

CANADIAN MENNONITE

February 7, 2022 Volume 26 Number 3



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EDITORIAL

Citizens of a city on a hill

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive editor



In the final days of January, a Christian acquaintance of mine started sharing social media posts supporting the “Freedom convoy” of truckers driving across Canada. The destination of this large moving protest was Ottawa, where the protesters planned to present their demands to federal leaders.

Initially billed as a protest against the vaccine mandate for cross-border truck drivers, the movement gained mileage with people from outside the trucking community joining in. Other grievances emerged: against public health measures, calls to replace the current government and even threats of violence against public officials and others. As the convoy arrived in Ottawa, emotions escalated. Reports showed protesters harassing local residents, endangering public safety and displaying symbols of hatred.

As I watched reports and saw the rhetoric and acts get more extreme, I wondered how much my acquaintance knew about the deeper motivations driving these protests. Was this—would this become—an event that a follower of Jesus could endorse?

Because of our history, all the way back to the founding of the Anabaptist movement, we Mennonites know something about standing up to civil authorities when we sense God calling for obedience to a higher authority. Sometimes those in charge do not have intentions for the highest good. At those times, the Bible instructs us to obey God rather than humans. And we tell stories of faith ancestors who did just that,

sometimes at a great cost.

But for those who follow the Prince of Peace, it is clear that his call does not include words and acts of violence against any of God’s children. Disrespect and intimidation are not part of the Christian witness. Scripture does not instruct people to place personal freedom above the good of the community so that they endanger those who are most vulnerable.

As the Ottawa protests started to get uglier, the executive ministers of Mennonite Church Canada and its regional churches issued a statement in response. It reads in part, “we unequivocally denounce the symbols, words and actions of white nationalism being expressed in Ottawa and across the country at “Freedom Rallies.” While we support the right of people to gather peacefully in protest of government laws perceived to be unjust, we cannot support any action that promotes anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or racism. Jesus calls us to love our neighbours as ourselves as an expression of our love for God (Mark 12:29-31), across categories of race, ethnicity, religion and gender (Luke 10:25-37; Gal 3:28).” (See the entire statement here: canadianmennonite.org/denounce)

Sometimes it is difficult for Christians to be “pure” in our engagement in the larger society; we live in a complex world. But we can—and should—ask questions of any efforts we choose to be involved in: Does this demonstrate Jesus’ way of love? How is this good news for all of God’s children, particularly for those who lack power?

Jesus described the witness of his followers as “a city built on a hill,” there for all to see (Matthew 5:14). In Matthew 10:16, he sends his disciples out, advising them to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” For today’s disciples, that wisdom means considering the causes we align ourselves with: What are the assumptions behind those efforts and how might they cause harm? We can also seek wisdom by considering our consumption of media. What sources of information do we choose? What do we expect in the way of responsible communication? Are we able to listen to diverging views, or do we pay attention only to those with whom we agree?

These are conversations we need to have with our siblings in the faith. The church community can help discern which of our actions pass the “love test,” and when our involvements might contribute instead to injustice and violence. Together we can imagine ways to stir up compassion instead of anger, as “ambassadors of Christ’s reconciliation” (Article 23 in *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*).

Article 23 is titled, “The Church’s Relation to Government and Society” and says in part: “We witness to the nations by being that ‘city on a hill’ which demonstrates the way of Christ. We also witness by being ambassadors for Christ, calling the nations (and all persons and institutions) to move toward justice, peace, and compassion for all people. In so doing, we seek the welfare of the city to which God has sent us.”

How do those ideals guide us today? ☞



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PHOTO BY KARLA BRAUN / MWC

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FEATURE

Biblical companions on my cancer journey

Dan Epp-Tiessen

My family does cancer in a big way. In my immediate family of five members, there have been 10 occasions when a doctor told one of us that we have cancer, or that, despite the treatments, the cancer has returned. My wife Esther has had two rounds of breast cancer. Our son Tim, who was born with significant physical and mental disabilities, was diagnosed with a brain tumour when he was three. Cancer took his life when he was eight.

In the last five years, I have been diagnosed with thyroid and prostate cancer. Despite surgery and treatments, both cancers have returned. Doctors now tell me that I will have cancer for the rest of my life, although various treatments should keep me alive for many years yet.

In spite of cancer, I experience my life as rich, joyful, meaningful and blessed. Numerous factors nurture my joy and gratitude, such as a loving life partner, supportive friends, family and church community, meaningful work alongside wonderful colleagues, financial security, and—not least of all—Christian faith. And I have been comforted and supported by biblical passages that I count as precious friends on my cancer journey.

Gratitude for life

The prophet Jeremiah once received a message from God for his friend and secretary Baruch: *“And you, do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for I am going to bring disaster upon all flesh, says the Lord; but I will give you your life as a prize of war in every*

place to which you may go” (45:5).

Leaving aside the difficult issue of whether God inflicts disasters on humans, the gist of the message for Baruch is that he must give up any great expectations for his life because defeat and disaster are about to befall his nation, but God will grant him his life as a prize of war. His life, diminished as it may be, is still a gift worth being grateful for.

With the diagnosis of cancer, I have had to learn the benefits of accepting my life as a prize of war, of being grateful for life itself, even though my quality of life was not what I wished for. Despite the challenges that the cancer brings, I can be attentive to small daily blessings and potential sources of pleasure and joy.

Gratitude can be nurtured through practices given to us by our Christian tradition, for example, table grace, a simple morning prayer thanking God for a good night's rest, and a bedtime prayer thanking God for the experiences of the day.

Settling into reality

Jeremiah wrote a letter to a group of exiles who had been dragged off to Babylonian captivity, advising them to build homes, plant gardens, raise families and seek the welfare of the city to which they had been deported (29:5-7). These exiles did not want to unpack their suitcases because they were convinced that God was about to intervene by defeating the hated Babylonians, and allowing them to return home. Jeremiah tells these exiles that their God-given calling is to accept the painful reality of their situation and make the best of it.

With the diagnosis of cancer, I have had to learn the benefits of accepting my life as a prize of war, of being grateful for life itself, even though my quality of life was not what I wished for.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAN EPP-TIESSEN

Dan and Esther Epp-Tiessen have found joy even in their long journey with cancer.

The various cancers in my life have taken me into exile. I have found it helpful to heed the advice of Jeremiah and accept the reality of my situation and that of my loved ones. As much as I have railed against heaven and earth, I have found it healing and life-giving to believe that God calls me to accept the painful reality that, in the midst of this journey, I am called to carry on with the mundane tasks of home-building, earning a living, tending relationships, and seeking the welfare of my community.

Embracing hope

Christians are people of hope, whose lives are not only defined by the painful realities of the present. But Christian hope is a far cry from naive optimism that every cancer story will have a happy ending.

First Peter 1:3 states, “By [God’s] great mercy [God] has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Christian hope involves the ability to look the crushing realities of our lives

straight in the face and acknowledge how painful they are, but then, in an act of defiance, to declare that they will not define us and overtake us, because we have given our lives over to a different reality, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection reminds us that there is always another power at work in the world besides the painful realities of the present.

Christian hope is the defiant act of clinging to, and being shaped by, the new life and healing that the resurrection of Jesus Christ makes possible already on this side of the grave, and it means facing cancer and the prospect of our own death knowing that Jesus’ entry into resurrection life is God’s promise that someday we will be privileged to follow.

Lament

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?” (Psalm 22:1).

When Tim had mostly recovered from the devastating side effects of the

radiation and chemotherapy treatments, he suffered a stroke that robbed him of many of his physical and mental abilities, including his vision.

For months I sank into an abyss of rage and bitterness that corroded my body and soul, and my ability to be a good father and husband. The most helpful thing I learned about grief is that, when we experience a major loss, our entire being is injected with a massive dose of pain. That pain is like a poison in our body and soul, and it can destroy us if we do not release it. The process of getting the pain out is what we call healthy grieving.

Once I realized that I was a warehouse stuffed to the ceiling with unaddressed pain, I knew that I needed to grieve. Almost every day for weeks on end, I would listen to certain music and look at pictures that I knew would tap into my grief, and I would weep, often uncontrollably. I would also lament like the psalmists do, crying out my pain and rage to God, and pleading for deliverance. This lamenting was a healing process as the anger and bitterness gradually dissipated, allowing greater space in my life for love, compassion and even fragments of joy.

Praise

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that

Christians are people of hope, whose lives are not only defined by the painful realities of the present.

is within me, bless [God's] holy name" (Psalm 103:1).

Praise can be a radical act of hope that nurtures faith by declaring that the steadfast love of God is greater than all the powers of death arrayed against us. Defiant praise is an act of basic trust and hope through which we give our lives over to the steadfast love of God, which is strong enough to carry us through life's difficult experiences, strong enough to empower us for faithful discipleship even in the face of hardship. Defiant praise reminds us that evil and suffering will not have the last word, but someday God's reign will come in all its fullness and renew all of creation.

Years ago, I was preparing to teach Psalm 103 when I stumbled on a statement by Claus Westermann: "The secret of praise is its ability to make contact with God; through praise one remains with God." Praise may help us experience some of the love, grace and power of God that we celebrate as we sing and speak our praises.

