properties and domestic animals being looted, villages being shelled,” and villagers needing to flee to the jungle for their lives.

This is also true elsewhere in the country—especially in Chin State—where the military faces off against armed

resistance groups. A church contact in Myanmar, who asked not to be named for security reasons, says the military will consider entire villages in conflict areas to be aiding and abetting the resistance and they are thus legitimate targets. He says Myanmar is “slowly becoming a failed state.”

Five Mennonite Church Canada congregations have close ties to Myanmar: Calgary Chin Christian Church; Kitchener (Ont.) Emmanuel Church; Chin Christian Church in Kitchener, Ont.; Grace Christian Church in Ottawa; and Living Hope Christian Fellowship in Surrey. The first four are made up primarily of Chin people, one of the larger minority ethnic groups in Myanmar, while Living Hope

has a Karen congregation—another large ethnic group in Myanmar—and a congregation of other Canadians.

The case of Reverend Leng Thang of Calgary Chin Christian Church is particularly troubling. As reported in a call to prayer put out by Steven Giugovaz, MC Alberta’s church engagement minister, Leng’s wife’s brother was killed in the violence. Two other deaths hit her family in Myanmar as well. In addition, Leng’s father has been diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer, and medical services are largely non-existent.

I was unable to reach Leng directly, as he is occupied caring for his family and congregation.

A majority of Chin and Karen people



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PARTNERS RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT

*An internally displaced Kachin family in Myanmar.*

in MC Canada congregations have family members suffering in Myanmar, as well as their own histories of upheaval.

### A personal history of upheaval

Thein of Living Hope shared his story with me.

He was studying philosophy at Rangoon University in 1975, when the body of U Thant, former secretary-general of the United Nations, was returned to Myanmar (then called Burma) for burial. The government at the time was hostile to U Thant. During a procession, monks and students from the university took the coffin and gave their late countryman a more dignified burial than the government had planned. Tensions soared. Thein happened to be on the campus on an evening when the army surrounded the campus and arrested everyone trapped there. He spent a month in prison.

“I did not experience physical torture,” Thein recounts, “but I became aware of incidents that had me feel the shadow of the informers. . . . I felt psychological insecurity.”

A couple weeks after his release,

he moved to a “liberated area” on the Thai-Burma border controlled by the Karen National Union. There, he became a teacher and headmaster. He also converted from Buddhism to Christianity and married another teacher.

A major military offensive forced them to move to Whalley, also on the Thai-Burma border. Then, in 1987, the Burmese army attacked and occupied the area, forcing them to cross into Thailand. While crossing into Thailand, Thein lost his leg to a Burmese army bomb.

Eventually the army left, and Thein and his wife returned. But, in 1990, the army was back, forcing Thein and his wife to settle in a refugee camp in Thailand. In addition to teaching in the camp, Thein became the refugee camp leader.

In 1994, the Karen Democratic Buddhist Army overran the Karen National Union and occasionally crossed over to the refugee camps. “They burned down houses, did the killings or kidnapped the people,” Thein says.

As camp leader and teacher, he was at risk. The field coordinator for Karen refugee camps—who had worked

previously with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) assisting Vietnamese refugees—offered to help Thein go to Canada through MCC sponsorship.

### ‘To love is to act’

As for the other Karen people in his congregation, Thein says: “[T]hey also were forced to flee Myanmar because of the Burmese military regime’s major offensives and human rights violations in the Karen State. At first, they became displaced persons inside Burma. When the fighting prolonged, they had to cross into Thailand and became refugees for a couple years and then were resettled to third countries.”

A majority of people in the Karen and Chin congregations in MC Canada came to Canada as refugees.

Recognizing the suffering in our nationwide faith family, Doug Klassen, MC Canada executive minister, says to the Chin and Karen people among us: “We consider ourselves siblings of yours in faith, and we are determined to find ways to be the church together and for their burden to become our burden.”

In addition to the calls for prayer, Frank Berto, a pastoral colleague of Aung Mya Thein at Living Hope Mennonite, says Partners Relief & Development is an organization doing good work both in Myanmar and surrounding refugee camps.

Greg Toews, who is the national director of Partners Canada, says the organization was started in 1994 in response to the civil war in Myanmar. He describes Partners as “a Christian humanitarian service organization that firmly believes that to love is to act. We act by providing emergency relief during acute crisis events and by working with communities of displaced families to design sustainable development initiatives.” ☞



*A grandmother from Karen State, Myanmar. Violence has broken out in this area, leading to a new wave of displacement.*

# 'More than a place to live'

*Initiatives at Parkwood raise funds to build 'community for all'*

By Janet Bauman

Eastern Canada Correspondent  
WATERLOO, ONT.

A fundraising campaign at Parkwood Seniors Community is underway, which will see 28 affordable units created in a six-storey, 90-unit building on its Waterloo campus, to be completed by late 2023.

According to Elaine Shantz, CEO of Parkwood and partner organization Fairview Seniors Community in Cambridge, Ont., making 30 percent of the units in the new building affordable is part of the non-profit organization's commitment to create a sense of "community for all."

Parkwood, a faith and values-based, senior-friendly community, already provides assisted living and long-term care. This "mixed housing expansion" will create more "integrated living, where

everyone has an equal place at the table regardless of their needs," whether those are physical, emotional, financial or spiritual. All will have access to the same amenities, including the pool, fitness facilities, and other programs, she says

Of the 90 units, 60 will be one-bedroom—32 aimed at people with modest income—while 28 of them will be affordable. Another 30 units will have two-bedrooms. The building will be fully accessible and energy efficient.

While the total cost of the project is \$36.7 million, Parkwood is fundraising for the affordable housing component, valued at \$11 million. Parkwood will donate land for the project, valued at \$3.5 million, and contribute another \$1 million from its

reserves, leaving \$6.5 million to be raised.

Waterloo Region, responding to the urgent need created by poverty and affordable housing, has committed \$13 million for four affordable housing projects. Parkwood will get \$1.9 million of that, while another \$2.7 million will come from provincial and federal governments.

According to Parkwood's fundraising brochure, this housing solution will help to relieve poverty, lessen the shortage of senior-friendly, affordable housing, and offer an "enriched retirement opportunity" for people with a range of financial needs—modest, middle and comfortable.

Another event called, Walk the Kindness Way, is also raising funds to support special initiatives at Parkwood

and Fairview. As part of the organizations' strategic planning, kindness that is aimed at self, colleagues and the community was identified as a key value. People are invited to ask the question, "What would kindness do?" in every situation.

Walk the Kindness Way was a 42-kilometre walk to raise funds for healing gardens at both campuses, where residents, staff and families can find peace and quiet. At Parkwood, the healing garden will be incorporated into the new build; at Fairview, it will be done in partnership with neighbouring Preston Mennonite Church.

The walk and the gardens it will support "exuded" all three of the kindness criteria, serving self, staff and the wider community,



PHOTO BY RACHEL LINCOLN PHOTOGRAPHY

*At Parkwood Seniors Community, Ruth Klassen, left, Phares Bauman, Lloyd Martin, Hilda Lorenz and Leeta Horst have room at the table where a "community for all" model means "everyone has an equal place at the table," no matter their physical, emotional, financial or spiritual needs.*





PHOTO BY CHRIS STEINGART

*Marion Good, left, Parkwood's board chair, presents Don Elliot, a resident of Parkwood, with his medal for completing Walk the Kindness Way, a two-day, 42-kilometre trek raising funds for healing gardens at Parkwood and partner organization Fairview. CEO Elaine Shantz, right, looks on.*

says Shantz.

The vision for the walk was sparked by Shantz, who has a passion for trekking, strengthening teams and building relationships.

On the weekend of Sept. 25 and 26, more than 60 walkers participated, covering the distance between Parkwood and Fairview on the scenic Walter Bean Grand River Trail. Splitting the distance over two days, the walkers got a send-off breakfast at Parkwood and a welcome lunch the next day at Fairview.

One Parkwood resident, Don Elliot completed the whole walk over the two days. Other walkers included board members, staff, church delegates and community members.

It created a "true sense of community," according to Shantz.

As part of Walk the Kindness Way, residents at Parkwood aimed to complete 1,000 kilometres of walking around the Waterloo campus, during July and August. They far exceeded their goal; together with staff and family, they covered 8,762 kilometres, covering the 42-kilometre trek 209 times.

The goal of this year's walk was \$50,000, with half for each campus. They ended up

raising \$57,700.

Shantz credits Waterloo Region for being a great community when it comes to fundraising efforts like these. She says people see a need, come together, offer support and follow through. "Partnerships make us strong," she adds, noting that it is "incredibly valuable" when people bring wisdom, experience and expertise together with a generosity of time.

Parkwood and Fairview welcome people of all faiths, ethnicities and cultures, embracing a "unique culture of kindness" while offering a range of amenities for

physical, mental and spiritual care. It is "more than a place to live," says Shantz.

The campus model of care at both places emphasizes continuity and consistency of care, allowing seniors to age in place. Fairview, which will get another 108 long-term-care beds, has been piloting a project for nearly three years through the local Home and Community Care Support Services organization that provides home care on its campus. The project has since expanded to Parkwood, which Shantz says allows for even greater integration of care. ☞

## News brief

### Four churches, five languages celebrating Jesus



*Punjabi Masihi Church lead worship: 'In heaven, we will all speak Punjabi!'*



*Katie, Angela and Key from Sherbrooke's Korean Group serve potato pancakes (Gamja-jeon).*

non-Mennonite congregation that rents from Sherbrooke). The main worship event included a musical band made from all the cultural groups. The theme of the day was Cross Culture = † Culture. Although those living nearby have been invited to the event in past years, Pastor Kevin Barkowsky says that organizers felt inviting more people could have a negative response from the neighbourhood, so it was limited to the four participating churches.

—BY AMY RINNER WADDELL

VANCOUVER, B.C.—Five different cultural groups continued an autumn tradition on Sept 26 by worshipping and eating together at Sherbrooke Mennonite Church's annual fall festival. Joining together for worship in all the languages and then eating an array of different ethnic foods outdoors were Sherbrooke Mennonite Church; the Korean group that is part of Sherbrooke; Vietnamese Mennonite Church, which meets at Sherbrooke; First United Mennonite Spanish Church, which meets at Peace Church on 52nd; and Punjabi Masihi Church (not a

# Seeking made-in-Leamington solutions to homelessness

By Charleen Jongejan Harder  
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*  
LEAMINGTON, ONT.

It was the spring of 2018, Pastor Ruth Boehm of Faith Mennonite Church in Leamington recalls, when the father of one of the kids attending the after-school program at the church approached her, asking if he could park his truck in the church parking lot overnight. He could not stay in his home.

"I knew him when he was doing well," Boehm says. "Now he was in trouble, out of a job, out of a place to stay."

Permission was granted, and overnight became a year.

"I didn't want to give him money," she says. "I said it was a systemic issue, and I would work on the systemic issues that had pushed him into the parking lot. I invited him into the process. He came to several of the first meetings, and it was something positive I could reflect back to his partner, to his mom."

Boehm shared his story at the Leamington ecumenical ministerial group, and more stories were told around the table. Someone was staying at the Lutheran church and at the Anglican church as well.

Boehm was designated to bring their concerns to the newly elected mayor of Leamington, Hilda MacDonald.

"I had never in my role as pastor talked to the mayor before," Boehm says. "I was definitely stepping out of my comfort zone." She urged the mayor to consider her connections: "You are in a position to deal with bylaws and funding for infrastructure along Highway 77; you are in a position to speak on issues with the City of Windsor."

From Boehm's perspective, the mayor has advocated a lot in the past few years.

Housing issues in Leamington are complex. As farming in the county moves increasingly towards greenhouse operations, more migrant workers are coming to the community. Sewage and other infrastructure issues limit how many workers



PHOTO BY ABBY NEUFELD DICK

**Working to provide homes, pictured from left to right: Hilda MacDonald, mayor of Leamington; Alissa Enns, project leader for the Leamington Homelessness Project; Lisa Bezaire, Housing Information Services; Carolyn Warkentin, South Essex Community Council; and Colm Holmes, Family Services Windsor Essex.**

can be housed on site, leading many farms to buy up available properties in town for worker housing, causing a housing shortage.