During Tim's last month of life, he was unconscious, and Esther and I took turns keeping watch by his bed. To comfort myself and pass the time, I sang my way through our church hymnal, singing all the hymns that were familiar. I noticed that the hymns of praise affected me most powerfully. I felt guilty, and wondered how I could sing hymns of praise while I was watching Tim die.

Praise puts us in touch with God, and this connection is precisely what I needed during that difficult time. I needed to experience God's grace, comfort and strength surrounding and sustaining me. Those hymns of praise were doing their work on me even

Defiant praise reminds us that evil and suffering will not have the last word, but someday God's reign will come in all its fullness and renew all of creation.

though I was not aware at the time of how they were affecting me. When life is painful, or seems like it is spiralling out of control, praise can be a way to remain rooted in the steadfast love of God.

Remembering faithfully

Israel's laws enjoining compassion toward vulnerable members of the community often include a motivation clause: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 24:18, 22).

We can choose how we will remember the individual and collective suffering that life dishes out to us. Pain and suffering can turn us into angry, bitter, frustrated people who lash out at others or nurse resentment while waiting to exact revenge. God encourages the Israelites to remember their collective trauma of Egyptian slavery differently. They are to become more empathetic, caring and committed to

preventing vulnerable persons in their own community from experiencing similar exploitation and hardship.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea" (Psalm 46:1-2).

The prospect of my own death still strikes terror into my heart. Yet the Bible comes to me as a precious gift, full of potential friends and companions eager to walk with me and support me as my family does cancer in a big way. ✎

In semi-retirement, Dan Epp-Tiessen teaches Bible part-time at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. This is adapted from a piece he wrote for Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology 22.1 (2021) and is used with permission of the Institute of Mennonite Studies.

✎ For discussion

1. What are the biblical passages that bring you comfort when life is difficult? If you were diagnosed with a serious health condition, how would you cope? What might be your journey to being able to experience life with joy and gratitude?
2. Dan Epp-Tiessen says that he has found it "healing and life-giving" to believe that God has called him to accept the painful reality of his situation. How is this attitude different from the messages we get from mainstream society? How might this story play out if it was a book or a movie?
3. 1 Peter 1:3 talks about the living hope we have through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Do Christians who suffer cling to this hope differently than those whose lives are easier? Does hope mature with age?
4. Epp-Tiessen says that the pain of loss is like a poison that needs to be released through grieving. Do you agree? In what ways does our society tend to deny or ignore loss rather than express grief? Should we re-adopt symbols of mourning such as wearing black?
5. Have you found it difficult to praise God when life is challenging? How does praise put us in touch with God?

—By Barb Draper

/// Readers write

✉ Writers speak out in support of sexual-abuse survivor

Re: “A survivor of sexual abuse speaks out,”
Jan. 10, page 13.

I love that phrase that you use to describe yourself: “a fierce pacifist.”

That is what I want to be, too, and yet it is sometimes just easier to be meek and go with the flow, to ignore things or situations that make one uncomfortable, that rock our little boats.

Yes, we need to listen, we need to speak up, we need to support victims, we need to demand justice, we need to be a friend! Thank you for reminding us.

HELEN GRIEBELING (ONLINE COMMENT)

Whenever I read or hear about sexual abuse, I note the omission of any discussion about why it happens to begin with.

What is it about men, the male gender, that allows and encourages them to think it’s okay to do what they’re doing? It seems there is something wrong with the thinking of the males of our species. When will we start to address that?

It is never mentioned in any discussions about sexual abuse, and especially childhood sexual abuse!

We are still afraid to point the finger at the perpetrators (men), to get at the root causes and hold men accountable for these heinous acts. Oh, yes, we now mention the occasional hockey coach, priest, Mennonite minister, movie mogul or prince, but what about the thousands of children who are victims of fathers, brothers, uncles and neighbours?

The perpetrators are men, and until we have the courage to name that, sexual abuse of women and children will never stop. If we can’t name it, we will never stop it.

I acknowledge and admire Andrea De Avila’s courage in carrying on the fight.

HEDIE L. EPP (ONLINE COMMENT)

Love this! Way to go, Andrea! Keep fighting. And love this message. Those who have ears, let them hear.

ALISON RALPH (FACEBOOK COMMENT)

Thank you for Andrea De Avila’s courageous article. . . . We must stand together for justice and wholeness for those of us who have walked this difficult journey.

LAVERNA ELLIOTT (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ My struggle with power

Re: “Let’s talk about power” feature,
Jan. 10, page 4.

As an infant, I was born powerless and depended on the protective power of my parents. They gave me the building blocks to build a meaningful life. They used persuasion, common sense and example to guide me through my childhood.

My family attended a Mennonite church, which was lay led. The power was not in the hands of one pastor or bishop but shared with several preachers, who elected an elder among themselves.

I was “empowered” for the first time at 11, when the boys of our village elected me to be their leader in the newly formed Hitler Youth, where membership was mandatory.

I learned about abuse of power for the first time as a young recruit in the German army. The drillmaster drilled into us obedience, discipline and endurance, which, strangely enough, also had some positive applications.

After the Second World War, I completed my high school education in West Germany and, to my surprise, the graduating class elected me to be their class president. I accepted and did my best to represent the class.

There is a difference between an elected and an appointed leader. The power of the elected leader is accepted because of his or her wisdom, loyalty or dependability. The appointed leader has to earn his position. People will have to recognize his ability to lead, trust him and follow him willingly. Jesus says, *“I am the good shepherd; my sheep recognize my voice and they follow me.”*

In the creation story, God calls people to *“subdue the earth and rule over every living creature.”* Translated into our time, this may mean you use your given power to care for the well-being of the natural environment, even if it means giving up conveniences; and to care for all of your fellow humans. God calls us to love each other and love our neighbour as ourselves.

HELMUT LEMKE, VANCOUVER

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

FROM OUR LEADERS

Passing on what we have received

Tim Wiebe-Neufeld

There is something about snowstorms that brings out the best in people. A stuck car will quickly attract a group to help push it out. My wife and I often find our neighbour has shovelled our walks before we get to them. After one particularly intense storm, six neighbours got their snowblowers together and worked in tandem to clear the street.

A few days ago, a neighbour and I talked about how these small acts of kindness shape the feeling in our community. Discovering someone has shovelled our snow is always a pleasant surprise. It encourages us to help someone else when we next have the chance. In our neighbourhood the sense of community has grown as people pass on the kindness to others.

In Ephesians 5:2 Paul reminds believers to *“live your life with love, following the example of Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us.”* Songs like “Magic Penny” describe love as something that grows as it is lent and spent, until it “rolls all over the floor.” Each act of kindness and love builds up, extending its reach and shaping the

world around us.

The ripple effects of kind actions may reach far beyond what we might ever anticipate. When I was a kid my parents worked at a community centre in a low-income neighbourhood. I remember them befriending a single mom with young children. The family lived in deep poverty, and you had to wonder how the children would be impacted by the tough situation.

My parents became a strong support for that family. They spent hours on the phone with the mother, hosted the family in our home and accepted hospitality in return. They drew the family into the community centre, helped them access services, connected them with other caring people and welcomed them into the church community.

Over the decades, my parents kept in touch with one of the children. Recently, she wrote about how much that childhood support shaped the person she has become. She shared how compassion, generosity, forgiveness and kindness were things she learned, not only by having them taught to her, but bestowed upon her. She then went on to

say how she tries her best to pay it forward in how she lives each day.

Stories of hope like these are part of an overarching vision of the restoration and wholeness of God. While the end transformation may seem dramatic, the difference is made by what we do in the moment. The only actions that are possible for any of us are in the here and now—what we do each day as we look to pass on what we ourselves have received.

Many communion services use the words of invitation from I Corinthians 11:23, where Paul writes, *“for I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you.”* How are we passing on what we have received? How are we sharing kindness, caring and love to those around us?

Finally, how might these small acts build into glimpses of God’s vision for the world? ☛



Tim Wiebe-Neufeld is executive minister of Mennonite Church Alberta.

A moment from yesterday



Cree chief, lawyer and author Harold Cardinal speaks at a symposium on “Native Peoples” at the University of Waterloo, Ont., in 1976. The event was planned by Conrad Grebel College students, and attracted Indigenous students from other universities, as well as Dene and Haudenosaunee participants and civil servants. Prominent topics included Indigenous control of their own educational systems, systemic racism and the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline.

Text: Lauren Harder-Gissing
Photo: Mennonite Archives of Ontario



THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

Communion with creation

Arli Klassen

I've been pondering a new-to-me thought in the last few weeks. In reviewing the Scripture texts selected for Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday this year, from the worship resources produced by Indonesian Anabaptist church leaders, I stayed with Psalm 104.

Pastor Antonius from Yogyakarta talks about the importance of creation in revealing God's glory. Creation reveals who God is. Creation reveals the wisdom of God. Creation in and of itself is a witness to God. He also talked about Jesus and the church being witnesses to who God is, but his first point was: Creation itself is a witness to God.