Meanwhile, urbanites are increasingly buying property further out from Toronto and driving prices up. Rental housing has become unaffordable and practically unavailable; rent was \$900, now it is well over \$2,000 a month.

"It's an absolute lottery to get a house," Boehm laments.

Another issue facing rural communities is that most social services are provided in the city. Funding is provided based on data for services used; and since rural people are counted among the city dwellers, no funding for housing is channelled to rural communities.

Mayor Hilda responded to Boehm's initial request by bringing together

representatives from the municipality, churches and social agencies. Eighteen people showed up at the first meeting.

Carolyn Warkentin, a member at Leamington United Mennonite Church, and the director of the South Essex Community Council, was there. "All my professional life I've worked in Leamington; issues of homelessness are not new to me," she says.

After initial conversations, Warkentin suggested that the Leamington Homelessness Project apply for a one-year grant, hire someone who could gather data and write a report including local solutions.

"The pandemic has exacerbated the issues," Warkentin says. "When everything was locked down, I was so disturbed to realize that folks on the streets had no access to washroom facilities or fresh water.

"As a Christian, I believe it's



PHOTO BY CHARLEEN JONGEJAN HARDER

**Ruth Boehm is pictured in the church parking lot where a man spent a year sleeping out in his truck.**

imperative that people have their basic dignity respected: basic needs, shelter, a safe place to go,” she says. “Our systems are broken. It’s time that Christians start pressuring our governments and advocate for systems to be overhauled and fixed. No person should sleep out on the street. This is a moral imperative, an ethical imperative. We all benefit from everyone being housed safely; we all have a stake in it. I feel a calling that my community is well served and that all people are given equitable access.”

Alyssa Enns was hired by the Leamington Homelessness Project a year ago, and the report was recently published online at [www.secc.on.ca/findinghome](http://www.secc.on.ca/findinghome). She has been hired for another year, working under Warkentin.

COVID-19 stalled the process, but five individuals had already been housed by mid-September.

“Zero Homelessness is achievable in Leamington,” says Warkentin. “It means a robust support system after they are housed and preventing evictions in the first place, but I believe it is doable. A rural community might even be better positioned to do this, to be innovative and serve our people with dignity.”

“Working together has shaped our ministerial,” says Boehm. “We are partners with agencies and municipalities and other churches. We’ve added a second weekly community meal. It’s changed my congregation. It’s changed me, how I minister. God has really led us to be an authentic part of our community. It started with a question, ‘Can I spend the night in your parking lot?’ And oh, here we go! God’s at work, getting us outside ourselves.” ❧

# Protesting pipelines in British Columbia

*Indigenous task group says project contributes to climate change*

By Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent  
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

**M**ennonite Church B.C.’s Indigenous Relations Task Group, which is committed to creating redemptive relationships between settler Mennonites and their Indigenous neighbours, has officially registered its opposition to the Canadian Government’s support for two projects: the Coastal GasLink Pipeline bringing fracked gas from the Peace River to Kitimat, B.C.; and the Trans Mountain Pipeline bringing bitumen from the tar sands in Alberta to tidewater in Burnaby, B.C.

The document reads in part:

“In the interests of achieving the government’s commitments to reaching its climate targets and demonstrating a commitment to a social contract for reconciliation with Indigenous nations and climate-conscious citizens, we urge the government to halt present and future fossil fuel infrastructure projects to prevent further ecological damage and the erosion of trust with Indigenous nations.

“As the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report makes plain, we have no time to spare. ‘The burning of fossil fuels and deforestation are choking the planet and putting billions of people in immediate danger,’ with Indigenous peoples and the poor particularly vulnerable. We also call on the government to cease subsidizing this industry with money

from taxes coming from citizens that do not agree with the government’s actions in this regard.

“The Coastal GasLink and Trans Mountain pipelines contradict the government’s stated policy directions. We urge the government to aggressively move forward on its climate agenda as well as its commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous nations, as articulated in both federal and provincial legislation to honour and implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These policy initiatives have our full support.”

The task group states: “These pipelines violate the fundamental right of free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous nations and contribute to escalating climate change. By granting approval to the Coastal GasLink pipeline, the governments of Canada and British Columbia fail to respect the Supreme Court of Canada’s 1997 ruling that Wet’suwet’en title constitutes an ancestral right protected by section 35(1) of the Constitution Act, 1982. Presently, construction of this pipeline is poised to destroy the ancient village site, Ts’elkay Kwe Ceek, that is culturally important and archeologically significant.” ❧

To read the full statement, visit <https://bit.ly/3AE41Q6>.



PHOTO BY JOSIAH NEUFELD

**Piles of pipe for the Coastal Gaslink just outside of Houston, B.C.**

# How do environmental problems make people feel?

(... and why does that matter?)

Mennonite World Conference Creation Care Task Force



**Sara Viteri**

**“**It makes me so sad to see the consequences of environmental damage all across the globe,” says Sara Viteri, a member of Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Jesús el Buen Pastor, in Guayaquil, Ecuador. “We have not been good stewards of God’s creation; we have destroyed it rather. It makes me feel guilty to be part of the problem instead of part of the solution.”

How do you feel about climate change or other environmental problems like pollution? Do those feelings motivate you to respond?

For those who work on environmental problems, these questions are starting to take centre stage. Understanding people’s emotional responses is key to responding to problems such as climate change.

In a Mennonite World Conference creation care survey, the Creation Care Task Force asked respondents to say how they felt about the environmental degradation that they experience. The task force grouped their responses to show how people are feeling.

## Fear and sadness are the most prevalent feelings

The most common responses to environmental problems were expressions of fear and sadness.

This is not surprising. Surveys of climate-related emotions report that, as people see first-hand the impact of environmental problems, they feel uncertain and scared.

Recent work in environmental psychology emphasizes how these feelings can lead to “implicit denial” of environmental problems; people know these changes are happening but, feeling overwhelmed and powerless, they choose to avoid facing the

problems.

Surprisingly, fear and sadness were as prevalent in more affluent regions as those with fewer resources. Fear was expressed by a consistent one-third to one-half of respondents in both more affluent regions (Europe and North America), and also in regions that are generally less affluent (Africa, Asia and Latin America).