This thought expanded when Wendy Janzen, the new Mennonite Church Eastern Canada eco-minister, preached in my local congregation, and used the same text from Psalm 104. She expanded on the idea of creation being a witness, a testament to who God is, by calling us to be in communion with creation. How is one in communion with God's creation?

I grew up in a camping and travelling family. I absorbed a love for the beauty and diversity of the physical world, a reverence for the Creator God. I learned to love being outside.

Living in Lesotho in southern Africa when our kids were little, we lived closer

to the outside world than ever before. We opened our door when we got up, and closed it when we went to bed. Our dogs would lie right in the doorway, as close as they could get to being inside. Sometimes a praying mantis lived on the fridge, right beside the door, helping to keep annoying insects under control. Our children moved freely between inside and outside, with the whole of it being our living room. I loved it.

Maybe you can identify with living outside if you've lived in places that don't have Canadian extremes. You will remember with joy the lack of barriers between inside and outside, while also remembering that walls and a roof are a privilege providing valuable protection.

I grew up thinking of spirituality as something rooted in my soul, ethereal and not physical. I am learning to see who God is, and how God has revealed Godself to the world through the physicality of creation. This is an easy step, given my love for the outdoors. It is an understanding that has never been forgotten by the Indigenous peoples of the land—to know that the earth and its creatures are holy. The whole created world is lit up with the power and presence of God.

It is harder to think about communion

with creation. I have thought a lot about the ritual of communion as sacred liturgy, an act of worship and commitment. I have been thinking about our church as a communion, whether our regional church, our nationwide church or our global church. As gathered congregations, we are a communion, in communion with each other.

But communion with creation as sacred liturgy, as an act of worship and commitment? I found a sermon from Margaret Bulitt-Jonas, who says: "We were made for communion with God and each other and God's creation, and it is communion that we feel when we gaze in silent awe at the sparkling river or the distant stars, and communion that we celebrate on Sunday. . . . Wherever we gaze, the Risen Christ is gazing back at us and his presence is flowing toward us. 'Peace be with you,' he is saying to us through hawk and wind, through tree and cloud and stars."

So I am thinking about communion as worship and commitment, communion with our Anabaptist sisters and brothers, and communion with creation. We are bound together on this earth, as God's creation. ☸



Arli Klassen lives in the Grand River watershed, and is a member of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont.

Et cetera

Involve men in preventing gender-based violence

As churches and other groups battle sexual and gender-based violence, church women leaders, lay members and gender advocates recommended at a church human-rights training in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, late last year, that it is urgent to include men in training sessions. While their country has been in the throes of a deadly wave of kidnappings and abduction, armed banditry and rape, the women highlighted the need to figure out strategies for protection, counselling and trauma transformation necessary among individuals and in the communities. Nicqi Ashwood, the World Council of Churches program executive for the Just Community of Women and Men, pointed out that, in some of the key recommendations, participants said training needed to include men, as they can also benefit and help to stem the spread of sexual and gender-based violence.

Source: World Council of Churches



WCC PHOTO BY NICOLE ASHWOOD
Participants of human-rights training for women and girls in Abuja, Nigeria, discuss recommendations late last year.

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Solitude and community

Troy Watson

Almost 400 years ago, the French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote, “All of humanity’s problems stem from [people’s] inability to sit quietly in a room alone.”

Pascal was probably being hyperbolic, but he was making a profound point, one that aligns with something I discovered and wrote about during my own recent season of solitude:

“In the spaciousness of solitude I am alone, yet the least lonely. It is here I feel most awake, alive, present, open, attentive and full. Here in this soil of solitude I am most deeply connected to the divine ‘ground of being.’ I am both content and expectant as I’m immersed in the insurmountable mystery of life.

Yet this feeling of expectancy is paradoxical. It’s not an expectation really, but rather a movement towards accepting my unknowing and lack of understanding. I feel empowered to take pleasure in nothingness, in emptiness, in the ‘kenosis’ of pure being. As Foy Vance sings so eloquently, ‘the joy of nothing.’ I feel enabled to let go of what I have, what I think I have, what I think I need, what I think I know and comprehend—and simply receive ‘what is.’”

This surrender to “what is” includes letting go of whatever result or reward my mind hopes to obtain as a result of this surrender, ceasing to cling to my desire for a particular experience, insight, revelation or understanding. Here in solitude it is enough to receive “what is” and participate in it.

However, my attempt to put this into language is a sign of my departure from the spaciousness of solitude and marks my re-entry into the realm of community life. This is not a negative thing. This is the dance of Spirit life, the rhythmic flow of receiving “what is” and then trying to share it with others.

Trying to describe it, discuss it, live in

it and understand it together, in community, as a family of conscious beings connected to the same vine, growing out of the same ground of being, all of us sharing, receiving and participating in the same ineffable “what is” of reality. And so it goes. The dance between solitude and community.

I am both content and expectant as I’m immersed in the insurmountable mystery of life. Yet this feeling of expectancy is paradoxical. It’s not an expectation really, but rather a movement towards accepting my unknowing and lack of understanding.

I’ve come to realize that I cannot stay in the spaciousness of solitude, nor can I dwell permanently in community. It is in the perpetual shifting between these two modes of existence that I find meaning, truth, love and joy.

Jesus modelled this well. He was constantly and consistently stealing away to find solitary and “lonely” places away from community. Away from the crowds, his disciples, his family, society. Yet he did not stay in the isolation of the wilderness. He did not remain in hermitage. He re-entered the world of community and life with other people after reconnecting with divine reality. He re-engaged the world of community as one filled and re-energized with the liberating and healing power of love. I think this pattern is important.

Bell Hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins), the American author, professor, feminist and social activist, wrote: “Many of us seek community solely to escape the fear of being alone. Knowing how to be solitary is central to the art of loving. When we can be alone, we can be with others without using them as a means of escape.”

As I prepare to return and re-engage in community after my sabbatical, I feel better equipped to love. I miss my community. I miss my sojourners and siblings in the Spirit. I’m looking forward to seeing them and conversing, laughing, worshipping and interacting with them again, but my relationship

with community is not one of dependence. I am more free to give and receive in community when my wholeness and sense of self is not dependent on these relationships or on my perceived identity in the context of community.

Community and relationships are not possessions we have but are living entities in the garden of life we participate in, and they require mutual nurture and care. They provide sustenance to all who participate in the garden of life, but more deeply for those who engage as both contributors and receivers.

Relationships and community help us discover who we are and who God is, because other people are the image of God. Yet to over-inflate the importance of community over regular periods of solitude is to miss out on the deeper rhythm of life in the Spirit that Jesus taught and modelled. ❧



Troy Watson is ready to re-enter community.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Be at peace?

Amy Rinner Waddell

Once memorized Romans 12, and verse 18 always stuck with me: *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* As Christians, shouldn't we be at peace with everyone? Shouldn't we make all efforts to mend relationships and right wrongs?

Well, maybe it doesn't always work out that way.

I live in an apartment building, and some time ago I made the acquaintance of a neighbour whom I'll call Vincent. We'd sometimes run into each other in the parkade or the elevator and have some brief, friendly conversations. I learned he lived just a few doors down the hall from me.

It turned out that through Vincent's work, he could get some good deals on food. He asked if I wanted to buy meat and eggs through him. I gladly used this connection to order ham, turkey, chicken and eggs. It was good-quality meat at a good price, and I was satisfied and grateful for the connection.

When I married several years ago, and my husband moved in, I introduced him to Vincent. Vincent was the one we called on when we needed to borrow some tools we didn't have. When we needed help moving something in our apartment, I called on Vincent. Last

year, we learned when Vincent's birthday was and, since he lives alone, I invited him in for cake. It felt good to be on friendly terms.

One day, Vincent called and asked if he could borrow some money.

"I left my wallet in my friend's truck, and he's gone to Chilliwack for the weekend," he said apologetically.

I felt sorry for him and lent him \$50 or so. I kept track of it, and he did pay me back.

However, this wasn't a one-time event. The borrowing continued, and always with a plausible explanation. One time he left his wallet at work. Another time he was just short of gas money until payday. Every time he wanted to borrow money, he presented a sob story and I lent him the cash, sympathizing with his misfortunes.

My spouse, who is more worldly wise than I, said, "He asks, and you say yes every time. He knows you're an easy mark. He's using you."

I had to step back and consider this. Why was Vincent always running out of money? If it was poor planning on his part, was I obligated to help him? I am a people pleaser and have a hard time saying no, but the next time he asked, I screwed up my courage and told him I

didn't have the cash on hand, which was true. When he asked again, I said I wasn't in a position to lend him money.

That pretty much ended the friendship. He informed me he could no longer get me deals on food, which was not surprising.

However, since I knew he could use egg cartons, I thought I was being helpful by leaving some outside his door, which I intended as a helpful gesture. Shortly after, I got this terse and sarcastic text: "Don't dump your garbage in front of my door. I'm still off work because you couldn't help me. My leg was broken after my truck landed on it. Your [sic] awesome. I'll put garbage in front of your door."

My first reaction was to be hurt. I am not used to people treating me with such contempt. I like to be liked—and, if I admit it, I need to be liked—and I thought Vincent was a friend, if only a casual one.

My husband convinced me that Vincent's insulting text was not worth worrying about, and I shouldn't let this loss bother me. I don't think I did anything wrong. Vincent chose to end this formerly friendly relationship.

Since then, when we've met in the hall, I've smiled and said a pleasant hello, but things are awkward. I detect a coolness on his part. I have nothing against him, and I'm sorry he has something against me.

I decided I cannot waste time trying to fix this problem with Vincent, despite my instincts to try to make all relationships right. Sometimes people will just treat us poorly.

As hard a lesson as this is for me to understand, I have to give up the idea that everyone has to like me all the time. Trying to live in harmony with everyone might be the ideal, but sometimes it isn't possible because it needs both parties to resolve a conflict. ☺



Amy Rinner Waddell is Canadian Mennonite's B.C. correspondent.



BOOK REVIEW

Children's book should also be read by adults

Dear Peter, Dear Ulla.

By Barbara Nickel. ThistleDown Press, 2021, 350 pages.

Reviewed by Barb Draper

BOOKS & RESOURCES EDITOR

Barbara Nickel has done something very clever with her book *Dear Peter, Dear Ulla*.

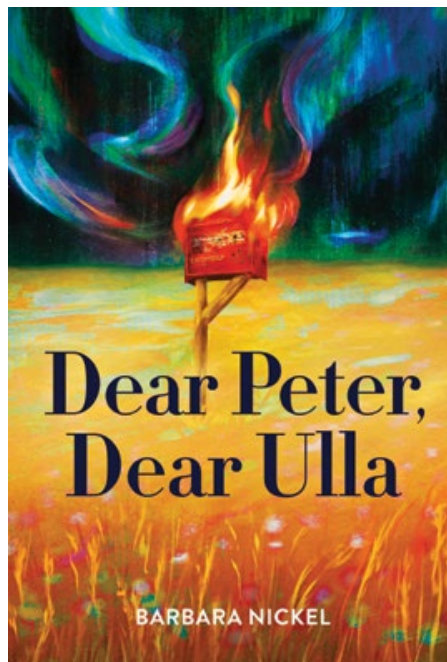
She brings Mennonite history to life as she presents the daily struggles of two related families who find themselves on opposite sides during the Second World War. The book explores adolescent themes, such as bullying and sibling rivalry, but her story also addresses more complex issues, such as pacifism and the Mennonite response to Hitler's invasion of Poland. Although it is advertised as a book for children, it should also be read by adults.

The story revolves around the correspondence between 12-year-old cousins: Peter Klassen, who lives in rural Saskatchewan; and Ulla Janzen, who lives in the city of Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland). The story begins on Sept. 1, 1939, the day Germany invaded Poland. As the scenes shift back and forth between Saskatchewan and Danzig, the reader gets a glimpse of how the families and their communities are responding to a world at war.

In Danzig, Ulla is horrified by the treatment of the Poles and her father loses his job because he refuses to participate in Polish suppression. Meanwhile, family friends ingratiate themselves with the Nazis, raising questions of friendship and loyalty.

Although Nickel is never preachy, astute readers will find themselves pondering how they might react in a similar situation.

In rural Saskatchewan, Peter's family and Mennonite community find that



Nickel cleverly uses the letters to give an adolescent perspective but also describes their actions from a third-person viewpoint

their German heritage is viewed negatively by the neighbours. As the oldest child, Peter has lots of farm chores, as milking and harvesting are done by hand. It's only when Peter takes a special trip to the city that he experiences an "inside washroom" and he

"runs his hand over the smooth, cool surface of a flush toilet." Meanwhile, his musical aptitude allows him to see a grander world beyond his routine life.

While the letters are central to the narrative, the story of Peter and Ulla is not limited to their correspondence. Nickel cleverly uses the letters to give an adolescent perspective but also describes their actions from a third-person viewpoint.

Nickel is a gifted writer; her descriptions are crisp and full of imagery. I found her portrayal of the northern lights and Peter's piano music particularly striking.

Nickel writes in her author's note that "*Dear Peter, Dear Ulla* is a work of fiction, but many of the events, places and people are real."

The story certainly feels historically accurate. Nickel's characters are likable and convincing, although some of their exploits are a bit fantastical. For example, Ulla sneaks out of her house in the middle of the night many times to support her Polish friend. To get away with it once is credible, many times is not. But Ulla's contacts with the Germans, the Catholic Church and Polish citizens are important to the story, so I was able to overlook this implausibility.

Given Nickel's strong writing style, I think the title of the book is less than inspiring, but I highly recommend the story for both adolescents and adults. This book is a great way to introduce young people to the nuances of Mennonite history. ❧

VIEWPOINT

'The ears of the family'

Ryan Dueck

A few months ago, my wife and I watched a film called *CODA*. Seventeen-year-old Ruby is a child of deaf adults (CODA). Her parents and brother, who is also deaf, rely on her to interpret the outside world to them. They need her to be present on the fishing boat on which they earn their living, to monitor radio communications and listen for warnings, among other things. They need her to attend meetings and sign what's going on for them. Ruby is quite literally the ears of the family.



Ruby also loves to sing and is coming to discover that she has a real talent for it. Her choir teacher encourages her to pursue this gift. It brings her joy and confidence.

Yet one of the sad ironies of the film is that Ruby's family members have no access to one of her deepest passions in life. They attend her concerts and are thrilled to see her on stage, but they can't hear her voice. They try to read the reactions of others; they clap and stand when others clap and stand. But they're mostly guessing.

There are places they can't get to in each other's experience of the world. Ruby's family obviously can't know what it's like to live and move in a world of sound. And Ruby can't ever fully know what it's like to move through the world as a deaf person. They live in different worlds.

What is true of Ruby and her parents is true in the broader world. These last few years of the pandemic, with all the divisions and incomprehension it has spawned across the ideological spectrum, have, in many ways, been an exercise in trying—and often failing—to understand across differences. Sometimes it feels like we're staring across an uncrossable chasm when it comes to those who see things differently from us. We sometimes wonder: Is there any hope? Or do we simply live in different worlds?

I'm just enough of an optimist to say, "No." I say this for a very specific reason. The most basic command that Jesus ever gave his followers, the way he summarized one of the most foundational ethical requirements of the life of faith, was to love our neighbours as ourselves.

This command requires the imaginative capacity to place ourselves in the experience of one another, even when we are formed in very different ways, even when our ways of living in the world are profoundly shaped by the places where we stand. Jesus seems to assume not only that we can do this, but that we must.

And I have had enough experiences with quite radical differences to really believe that, no matter how different we might be, we are all, in the end, human beings. It sounds like a tired cliché, I know. But it happens to be true.

We can't ever fully enter the experience of another person, but we can get part of the way. All it takes is a bit of empathy, a bit of curiosity, a bit of openness. And a bit of confidence that we, too, have something worth sharing from where we stand.

There are two very moving scenes

near the end of *CODA*:

- **The first** comes after Ruby's choir concert. Back at home, her dad is sitting outside, looking at the stars, pondering this new world that his daughter is making her way in. Ruby comes outside to join him. They look at each other knowingly for a while. They both seem to know that something important has changed in their lives. Ruby's dad asks Ruby to sing for him. As she begins to sing, he places his hands on her neck, around her vocal cords. She keeps on singing. He doesn't hear her voice, but he feels it for the first time.

- **The second** is when Ruby is auditioning for a spot in a music college. She's feeling alone and struggling on an intimidating stage. And then, her parents and brother sneak into the balcony (against school policy) to watch her audition. Emboldened, she sings out with strength and conviction and joy. The song is beautiful. Even more beautiful is what Ruby does partway through her audition. She starts to sign along with the words she's singing for her family. She helps her parents to enter her world, her experience, even if in a partial way.

And this is all we can do, isn't it? To help each other to see what we see. To try to see what others see, even if it's not easy or doesn't come naturally. To love our neighbours as ourselves.✚



Ryan Dueck is the pastor of Lethbridge (Alta.) Mennonite Church. This 'Menno Minute' reflection originally appeared in the Jan. 12 Mennonite Church Alberta e-newsletter.

NEWS

FAQs: MC Canada sexual misconduct policy

Occasionally readers ask questions about investigations into misconduct by Mennonite leaders. Guiding the process is the “Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure,” a 40-page document released by Mennonite Church Canada and MC U.S.A. in 2016 (available at commonword.ca). This document is currently under revision by a binational committee. (See “Trust is foundational in Christian community”: MC Canada and MC U.S.A. partner on prevention and accountability project” on page 15.) Below, Doug Klassen, MC Canada’s executive minister, and Marilyn Rudy-Froese, church leadership minister for MC Eastern Canada, answer frequent questions about the current policy. They both serve as members of the revision team.



Doug Klassen



Marilyn Rudy-Froese

1. What are the values and theological foundations that guide this process?

The work of the church is participating in God’s reconciling mission in our world, a mission characterized by shalom. The policy is theologically grounded in the Christian belief that God calls us to right relationship with each other and our world, and that credentialled leaders are accountable for their behaviour. In this way, the misconduct investigation is an ecclesial, rather than a judicial, process, because it is guided by the theological and ethical understandings and expectations around what it means to be a Mennonite pastor.