Responses of sadness varied more but also did not correlate with levels of affluence. Asian respondents, in particular, expressed high levels of sadness, whereas Europeans and Latin Americans did not).

So even though some people are clearly affected more by climate change than others, everyone is showing similar emotional responses of fear and sadness.

## Respondents rarely report hope

What leads to effective action on environmental problems? Although studies suggest there isn’t an easy answer, there is evidence

that people respond effectively when they feel hopeful that they can have an impact.

In this survey, some people reported that experiencing environmental problems and the accompanying emotions does motivate them to action.



**Mark Ruzzel**  
**Victoria**

“[I feel] scared yet motivated, because if I act accordingly for the betterment of the environment, then I might make a change,” says Mark Ruzzel Victoria of Lumban Mennonite Bible Church, the Philippines.

However, relatively few people responded with expressions of hope and motivation. Perhaps feelings of sadness and fear are hindering an effective response.

Furthermore, few people in any region reported feeling guilt or shame, even in affluent countries that bear greater responsibility, given their resources. Perhaps this is



*Deforestation in the Philippines.*

PHOTO BY XYRA ORTIZ

### Reported emotions by region

	Sadness	Fear	Lack of control	Anger	Hope/ motivated	Guilt/ shame
Africa	29.5%	29.5%	11.4%	13.6%	15.9%	0.0%
Asia	47.6%	23.2%	11.0%	2.4%	7.3%	1.2%
Europe	12.3%	33.8%	3.1%	10.8%	4.6%	3.1%
Latin America	15.6%	25.0%	34.4%	15.6%	12.5%	3.1%
North America	29.5%	34.1%	12.4%	16.3%	7.8%	7.0%

In a creation-care survey, the MWC Creation Care Task Force asked respondents to say how they felt about the environmental degradation that they experience.

another indication that people are avoiding this overwhelming problem, or that they don't personally feel that they have a large impact.

#### Family and community are central motivators

"It makes me uncertain what kind of world will be here for my children and

future grandchildren," says Canadian Joan Bueckert, a member of Ottawa Mennonite Church.



Joan Bueckert

Many respondents put their emotions in a communal context. They were thinking of others, such as their grandchildren, their church communities or those in parts of the world most affected by climate change.

These results suggest that the church has an opportunity to help people respond positively by helping them understand their emotions in the context of their loved ones. Anger, for instance, can move people to respond passionately to what they observe.

The task force offers this challenge: "Don't avoid your emotions about the impacts of climate change. Learn to understand your feelings, and then transform them into motivation for action." ✎

## A prayer of environmental lament

MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE

**F**ather, Son and Holy Spirit:  
As we reflect on the beauty and diversity of Planet Earth and all its beings that you have created to function in harmony with each other, we are deeply saddened and repentant for the way in which we have behaved, and the disasters we have contributed to with our irresponsible behaviour.

We have been disobedient to your calling to be good stewards.  
As a society, and as your church, we are fearful and sad for what is happening all around us;  
for the deep damage and pain we have caused,  
especially to so many poor, vulnerable and helpless communities,  
to future generations (our own children!),  
and to diverse and wonderful creatures you care for.

We all cry out to you in sadness, fear, pain and sometimes anger.  
We pray that our feelings of anxiety, despair and discouragement might be transformed into hope by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as a church, we can wake up from our slumber, and be motivated to work for change and restoration of your beloved creation.

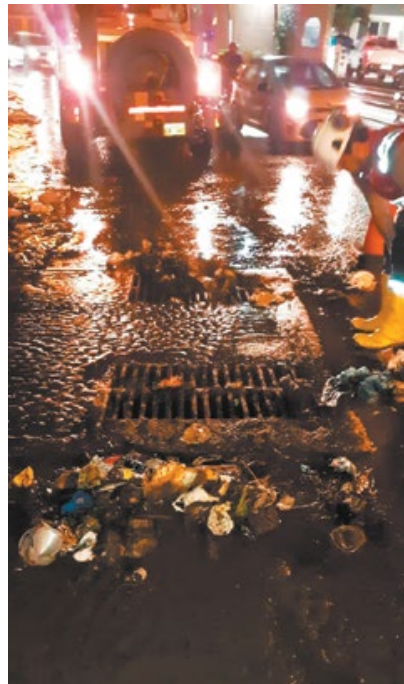


PHOTO COURTESY OF MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE

*Impacts of climate change on flooding in Ecuador.*



### !Explore: A Theological Program for Youth

In July 2022, participants (grades 10 to 12) can attend Mennonite World Conference in Indonesia with other Indonesian youth, explore theological questions and lived faith together, and visit parts of beautiful Java Island.

Sign up by Dec. 31!

Learn more: [amb.ca/explore](https://amb.ca/explore)

# Grants help people recover from disasters big and small

MDS Canada launches new round of Spirit of MDS Fund grants

By John Longhurst  
Mennonite Disaster Service

After a successful first two rounds of funding, Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada is once again offering its Spirit of MDS Fund to Canadian congregations.

Created in response to COVID-19, the Fund provided a total of 81 grants worth \$206,900 in 2020-21 to help congregations and other organizations respond to needs in their communities due to the pandemic.

Now MDS Canada is offering grants again, this time making them a regular part of its program.

“When the pandemic hit, we were greatly limited in the ways we could respond due to safety and health concerns and travel restrictions,” says Ross Penner, the director of Canadian operations. “The Spirit of MDS Fund was a way for us to support congregations working on the frontlines of the pandemic disaster, doing things we couldn’t do, in the spirit of MDS.”

When MDS Canada board members saw the success and impact of the Fund during the pandemic, they decided to make it part of the regular program, Penner says. “There



Ross Penner

are many other ongoing practical needs churches want to meet in their communities, but maybe they lack funds or expertise. A grant from the Fund could be just the thing they need to get some volunteers together, buy materials or other needed items, and help people in their community.”

Grants of up to \$5,000 are available and can be used for construction or renovation projects to repair a home or make it more livable, according to Penner.

Other ways grants can be used include:

- **Providing food** or other needed resources for those in crisis, as a result from the ongoing pandemic.
- **Neighbourhood ministry** projects.
- **Other creative** ideas that fit with MDS Canada’s core values of faith in action and caring relationships.