2. Who uses this policy? Whose misconduct does the document address?

The church leadership ministers of each regional church and the ministerial or leadership councils/committees use this policy. This policy addresses the misconduct of church leaders: licensed and ordained ministers, and those in pastoral or ministerial positions in congregations and regional and denominational churches.

3. What happens in an investigation process?

It is important to note that every situation has unique aspects, or complexities, that require adaptation of the process. No policy can address every situation, but it provides guidance.

Typically, a formal complaint is received, and an investigation team of three people is appointed, comprised of people who understand what is expected of Mennonite ministers, and of matters related to trauma and abuse.

After interviewing all parties, the investigation team submits a report of findings to the ministerial leadership body of the region. That group then decides about whether to charge the leader, based on the evidence found by the investigation team. The accused person may choose not to participate and can accept the charge or refute it. (More details can be found in the policy itself.)

If the decision is made to uphold the charge, the appropriate action is taken against the person’s credential (the licence or ordination): to suspend the ordination, put the person on probation or terminate the licence/ordination. Any action taken against the credential is reported to the pastors and congregations of the regional church in the same way that an ordination is reported. An announcement might also be made to the broader church, if that person’s ministry extended more widely.

4. Why does the policy allow for investigation into cases that happened a long time ago? And of people who are deceased?

This is the work of shalom that is the work of the church. Regardless of when the misconduct happened, the impact of

The work of shalom and reconciliation begins with speaking the truth and owning the truth of what happened. It is the work of the church, guided by God’s love for all parties. (Marilyn Rudy-Froese)

the harm is felt long after. Investigating incidents in the past is a way to uncover and name what happened. If the person who committed the harm was a prominent leader (either alive or deceased), every time they are quoted or referred to in ways that highlight their good work, those who were harmed once again experience the injury of those past harmful actions.

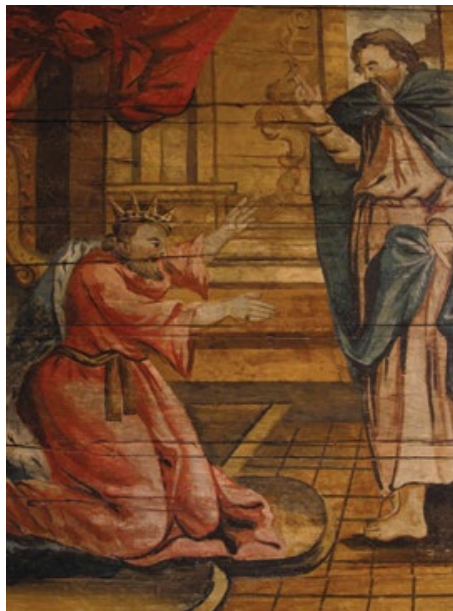
Bringing the past harms into the open is a way to tell a fuller story of the impact of this person’s actions on someone. The challenge of doing this is that the deceased person cannot respond to the complaint, nor bring their side into the deliberations. The new policy will need to address this more fully than the current policy does, but it is too early to know the details of how it will be addressed.

5. Is it necessary to publicly name the people accused of misconduct?

The work of shalom and reconciliation begins with speaking the truth and owning the truth of what happened. It is the work of the church, guided by God’s love for all parties. It is important to publicly name the harm that was done, because we do not hesitate to publicly name the accomplishments. Public disclosure is also a way for others to help hold leaders accountable for their current actions, and it can protect vulnerable people who might interact with these leaders.

6. Why aren’t the complainants named? It seems unfair not to identify the people who are making such serious claims.

It takes a lot of courage for survivors of abuse to come forward to tell their story, even with the commitment to confidentiality. Disclosing a story of abuse is



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'Nathan confronts David' (a detail), by Emanuel Granberg, circa 1773 to '78.

especially hard when an accused person is revered for their ministry. Other people's responses to reports of misconduct also contribute to the fear survivors feel in coming forward with their stories. They risk experiencing further harm from public attacks or censure by those who do not believe them.

7. Why does the policy allow accusations to come from third parties? How do you know they are reliable?

An investigation can begin with a signed complaint by a third party, but the investigation team must also receive first-hand communication or documentation from the person who originally experienced the harm. Investigations need first-hand stories in order to corroborate what a third party has alleged.

8. The accused person has done so much good. Why is the good ignored or erased?

In the work of shalom, there are times for silence, in which the community can absorb this new information, and lament and grieve for what happened. These times create space for the voices of those who were harmed to be heard and for the truth to be owned by the community. These are

crucial steps in the ministry of reconciliation. It could be that, at some point in the future, the good can be reconsidered, in light of this new information.

9. The Bible teaches forgiveness. Why can't the church today just work at restoration and forgive past sexual sins?

The persons who experienced the harm are the only ones who can forgive it. In order for forgiveness and work for

restoration to happen, the sin must first be uncovered, named and acknowledged. How do the ones who committed the sin take responsibility for what they have done? How are they working to understand why they did what they did and why their actions were harmful? How are they working to make amends?

We also want to consider what restoration means: restoration to what? The new policy will address these questions. ☘

'Trust is foundational in Christian community'

MC Canada and MC U.S.A. partner on prevention and accountability project

Mennonite Church Canada / Mennonite Church U.S.A.

Mennonite Church Canada and MC U.S.A. are collaborating to create a centralized, comprehensive guidebook for regional churches, conferences and congregations that addresses prevention of abuse by lay and credentialed leaders, as well as leadership accountability. The prevention and accountability project is expected to be completed in early 2023.

The new resource will incorporate, and build on, existing procedures and policies used by both church bodies, such as the "Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure" (commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/16285) and "Prevention and response: "Sexual Abuse and Non-credentialed Individuals" (<https://bit.ly/3I1K2UJ>).

Both national church bodies plan to submit the completed policy guide to their delegate assemblies in 2023.

"Trust is foundational in Christian community," says Doug Klassen, MC Canada's executive minister. "Current and well-articulated policy is critically important for guiding how church leaders and congregants relate to each other. I am so thankful for those willing to contribute to the project."

For MC U.S.A., if the policy is affirmed, it will be the first prevention and accountability policy to be affirmed by

delegates, an important step in ensuring its consistent use and acceptance, says Michael Danner, MC U.S.A.'s associate executive director of church vitality. "It's our responsibility, as a denomination, to ensure that our congregations and conferences have the resources they need as they engage in the prevention of abuse by lay and credentialed leaders and in holding transgressors accountable," he says.

Work on the prevention and accountability project began in the summer of 2021, when the Joint Executive Committee of MC Canada and MC U.S.A. endorsed the project at its meeting in May of that year.

A binational, volunteer reference team was formed to work on the project. Reference team members are:

- **Doug Klassen**, executive minister of MC Canada, Winnipeg.
- **Heather Klassen**, celebrant and chair of the board of trustees of Foothills Mennonite Church, Calgary.
- **Carol Penner**, assistant professor of theological studies, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont.



Michael Danner

- **Marilyn Rudy-Froese**, church leadership minister at MC Eastern Canada, Kitchener, Ont.
- **Dick Barrett**, conference minister, Ohio Conference of MC U.S.A., Kidron, Ohio.
- **Michael Danner**, associate executive director of MC U.S.A.
- **Susannah Larry**, assistant professor of biblical studies, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.
- **Kathy Neufeld Dunn**, associate conference minister, Western District Conference of MC U.S.A., North Newton, Kan.

The team initially met with Nancy Kauffman, former MC U.S.A. denominational minister (2009-2018) who, along with Terry Shue and Karen Martens Zimmerly, former denominational minister of MC Canada, developed the 2016 “Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure.”

The reference team then created an outline for the project centred on four broad topics: introduction, theology, prevention and accountability.

Team members are working in pairs to develop their respective content sections. As part of the research phase, the team has begun reaching out to conference ministers and pastors to learn about their experiences using the existing documents.

Those experiences are helping to guide the project, says Danner. The reference

team also plans to share its completed work with conferences and congregations for feedback throughout 2022. ☞

To contribute to the funding of this project, Canadian donors can send cheques to Mennonite Church Canada, 600 Shaftesbury Boulevard, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4, noting “EB-prevention and accountability project” in the memo line.



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Restorative justice program faces uncertain future

Mennonite-affiliated Circles of Support and Accountability seeks renewal of federal funding

By Emily Summach
Saskatchewan Correspondent
PRINCE ALBERT, SASK.

“There’s certainly a sense of urgency and immediacy to our request,” says Kerry Reimer, director of Parkland Restorative Justice, based out of Prince Albert, Sask.

One of Parkland’s main programs, Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), has been sustained largely through a federal funding initiative, but that funding is set to expire on March 31.

“We haven’t heard anything from the federal government at this point, so that means a no to renewal,” Reimer says. “All of us involved with CoSA, including the CoSA head office in Ottawa, are just trying to get this information in front of Members of Parliament, and really anyone who can help get our funding renewed.”

The group that eventually became Parkland Restorative Justice began in the 1970s as a ministry of Grace Mennonite Church in Prince Albert.