MDS Canada is also open to providing assistance in leadership or volunteers to churches that want to do repair or construction projects, he said.

As in the past, the new round of funding will focus on Mennonite/Anabaptist churches and organizations, with funding available for other churches and church-related groups on a case-by-case basis. Priority for funding will be given to applications that mobilize volunteers.

“Our goal at MDS Canada is to partner with local congregations as they seek to be the hands and feet of Jesus in their communities,” says Penner. “They know where the needs are in their communities and how best to meet them. We can be a support to them, and together we can help people recover from disasters both big and small.”

An application for funding for the 2021-22 Spirit of MDS Fund is available online at [www.mds.org](http://www.mds.org).



**Mennonite  
Disaster  
Service**

## News brief

### Two MC B.C. churches close their doors

• **Living Stones Chinese Mennonite Church** of Surrey, a Chinese language congregation, held its last worship service on Sept. 26. It had been a member of Mennonite Church B.C. since Easter Sunday of 2013. “We thank God for this congregation and the impact they have had in the Mandarin community in the Surrey area,” says Garry Janzen, the regional church’s executive minister. Jonathan Deng was the church planter who started Living Stones, and Audrey Sheu was the pastor at its closing, with Martha Chen serving as congregational chair for much of eight-year lifespan of the church. “We are thankful that all the people are finding their way to other congregations, including

our other Mandarin congregation, White Rock Mennonite Church,” says Janzen. “Let us keep these sisters and brothers in our prayers as they go through this challenging time.

• **Northgate Anabaptist Fellowship** of Dawson Creek has decided not to continue as a church. The congregation held its final Zoom service on Thanksgiving Sunday, Oct. 10. Northgate began as a plant of the B.C. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in 1982. It left the MB conference and was accepted into MC B.C. in February 2016. “We give thanks to God for these years that we have had Northgate in our MC B.C. family,” says Janzen.



## Peace and chocolate

A community in Colombia finds an unusual way to work for peace

By Renata Buhler

What does embodying the peace of Jesus look like in the face of violence? For some people living in the Chocó region of Colombia, the answer involves an unexpected ingredient—chocolate.

Families living in Chocó face significant obstacles. Armed groups have expanded into the region, bringing illicit activities and violence with them. The area is also isolated from the rest of the country, leading to few opportunities to safely earn a living.

Many families support themselves best through farming. But harvest season brings a particular challenge. There's little demand for unprocessed crops in the community, so earning an income means travelling significant distances to bring the harvest to market. But reliable transportation can be complicated by the violence present in the region.

MCC's local partner, the Mennonite Brethren church, saw their community struggling and wanted to help. "The Anabaptist churches here have used the framework of 'life abundant' [found in] John 10:10 to live out the gospel in their context, a way of insisting on the holistic peace embodied by Jesus," said Elizabeth Miller, MCC representative for Colombia.

That holistic peace is more than just a wish. True peace involves the opportunity for everyone to have life abundant and earn a dignified living.

Working with the community, MCC's partner FAGROTÉS (Fundación Agropecuaria Tejiendo Esperanza, Weaving Hope Agricultural Foundation) first opened a rice processing plant and committed to purchasing farmers'



Luis Norberto Mosquera shows the interior of a healthy cacao pod from his farm in Chocó, Colombia in 2018. He received training in growing and processing cacao through an MCC partner. (Growing Hope Globally photo/Alex Morse)

harvests. Then, they expanded into training the farmers how to grow cacao, the plant used to make chocolate.

Thanks to the Mennonite Brethren's decades-long reputation of peace and a firm commitment to not affiliate with any of the armed groups in the region, our partner was also able to safely open and operate a chocolate processing plant in the community.

Now the farmers can turn their cacao harvests into a finished product. The chocolate bars are then sold in the community, allowing farmers to safely earn an income while also helping the local economy.

**That's the power of peace in action.**

**For MCC, peace is more than a wish. It's our work.**  
To learn more, visit [morethanawish.ca](http://morethanawish.ca)



## PEOPLE

# What does it mean to be a Mennonite?

*New film entertains while exploring Mennonite history and identity*

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe  
Manitoba Correspondent

**“W**hat does it mean to be a Mennonite?” This is the question Winnipeg filmmaker Paul Plett seeks to answer in his latest film, *I Am A Mennonite*.

Plett has been creating an extensive catalogue of movies for 10 years through Ode Productions, the company he founded that focuses on “conscious entertainment.”

*I Am A Mennonite*, which launches on Nov. 2, is an hour-long documentary that explores Plett’s personal Mennonite identity but also the broader Mennonite story.

“I wanted to make a Mennonite documentary which was fun,” says Plett, who attends Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. He aimed to create something substantial yet entertaining, different from the serious documentaries that already exist on the topic.

He and his team started filming two years ago, in the fall of 2019, but he started working on the idea years earlier, first going through the long pre-production process of securing funding, planning and writing.

Plett begins his journey at home in Manitoba, then he travels around the world in search of his Mennonite roots and identity. While walking through old Mennonite churches in the Netherlands and wandering among the remains of former Mennonite villages in Ukraine, he hears about what being a Mennonite means to a multitude of different people.

He speaks with adults and children from various walks of life—experts like historians and theologians, people who have been Mennonite for generations and those who only recently began identifying as such. He retraces the steps of his ancestors and, along the way, learns where Mennonites have come from and where they are going.

In his early conversations, Plett encountered two contrasting definitions of Mennonite identity. One view classified it as ethnicity—culture, food, certain last names. The other maintained that being Mennonite is about faith, not heritage; anyone can claim it as an identity if they believe. Plett wrestles with these definitions, and others, throughout the film.

“For Russian Mennonites in Manitoba, this will be obviously super interesting



PHOTO COURTESY OF ODE PRODUCTIONS  
**Paul Plett’s new film explores his Mennonite identity and heritage at home in Manitoba and across the ocean.**

because it’s our story,” he says of the film. But the documentary will also act as a helpful introduction to Mennonites for people who have no prior knowledge.

He hopes viewers, in addition to learning, also just enjoy watching it.