Orville Andres, a member of the church, served as chaplain at Saskatchewan Penitentiary and was looking for a way to create meaningful connections between inmates and people of faith. He and Dale Schiele, a fellow Grace Mennonite member, launched the Person to Person prison ministry that recruited volunteers to do visitation with inmates at the penitentiary, in hopes of building relationships and easing the isolation and loneliness that inmates experience.

Schiele was eventually hired to manage the program that grew and changed over the years. In 2014, the ministry was incorporated to become Parkland Restorative Justice, which provides restorative justice programming for the Saskatchewan Parkland region.

CoSA, a program in 15 centres across Canada engaged in reintegration of persons

who have offended sexually, became a part of the ministry in 1997. The program has proven to lower the risk of re-offence by 88 percent.

“We know the program works and works well,” Reimer says. “It’s beneficial on so many levels. People often imagine restorative justice as only about reconciliation—a victim and an offender in a room talking about what happened and making things right. Or people think that the emphasis should only be on victims, not offenders. But making offenders safe [though CoSA] reduces victims, gives offenders healthy influences and healthy social connections that may be missing without CoSA volunteers.

“In our current system, offenders who are released are often more isolated than they were in the penitentiary system. The public perception about those who are released is ‘not in my backyard.’ CoSA

believes that everyone is deserving of love, and volunteers are advocates for the core members [offenders] and their restoration.”

As to why the federal government hasn’t renewed CoSA’s funding, Reimer surmises: “I think the government is distracted right now. It’s a matter of getting the information in front of the right people. This program has been run at 25 centres for \$1.5 million per year; that’s a cup of coffee in terms of the federal budget. Everyone who is involved with CoSA is really advocating and trying to make sure the right people see it.”

Without a renewal in funding, 25 percent of CoSA agencies will likely close, she says. “People can help advocate for CoSA by contacting their Member of Parliament, sharing the need with their churches and other networks, making a donation, or by getting involved with CoSA as a volunteer,” Reimer says. ☘



PARKLAND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PHOTO

Parkland Restorative Justice staff and volunteers take part in a simulated CoSA meeting between a core member (offender) and volunteer supporters.

INTERVIEW

Crossing barriers to reach out to the other

With the 17th Mennonite World Conference (MWC) assembly set for Indonesia this July, Canadian Mennonite magazine's senior writer, Will Braun, talked to César García, the Colombian who serves as MWC's general secretary. They talked about Assembly 17, challenges facing Anabaptists globally and the unique Mennonite churches of Indonesia. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Will Braun: Mennonite World Conference holds a global assembly every six years. How many have you attended?

César García: Three: Pennsylvania, Paraguay, Zimbabwe.

WB: What are your best memories of those assemblies?

CG: Each assembly has its own flavour. Worship is one of the major awesome experiences during assemblies. . . . Also, when we hear people from different cultures sharing about their journey and then others responding to that, those are things that transform you.

I have good memories of a time in which I was in a small van visiting a church in Zimbabwe with pastors from different cultures. So it is not only the formal event, but the time when you interact with others in a more personal way.

WB: Have you been to Indonesia before?

CG: Yes, I have been there several times.

WB: What do you remember from these visits?

CG: Many things. When you go to Indonesia you find yourself in the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. So you see the ways in which many women are dressed, and you see different mosques. They have a lot; at least one in each neighbourhood. You hear the calls to prayer early in the morning.

And then you find Anabaptist congregations that are vibrant. Then you realize that there are Anabaptists that have been Anabaptists for generations, because the



César García

church in Indonesia is the oldest non-western Anabaptist church. So you may have people who are part of families that have been Anabaptist for three generations. You have people with the name Menno and the last name Hartono or Widjaja.

And then you'll find a diversity of Anabaptist churches there, which is also amazing. So you'll see a church with a liturgical style of worship, then you'll find a church which is, well, a megachurch, in the Anabaptist tradition.

And then you see other things that are a good mirror of our global Anabaptist church. So some of these churches ordain women; some of them use clerical collars; some of them emphasize—a lot—the work of peacemaking, and that in itself is so inspiring. . . . To find areas in Indonesia where the work of Mennonite pastors is so closely connected with Muslim imams. They work together and even have close friendships. That is, again, inspiring. And that is because of the work of peacemaking.

Others—including megachurches—emphasize service to the community. In Latin America you see a lot of megachurches that are very Pentecostal and charismatic, but they don't touch issues related to justice, or health or support for the poor.

So, as a Latin American, it was so interesting to see that it is possible to be part of an Anabaptist megachurch with contemporary worship and emphasis on Pentecostal beliefs, and at the same time strong social commitment and a sense of service for the well-being of the community, which is, by the way, a Muslim community. That was

for me like a blessed shock.

The Indonesian context has a lot to teach us.

WB: Assembly 17 was postponed once. Will it need to be postponed again?

CG: No. It may be that, because of the pandemic, we will have the majority of the assembly online. We are in the process of deciding if there is going to be on-site attendance, and, if so, on what level.

WB: When will that decision be made?

CG: Around the middle of February.

WB: What are you looking forward to most about Assembly 17?

CG: Facilitating the opportunity for all our churches around the world to get to know our churches in Indonesia. There are many lessons we need to learn from the church in Indonesia.

And when we think of the church in Germany, or the church in Zimbabwe, or the church in China, all these different churches will see different things in Indonesia that will be a blessing for them.

WB: The theme of Assembly 17 is "Following Jesus together across barriers." In your mind, what sorts of barriers might this refer to?

CG: We have many, as human beings. Part of our nature is to build up barriers. So we build up barriers because of economic differences, social classes, cultural differences, the way in which we dress, the way in which we cook. There are barriers because of political differences and how we understand our role as citizens of a country vis-a-vis the Kingdom of God. There are barriers because of theological differences.

So when we find churches that don't share our principles and are still Anabaptist, how do we cross those barriers? That is something that we want to do.

The fact is that every single culture builds up many barriers in different ways. And we understand that in our Anabaptist tradition, our call, among many other calls, has to do with this idea of crossing barriers as we follow Christ. Because Christ does

that—crosses barriers to reach out to the other.

As Anabaptists, we have, regrettably, a long history of building up barriers that divide us. In MWC we are convinced of the need to go against that tendency.

WB: If the assembly goes ahead in person, it will involve a lot of flying. How do you feel about that?

CG: We want to be sensitive to climate change. That is a high priority for MWC. We have a call to care for creation and that is essential for our churches and our theologies.

At the same time, we need also to understand that an assembly is not only a meeting of people, is not a vacation time. It has to do with the idea of being part of a global church that is an alternative to the kingdoms of this world. So assemblies are essential, because we believe that cross-cultural following of Christ is essential for discipleship. And it has been that way for the entire history of the church, since the Book of Acts, when there was the council in Jerusalem.

So the universal church needs to be together because it's together where we can shape each other's way of following Christ.

So taking those two realities into account is a challenge and we want to be

faithful to that.

WB: Where will the next assembly be?

CG: It will be in Ethiopia in 2028, God willing.

WB: Who makes that decision?

CG: That decision is made by the Executive Committee of MWC, and it is in response to an invitation. We wait for the invitation from a specific church. When there is more than one invitation, there is a process of discernment and decision-making, in order to make sure that we rotate among the different continents and that we also give the opportunity to a church that has not had an assembly before.

WB: What are the biggest challenges facing the global Anabaptist community?

CG: Challenges that I identify now have to do with the rise of nationalism and political polarization. In many places, that's an ongoing challenge. And I say "challenge," because it affects our churches. We have local congregations, or national conferences, or just individuals in churches, entering into conflicts for political reasons and because of the rise of nationalism.

The pandemic, of course. And how churches respond to that. And also how

the pandemic has affected our churches. The loss of leaders because of COVID-19, people that have passed away, vaccine hesitation, in other places lack of access to vaccines, conspiracy theories . . . those are global challenges.

WB: As general secretary how do you describe your role in the global Anabaptist community? What is your job?

CG: If I tried to summarize it, I would say I am called to facilitate our global communion. This implies looking for many different ways to help our Anabaptist church to be aware, and to actually enjoy the fact that we are called to be one, and that we are one even though sometimes we don't realize that.

WB: You moved to Kitchener, Ont., in 2019. How has that worked out for you?

CG: It has been very special. It has given me the chance to be closer to a different part of our constituency. It is something good. To have this kind of mobility in our headquarters is great. That is one of the good things of not owning a building as an organization.

In a more personal way, the possibility of knowing churches in this context has challenged some of my cultural assumptions and helped me be aware of my own blind spots.

WB: What do you miss most about Colombia?

CG: I miss the weather. I miss the food. I miss the views, the landscape. I miss the cultural diversity that we have in Colombia. But I would say that what I miss the most are people.

WB: You've been in this role since 2012. How much longer do you think you'll be doing it?

CG: Well, that's a question I have been asking myself. But more important than asking myself, is asking our church. The term of the general secretary is six years, so every six years there is this question. That six-year period will finish at the end of 2024. So there is the need of starting that process of discernment again. //



MWC PHOTO BY KARLA BRAUN

Worshippers gather at JKI Injil Kerajaan (Holy Stadium) in Semarang, Indonesia.