PHOTO: PAUL PLETT / ODE PRODUCTIONS

**In *I Am A Mennonite*, filmmaker Paul Plett begins his journey at home in Manitoba, then travels around the world—including to the Netherlands, pictured—in search of his Mennonite roots and identity.**

“It was a really exciting adventure to go and travel to these places, and I wanted to bring the audience on a fun ride,” he says.

Audiences have already been appreciating it. The film has played at numerous festivals and won many awards.

“For me, it’s been an incredibly affirming experience seeing it being embraced,” he says.

Plett was inspired to create the documentary after working on his last project, *Seven Points on Earth*, which tells the stories of seven Mennonite farmers around the world. Diving into the farmers’ life stories made him want to look deeper at his own.

He also began to appreciate his Mennonite heritage and values when he became a parent and considered what he was passing on to his children. “I’ve spent the last 10 years travelling around the world, telling other people’s stories. . . Now what’s my story?”

*I Am a Mennonite* was made in partnership with the D.F. Plett Historical Foundation and several private donors. It is now available for pre-order on iTunes. Starting Nov. 2, it will be available anywhere movies can be rented or purchased.



# A biblical foundation to stand on

*Get to know an MWC commission member*

Mennonite World Conference

**T**he Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Faith and Life Commission helps MWC member churches to share counsel on Christian faith and practice, represents MWC in ecumenical relationships, and promotes Anabaptist-Mennonite witness in the world today.

Lydia Christina Adi, a commission member from Indonesia, is interviewed about the commission's work and her part in it.

## How does this commission practice being together in Christ?

**Christina Adi:** We discuss, research and provide resources on Christian faith and witness according to the convictions we hold, providing biblical foundation for our churches.

For example, in June 2021, secretary John D. Roth and chair Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld taught on baptism at the "Renewal 2021" webinars.

## Why are you pleased to serve on this commission?

**Adi:** It is a great honour to be a part of the Faith and Life Commission because I can take part in gathering the resources believers need to stand firm, especially during difficult times like this pandemic.

I am also looking forward to writing and researching about practices in Indonesia and other countries that churches have questions about.

## What is the name of your local church?

**Adi:** Jemaat Kristen Indonesia Maranatha (JKI Maranatha) in Ungaran, Central Java, Indonesia.

## How do you serve the Mennonite church in your daily life outside of your commission work?



**Lydia Adi**

**Adi:** For the JKI synod, I serve as the international relations representative.

My husband, Anton K. Sidharta, and I serve on the National Advisory Council in preparation for MWC Assembly 17: Indonesia 2022.

In the past, I have helped share, recruit and find hosts for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) volunteer exchange programs (Yamen, International Volunteer Exchange Program, and Serving and Learning Together), and the Mennonite Mission Network's Journey mission program to Indonesia.

For the JKI synod, my husband and I also serve on the Digitalization Team, Unlimited Fire Youth.

Through a conversation that started at Global Youth Summit at Paraguay 2009, where I attended as a delegate, my husband and I started a conference to equip the youth leaders from our synod. Through our annual conference, radio program, reflections, podcasts, networking, worship songs and workshops, we create spaces where young people can encounter God's love and be trained as they are plugged into local churches and communities.

At my local church, I serve on the creative team in multimedia and events.

## How do you experience togetherness in the body of Christ in your daily life?

**Adi:** Peter had hopelessly fished all night and caught nothing. Then a miracle happened as Peter obeyed Jesus' words to cast the net on the other side. They caught such a large number of fish that they needed to ask for help from other boats.

In the same way, we cannot serve alone. We need our friends to help us "catch" the people who need to know Jesus. Together, we can disciple this next generation and

make God's name known.

When the pandemic came to Indonesia, suddenly many people were jobless at home. Some could not afford food and medication when COVID-19 hit, and they needed to self-isolate. Our church home groups took turns sending food, vitamins and supplies every day. We supported families needing money for internet connection, laptops and phones. Sometimes all we could do was lend our Zoom account to the local school for class or to host a COVID-19 Zoom funeral.

It was a hard time and still is. We have found God's strength through one another. Sometimes it just took a short video call to restore someone's faith.

In July, when COVID-19 hit our home, we experienced the love of neighbours, friends, leaders and community sending us medicine, home tests, food hung on our fence, daily voice notes with prayers and encouragement, and people connecting us to the right doctors and specialists. It was the whole body of Christ taking care of one part of the body that was hurting until it is made whole again.

## In what way has being part of MWC affected your local congregation(s)?

**Adi:** Being a part of MWC has broadened the experience of many Indonesians, especially from small towns.

Youth and families had a chance to connect with guests from all over the world, learning about other cultures and introducing Indonesian culture.

Some youth could never even dream about setting foot outside of Indonesia, yet the MWC and MCC programs open opportunities to experience God's goodness in another country or to connect with someone from another country here in Indonesia.

It really brings colour to our churches. ☘

# Making the best of a bad situation

*Former director of child welfare reflects on actions that contributed to the Sixties Scoop*

By Donna Schulz  
Saskatchewan Correspondent  
REGINA

**“H**ow do you deal with a bad situation? What is the best of the worst solutions?”

These are questions Otto Driedger poses as he reflects on the past.

In 1965, when Driedger was director of child welfare for the Saskatchewan Department of Social Services, he and a colleague started the Adopt Indian Métis (AIM) Program. The program was part of what later became known as the Sixties Scoop. The goal of AIM was not to remove

Indigenous children from healthy homes, but to place children already in foster care with permanent adoptive families.

“We had 3,000 children in care on the basis of neglect or abuse,” says Driedger. “Whether our judgments were always accurate is another question, but some would have died if they had not been taken from their homes.”

Indigenous children were often moved from one foster home to another. White families readily adopted white children who were in care, but they did not adopt Indigenous children.

“The recommendation was to find more permanency [for these children],” says Driedger. “Security, love and identity are the principles of child care, especially between the ages of two and five years.”

Driedger acknowledges that having Indigenous children adopted into white families was not the best solution, but he and his colleagues felt it was the best option available to them at the time.

“If you can keep the family together as much as possible, that’s ideal,” he says. If a child is removed from their family, the second best solution is to “find ways for the family to pull together,” and if the child has to be permanently removed, the third best option is “finding as permanent a place as possible.”