How to maintain relationships when there are disagreements

Training course helps navigate difficult COVID-19 conversations

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

Right now it feels hard to believe, but eventually the COVID-19 pandemic will end. What will last longer are the strained and hurt relationships the virus has created.

Mediation Services in Winnipeg launched a new training program on Dec. 6 to help people learn how to navigate difficult conversations and maintain relationships when they disagree.

The module-based course, “Covid Conversations: A roadmap to existing together with opposing views,” aims to help participants learn how to move from judgment to curiosity, identify common and incompatible interests in a conflict, engage in healthy argument and defuse anger.

“This specifically is a course that’s not about trying to change someone’s position; this is about finding a way to exist together, knowing that those positions are likely going to stay very similar to what they already are,” says Tony Friesen, Mediation Services’ training program coordinator. The tools in this workshop are part of a workshop it has been doing for years and is now applying to COVID-19’s specific circumstances.

The program’s asynchronous online format allows people to participate from anywhere at any time, as long as they speak English and have internet access. The content is equivalent to a one-day training session, but it can be read at any pace and revisited as often as needed during the 12 months participants have access to the material. When interviewed, Friesen said 100 people and counting were working through the webinar.

Mediation Services works at resolving conflict and transforming relationships with individuals, families and groups in

the community and the justice system. The non-profit organization was started in 1979 as a project of Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba.

Staff first developed “Covid Conversations” because, as mask and vaccine mandates set in, they saw polarization

will have had conflict already, completely unrelated to COVID-19 and, instead of a straw, we have a whole new load of difficulties being thrown on top of an already difficult situation.”

Ens notes that, before COVID-19, we had good relationships with people with



UNSPASH PHOTO BY GRAHAM RUTTAN

Mediation Services in Winnipeg launched a new training program on Dec. 6 to help people learn how to navigate difficult conversations and maintain relationships when they disagree.

increasing and people struggling to talk about it.

“We were trying to respond to a community need because we knew we had some great tools, and if more people had these tools they’d be having more productive conversations,” says Christine Ens, executive director.

She and her team are seeing COVID-19’s effects show up prominently in their work with clients.

Friesen says: “We often talk about the straw that broke the camel’s back. People

whom we disagreed, and that shouldn’t stop. But, with the pandemic, something changed. “Lots of us have found ourselves ‘othering’: ‘That person thinks that way so I’m not going to see them or talk to them or engage. I don’t think that’s a healthy way for us to live in society or to be neighbourly,” she says.

In the past, Mediation Services found ways of engaging with difference largely by avoiding it, says Janet Schmidt, associate trainer with Mediation Services and lead trainer for the course, who has worked in

mediation for over 30 years, in multiple countries.

“The gift of COVID-19, one could argue, is that it kind of blew that up,” she says. “People who we shared a lot in common with suddenly were taking different decisions and had different understandings. We suddenly were surprised—somebody doesn’t think like us!”

Ens regularly hears about families being torn apart, and she says one person recounted to her how they felt isolated after losing their job and then their church. Ens says this is something the Mennonite church and *Canadian Mennonite* readers should be considering: “Are we as a church being as open and hospitable as we can be to this issue? . . . Are we doing this well?”

But people shouldn’t have to deal with these conflicts alone, she says. Resources like Mediation Services are available and teach skills anyone can learn. It’s okay to reach out for help.

So what are some key principles to maintaining good relationships, while disagreeing about COVID-19?

“One of the problems we get ourselves into is the difference between what I believe about COVID-19 and how we are going to coexist, says Schmidt. “Those are totally different conversations, which certainly inform each other but need to be handled separately.”

When sharing about COVID-19 beliefs, Ens says, “If the conversation can go deeper into why does this really matter to you . . . into some vulnerability, it has a bigger chance of success.”

When discussing how to coexist, people need to be willing to open their perspectives; it’s very hard to say “I changed my mind” or “I was wrong,” but it’s a key step. While doing this negotiating, try summarizing the other person’s words and asking them if you understood, before presenting your argument. Set up a time where no one is allowed to bring up COVID-19 and, instead, try to remember: What did you talk about four years ago, before this all started? ❧

To learn more about the “Covid Conversations,” visit <https://bit.ly/3G2wcuH>.



‘Together we can do more’

MCC B.C., MDS Canada partnering for B.C. flood relief

Mennonite Central Committee B.C. / Mennonite Disaster Service Canada

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) B.C. and Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada have entered into a partnership agreement to respond to the floods that hit B.C. last November.

“When the full scope of the flooding became known, it was apparent we needed more resources to help our B.C. Unit to respond,” says Ross Penner, who directs operations for MDS Canada.

Through the agreement, MCC B.C. has agreed to loan Shelley Dueck, its church relations and events manager, to MDS Canada to serve as operations coordinator for the flood response in the Fraser Valley.

“We are grateful MCC B.C. made Shelley available,” says Penner. “Through her church relations role, she brings good experience and contacts to help us get up and running.”

For Wayne Bremner, MCC B.C.’s executive director, working with MDS Canada is a way to combine the strengths of the two organizations. “MDS brings a special expertise in mobilizing volunteers to repair and rebuild homes, while MCC can mobilize resources,” he says. “Together we can do more.”

Although the details or timeline for the response have not been finalized, the two organizations expect to be involved in responding to needs in Princeton, where MDS Canada is already active doing clean-up, and in the Fraser Valley itself.

“It typically takes six to nine months before we can get involved in repair and rebuilding work following a disaster,” says Penner, noting it can take that long to deal with insurance claims, finalize government funding, identify eligible clients and secure volunteers and materials. “Our goal is to look for people who fall through the cracks, especially those who are most vulnerable due to finances, age, disability or some other reason,” he says.

To date, more than \$600,000 has been

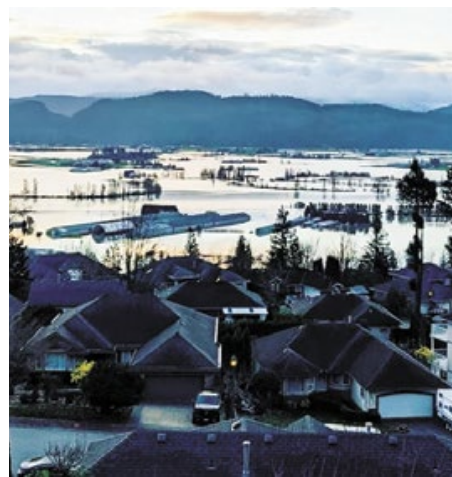


PHOTO BY RICHARD THIESSEN

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) B.C. and Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada have entered into a partnership agreement to respond to the floods that hit B.C. last November.

donated for flood relief through the two organizations. “We are deeply grateful for the generosity,” says Bremner.

In addition to the flood needs, MCC B.C. and MDS Canada are also looking for ways to respond to those who lost homes to the wildfires last summer.

“We don’t want their needs to get lost in all the attention over the floods,” says Penner.

The last time the two organizations worked together was in 2017, when they responded to wildfires in the Williams Lake area of northern B.C. ❧

People who want to donate to B.C. flood relief can do so by giving to MCC B.C. at <https://bit.ly/3tOmzNI> or to MDS Canada at www.mds.org.



A call to prayer

Burkinabé church leaders ask Canadians for prayer as Burkina Faso faces instability, violence, change in government

Mennonite Church Canada

The Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso (Mennonite Church Canada's sibling church through Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission) is calling on MC Canada to pray for security and peace in the African country.

Violence in Burkina Faso has escalated since 2016, as terrorist attacks wreak havoc in many of the northern and eastern areas, killing as many as 2,000 and displacing 1.5 million people from their homes.

Calixte Bananzaro, pastor of the Mennonite Church in Ouagadougou and president of the Evangelical Mennonite

Church of Burkina Faso, sends the following message:

"Here in Burkina Faso, we continue to thank God, who sustains us and allows us to live out our faith despite the challenges. Regarding the security situation, we thank God that everyone is now taking things seriously. Currently, the police are no longer waiting to be attacked. They are maintaining a presence in areas that had been taken by the jihadists, to encourage the displaced people to return to their homes and to protect them.

"At this point, the largest concerns are

the displaced, who are not adequately fed, the missed education of children in areas where schools are closed and [there are] general food shortages. There are areas where there has not been enough rain, and the crops are very poor. In other areas, people needed to flee before they were able to harvest their crops. Most recently, the jihadists set fire to the granaries of those who had fled their homes."

In December 2021, Burkina Faso experienced major political turmoil after President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré fired Prime Minister Christophe Dabire,



PHOTO COURTESY OF TANY WARKENTIN

Pastor Calixte Bananzaro preaches in Ouagadougou.

which necessitated the resignation of the entire cabinet. The population has been calling for change, many wanting a “fighting government” to deal with the increasing terrorist attacks.

While no Mennonite churches in Burkina Faso have been directly affected by the violence, many have relatives and neighbouring communities who have been. Mennonite churches have responded by welcoming relatives who have fled their homes, providing them with lodging and food. In some areas, Mennonite churches are providing support for displaced children to attend schools and access basic living supplies.