Driedger blames settler colonialism for the social disintegration in Indigenous communities.

“For 100 years we tried to destroy the Indian identity by putting them into reserves and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FLORENCE DRIEDGER

*Florence and Otto Driedger, about 40 years ago.*

residential schools and by not allowing them to practise their religion,” he says. When this happens, he adds, “you expect social disintegration.”

Driedger doesn’t believe that racism motivated his work with AIM. He has always believed that all people are equal regardless of race or gender. And he holds to the social-work principle of looking for positive ways to alleviate negative situations.

“My attitude hasn’t changed,” he says.

Born in 1932, Driedger grew up on a farm near Osler, Sask. “When I grew up I never had that perspective that we needed to be missionaries [to Indigenous people],” he says, recalling youth from Beardy’s and Okemasis First Nation camping near the farm en route to Saskatoon for the exhibition. He and his brothers played with these Indigenous children. As teenagers, he and his older brother drove to Beardy’s community to visit. These experiences, he believes, led him to an open and respectful attitude toward Indigenous people.

“People are different,” he says, “but they’re not above or below you.”



*Florence and Otto Driedger stand beside a tree planted in their honour at the dacha (summer home) of Lyudmila Romanenkova (or Lucy as she is known) in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. Romanenkova is director of the Family Support and Community Education Centre (or Florence Centre) in Ukraine.*

Otto's wife Florence says that over the years she and her husband "have had many connections with adoptees and their parents—some where it has worked out well, others where it didn't work out at all."

Driedger understands that AIM and the Sixties Scoop solved some problems while creating many more. Referring to Indigenous culture, he says, "It took us 100 years to break it down. It will take a lot longer to make it right." Yet he remains hopeful that Canadian society is moving in the right direction.

"I am incredibly impressed by how forgiving the Indigenous community is," he says. "A very large percentage is moving in the direction of reconciliation." He also notes a growing awareness among non-Indigenous people that they have a responsibility to work together with their Indigenous neighbours to right past wrongs.

"Many people in our society are recognizing that we've got to work this out together," he says. "There's movement in that."

Driedger worked for the Department of Social Services for 17 years. In addition to several years as director of child welfare, he also worked in corrections, youth and geriatric services.

During the 1970s, he helped develop the social work program at the University of Regina and worked with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (now Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations) to develop a social-work program specific to the Indigenous context. This resulted in a

bachelor of Indigenous social work degree that is recognized nationwide. Driedger also helped develop the human-justice program at the university, eventually serving as professor of social work and human justice.

Since retiring in 1997, the Driedgers

have been heavily involved with Circles of Support and Accountability, a restorative justice program that reintegrates former sexual offenders into society. They have also assisted in developing social-work and human-justice education at the University of Odessa in Ukraine. ✎



- Study participation includes an interview (2-4 hours) and a blood sample.
- Participants must be 18 or older and may be eligible if they have either a bipolar diagnosis or a family member with bipolar disorder.
- No travel necessary. No cost to participate. Financial compensation provided.

### Join A Study!

Call 1-866-644-4363 or TTY: 1-866-411-1010  
Email [bipolargenes@mail.nih.gov](mailto:bipolargenes@mail.nih.gov), [www.nimh.nih.gov/JoinAStudy](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/JoinAStudy)

Write to National Institute of Mental Health  
10 Center Drive, MSC 1264, Bethesda, Maryland 20892-1264



Department of Health & Human Services  
National Institutes of Health



National Institute  
of Mental Health

[www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov) Protocol No. 80-M-0083

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## ONLINE NOW!

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



### Ohio mission group captured in Haiti

A group of 17 workers and family members from an Ohio-based, Mennonite-supported Christian aid organization was kidnapped Oct. 16 by gang members in Haiti.

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



### Volunteering with Okanagan Gleaners

Volunteers from Rosthern Mennonite Church spent five days last month chopping and dehydrating vegetables at Okanagan Gleaners near Oliver, B.C.

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



### Training begins for Indonesia 2022 volunteers

The Mennonite World Conference Assembly 2022's Indonesian planning committee is training volunteers virtually.

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



### 'A sign of hope from God'

The damage caused by a severe windstorm proved to be overwhelming for a couple in southwestern Ontario—until they heard from Mennonite Disaster Service.

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

Call for Art

# The Christmas Story

Canadian Mennonite invites elementary and high school students from Mennonite schools and churches to submit artwork for the Christmas 2021 issue by **November 9, 2021**. The theme this year is **The Christmas Story**.

Digital versions (*at least 300 dpi*) can be submitted to [submit@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:submit@canadianmennonite.org). Paper artwork (*minimum 4" by 6"*) can be sent to: 490 Dutton Dr., Unit C5, Waterloo, ON N2L 6H7.

Submissions should be high resolution and should include creator's full name, grade and the name of the student's school or congregation.

Selected works will appear in the **December 6, 2021** print issue and online.

**CANADIAN Mennonite**

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Schools Directory featuring Conrad Grebel University College

# New scholarship honours parents' legacy

Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont.

The family of Emerson and Elsie McDowell recently established a scholarship endowment in the master of theological studies program at Conrad Grebel University College, to honour their parents' commitment to the ministry of the Mennonite church, and their vision of ecumenism. The McDowells had a long relationship with Grebel as supporters, parents and grandparents.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MCDOWELL FAMILY

**The Emerson and Elsie McDowell Theological Studies Scholarship honours the legacy of a couple committed to the Mennonite Church.**

"It is gratifying when donors can honour the legacy of their parents by offering tangible support to students in our programs," says Fred W. Martin, Grebel's director of advancement.

The scholarship will assist strong students who are interested in pursuing ministry. The first recipient is Zachary Stefaniuk.

Emerson (1918-1976) and Elsie (Ramer) McDowell (1923-2018) served in various ministry and pastoral settings in Ontario. These included the Toronto Mennonite Mission (later Danforth Mennonite Church), Hagerman Mennonite and Steeles Avenue Mennonite churches.

Elsie enjoyed serving on the Women's Inter-Church Council for six years in the late

1970s, working on the Women's World Day of Prayer Committee. Emerson developed camp programs at Fraser Lake Camp and Willowgrove Day Camp; served on several Mennonite boards and committees; and was chair of the Inter-Mennonite Executive Council in Ontario, which eventually led to the formation of the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada.

In an interview shortly before his death, Emerson said that one vision he had for the church was to "work at breaking down barriers so that people now outside our church can experience faith and fellowship and right relationships with God and people."

## DISCOVER ROCKWAY

Tuesday, November 9, 2021  
7 pm  
register at [www.rockway.ca](http://www.rockway.ca)

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## MCEC Learning Commons

Equipping Church Leaders

**L**earning Commons celebrates its first year on the MCEC website.

Explore events and learning opportunities geared towards your ministry. Our focus is to assist church leaders to grow in their core competencies. No matter if you are pastoral staff, lay leader or an aspiring leader in your congregation, Learning Commons might be just the site to explore.

Discover regular and special events, online and in-person, as well as recordings of past events. We link with our partners to bring you curated events which will speak into the development of your core competencies.

You are invited to participate in setting the direction of educational events for the coming year. Those events will be highlighted as “guide-events.”

**No matter if you are pastoral staff, lay leader or an aspiring leader in your congregation, Learning Commons might be just the site to explore.**

Explore a ministry portfolio – a curation of your own learnings, ventures into writing or art, hearing God’s voice, and seeing your call unfold.

**Come and explore what more there is to learn.**

### MCEC Learning Commons

**Grow your  
ministry core  
competencies**

**Learn from each  
other**

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**Set direction for  
further learning**

**Curate your  
learnings in the  
ministry portfolio**

**Equipping Church Leaders**  
[www.mcec.ca/learningcommons](http://www.mcec.ca/learningcommons)

## /// Calendar

### Nationwide

**July 29-Aug. 1, 2022:** MC Canada Gathering 2022, in Edmonton. Theme: "We declare what we have seen and heard." Information about Gathering 2022 will be regularly updated at [mennonitechurch.ca/gathering2022](http://mennonitechurch.ca/gathering2022).

**July 31-Aug. 4, 2022:** MC Canada National Youth Gathering at Camp Valaqua, Water Valley, Alta. Theme: "Amplify! Giving voice to what we have seen and heard." Information will be regularly updated at [mennonitechurch.ca/amplify](http://mennonitechurch.ca/amplify).

### Saskatchewan

**Nov. 15-19:** "21st-century preaching," a one-week intensive course with Meghan Good. This course will examine methods for doing exegesis for preaching that are realistic in the busyness of ministry and keep pastors' own hearing of God's words fresh and living. For more information, or to register, visit <https://mcsask.ca/event/10691>.

### Manitoba

**Ongoing:** Join an MC Manitoba gratitude group every second week for six weeks on Zoom, for 40 minutes of gathering with others in encouragement and sharing gratitude. Leader: Laura Funk, MC Manitoba's spiritual director-in-residence. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/2YbxzRf>.

**Nov. 12:** Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery is hosting its annual fundraising gala, "Up and Running," featuring live music, artworks and a tribute to retiring founder-curator Ray Dirks, at 7:30 p.m. The event takes place in person at the gallery or it can be viewed through livestreaming. To register, visit <https://bit.ly/3A13LoQ>. The live event is capped at 50 spots, and guests must provide proof of vaccination and wear a mask.

### Ontario

**Until March 7, 2022:** Not Traumatic Enough for a Shock Blanket exhibit at the Grebel

Gallery, Conrad Grebel University College. For more information, visit <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-peace-advancedment/grebel-gallery>.

**Nov. 19-20:** MCC Ontario virtual peace conference, Reconciliation in Action. See: [mcccanada.ca/get-involved/events/peace-conference](http://mcccanada.ca/get-involved/events/peace-conference).

**April 19, 2022:** Diverse Paths: An Exploration of Low German Mennonite Experiences, at Conrad Grebel University College. This conference will bring together members of Low German-speaking communities and those who work within these communities, including service providers, educators and academics. More at: <https://mcccanada.ca/get-involved/events/diverse-paths-exploration-low-german-mennonite-experiences>

**May 13-15, 2022:** "Indigenous-Mennonite encounters in time and place" academic conference and community education event, at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo. The event will include academic presentations, community storytelling, artistic offerings, and both Indigenous and Mennonite ceremonies.

### 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](http://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](http://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](mailto:calendar@canadianmennonite.org). For more Calendar listings online, visit [canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar](http://canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar).**



## /// Classifieds

### Employment Opportunities




Employment Opportunities  
**Project Director**  
**Managing Editor**

**MennoMedia**

The 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement in 2025 provides a remarkable opportunity for Anabaptist Christians to reflect on their faith.

**MennoMedia seeks to hire a full-time project director and a full-time managing editor to oversee publication of a suite of products that invite Anabaptists and those interested in Anabaptism to consider the history and future of this movement.**

Find out more at  
[www.mennomedia.org/job-openings/](http://www.mennomedia.org/job-openings/).



Employment opportunity  
**Lead Pastor**  
Calgary, Alberta

Foothills MC is a multigenerational urban church of 169 members. The fellowship was established in 1956 and is a member of Mennonite Church Alberta and MC Canada.

A Lead Pastor is sought to guide the congregation after an 18-month interim ministry following our Lead Pastor's 20-year pastorate. Meet us by going to [www.foothillsmennonite.ca](http://www.foothillsmennonite.ca). Foothills MC is an Anabaptist faith community that desires to embody, share and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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

Please direct inquiries to: [office@foothillsmennonite.ca](mailto:office@foothillsmennonite.ca), Attention of the Chair, Search Committee.

Employment Opportunity  
**Fraser Lake Camp Director (1.0 FTE)**  
Stouffville/Bancroft, ON.

Fraser Lake Camp is looking for a visionary Director to lead our overnight camp program during changing times.

The ideal candidate will have experience working with youth and children, practiced leadership and communication skills, and a commitment to Mennonite values and faith.

Learn more at  
[www.willowgrove.ca/work-with-us](http://www.willowgrove.ca/work-with-us)

# Photo finishH



PHOTO BY KEN REDDIG

*Ken Reddig of Pinawa, Man., made an orange chair to honour residential school survivors and all those who died tragically away from their homes and communities. The fawn came by a bit later to honour all those young people as well.*