Lassina Traoré, president of the Ouagadougou Mennonite Church’s leadership committee, writes: “We have abstained from fully celebrating Christmas and New Year’s, while praying for our brothers and sisters who are displaced, injured or in mourning because of this imposed war. Please pray that God will point us in the right direction, so that we can express our love for these people going through difficult times following the terrorist attacks. We remain grateful to all who support us in prayer.”

Tany Warkentin, liaison to ministry in Africa for MC Canada’s International Witness program, says the Mennonite church in Burkina Faso is known for its peacebuilding capacities. It is also active in building trust and relationship with Muslim neighbours.

“These terrorist attacks are made on all religious groups alike, so it is inspiring to see Muslims and Christians coming together as a result of this crisis,” she says.

COVID-19 has not been a great threat in Burkina Faso compared to these security issues, so there has been little interest among the general population to receive the available vaccinations. But the number of COVID-19 cases has recently increased, adding another dimension of concern in the country. ❧

Update: According to a Jan. 24 report by Al Jazeera, the president was detained by soldiers, in an apparent coup.

News brief

CMU continues in-person education with extensive safety precautions



PHOTO COURTESY OF CMU

Canadian Mennonite University students returned to the university’s Shaftesbury campus for in-person education on Jan. 24.

WINNIPEG—After starting the 2022 winter semester with two weeks of online classes, Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) students returned to the university’s Shaftesbury campus for in-person education on Jan. 24. “I have been deeply heartened by the exemplary behaviour and commitment to the health, safety and well-being of all students, staff and faculty,” said Cheryl Pauls, CMU’s president, at the conclusion of the fall term. “Thank you for honouring and cherishing the gift of learning well, together.” CMU has committed to operating in ways that cultivate and sustain high levels of safety, health and well-being for its community. This means increased health and safety protocols for the winter term, given the increased transmissibility of the COVID-19 Omicron variant. All students, staff and faculty are required to wear higher-quality or double masks and receive a third COVID-19 vaccination dose as soon as they become eligible. They are also asked to participate in free on-campus rapid testing one to three times a week. To assist students, staff and faculty with these measures, CMU hosted a COVID-19 third-dose vaccine clinic on its campus and provides learning accommodations for people needing to isolate at home. The university is also supplying free masks, while supplies last, and has set up recycling for disposable masks.

—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

News brief

Province investing \$8.5 million in House of Friendship project

The Ontario government is providing \$8.5 million to help create a ShelterCare centre, to provide emergency housing and wraparound support services to people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region. The funding will be used to help House of Friendship (HoF) purchase and convert a former hotel into a 100-bed emergency housing centre that is expected to open by this spring. Located at 190 Weber Street North, future residents will have access to meals and wrap-around healthcare services, including mental health and addictions treatment services, and will be close to public transportation, schools and job opportunities. “We are thrilled to have a location where we will once again be able to provide the innovative Shelter-Care model for people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region,” says Jessica Bondy, housing services director at House of Friendship. “It has been a long and difficult journey to get to this point, and we’re so thankful to the province of Ontario for making this purchase possible. This location will provide some much-needed stability for both program participants and staff for the foreseeable future.” Collin, a former ShelterCare participant, says, “When you have no shelter, your immediate concern is survival. It’s not rehabilitation, or getting better, or getting back into society. It’s ‘Where’s my next meal coming from? Where am I sleeping tonight?’ There’s no opportunity, no opportunity whatsoever for growth or change” without shelter.

—GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO



Pandemic parameters during the fifth wave

By Maria H. Klassen
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

At the beginning of this pandemic, long-term-care homes were hit hard, with residents contracting the COVID-19 virus and many of them died of it.

Walter Sguazzin, executive director of the United Mennonite Home in Vineland, Ont., is happy to declare that not one resident had contracted, or died, of COVID-19 and its variants during the first four waves of the pandemic.

In September 1955, the United Mennonite Home for the Aged opened its doors to 47 residents. It was supported by the United Mennonite churches of Niagara, Hamilton, Waterloo and Toronto through financial gifts and board representation. In 1972, the home was licensed by the Ministry of Health.

A new home was built in 2004, consisting of 128 long-term-care beds, sitting on 4.5 hectares of land. This facility now also includes 48 apartments and 18 care-suites, with 48 townhouses next door.

The biggest challenge during this current fifth wave has been staffing. When staff members come to work, they do rapid-antigen screening, then wait for results before going on their shift. If the test is positive, the staff member leaves the building and goes home to quarantine for up to 10 days. Sguazzin believes that this protocol has prevented the virus from being passed on to the residents.

Staff that have chosen not to be vaccinated are on a leave of absence. Student placements for personal support workers and registered practical nurses-in-training recruited from Niagara College have helped fill the vacancies. Normal recruiting on recognized websites continues.

Currently, another challenge has been keeping up with the Ministry of Long-Term-Care directives and

restrictions, including training, number of staff required for each shift, and limiting the number of visitors due to the contagious nature of the Omicron variant. Families are using iPads to communicate with their resident family members. During lockdowns early in the pandemic, meals were served in the residents' rooms. At other times tables were moved in the dining room to allow for more distancing. This is no longer the case.

“Communication is the key.”

The family of each resident receives an information package which includes advice on infection prevention and control; self-monitoring at home; proper hand washing; wearing PPE; and following government COVID guidelines with masking, distancing and visiting in rooms. Visitors are tested each time they come into the home.

Changes have come with the recent



UNITED MENNONITE HOME ARCHIVES PHOTO

Fill the Bus campaign was held in December 2021 when the United Mennonite Home residents, families, staff, suppliers and community members filled the home's bus with toys, personal-care items, non-perishable food, clothing and gift cards to support the local Community Services Village of Hope.

Swabbing and testing have been outsourced to a security company, in order not to overload the staff.

Keeping a well-stocked supply room of rapid-antigen tests and personal protective equipment (PPE) has been another challenge.

With COVID-19 one must always be vigilant, Sguazzin says, adding,

Ontario government guidelines that came into effect in mid-December. These included only two designated caregivers allowed to visit a resident; the pausing of all general visiting; a requirement that all visitors must be fully vaccinated; and the placing on hold of social-day absences for all residents, although medical appointments can continue. People can enter the

home for palliative visits.

Sguazzin says there have been blessings as well as challenges. He congratulates the staff who came in to work and honoured their shifts by putting the residents first. Masks were worn at the home two weeks before they were mandated. Lessons in pandemic planning and keeping a month's worth of supplies on hand were learned from the SARS outbreak of 2004.

Sguazzin says he believes "God gave us the foresight."

David Gifford, the home's chaplain, conducts religious services for the residents as a group, and he provides pastoral visits to individual residents. The biggest change for him during COVID-19 is not having large group worship services and Bible studies, but, instead, small groups gathered in individual sections. No longer is there a pianist for the services, so music comes via CDs. He does individual chaplaincy visits wearing PPE and doing physical distancing.

Gifford says, "In many ways I believe my role is less stressful than what frontline nursing staff face."

Knowing his work is done for the Lord, and to serve the residents, gives him strength and peace, he says. Livestream Sunday services from his church and the connection with his life-group have given him support and strength.

Lorna Metzger, a resident of the home, says of the changes brought about by the pandemic, "It is difficult when family can't come in to visit during lockdowns. I miss the programs, especially physiotherapy, that doesn't happen during lockdowns." She says the staff work very hard and are very busy, and give as much time as they can.

Frank Pravitz, chair of the home's family council, has a mother with advanced dementia residing at the home. He does not receive much feedback from her but, from his personal observations when visiting his mother, he says, "I have always been impressed with the attention and care provided by individual staff and caregivers."

Sguazzin says the bottom line is to have a balance: to continue keeping a quality of life for the residents while dealing with the pandemic challenges. ❧

News brief

UMEI murder-mystery play provides light escape



PHOTO BY ERIN ARMSTRONG

Pictured from back, left to right are UMEI's cast of *The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940*: Justin Neufeld, Timmy Teichrob, Cody Konrad, Ryan Friesen, Mason Fittler, Braedon Douglas, Isabelle Neufeld, Olivia Coppola, Tiffany Redekop, Madelyn Enns and Erin Armstrong.

LEAMINGTON, ONT.—It's been a heavy year, so Erin Armstrong, a UMEI Christian High School teacher, decided a lighter touch would fit the playbill for the annual Grade 11 play: *The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940*. Wanting to select a play that suits the specific class of nine students, she decided early in the year that this would need to be a funny play. It was funny, though not always easy to follow; the audience was left wondering "who dunnit" again and again, with slapstick twists reminiscent of the movie *Clue* and a bit of mystery author Agatha Christie mixed in. One Grade 12 student completed the cast. The students were involved in every element of the production, from building the set and assembling the props, to repainting the stage. For the audience, it was a delight to be able to give the students a rowdy in-person applause during performances over two days in early December 2021.

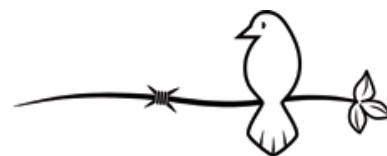
—BY CHARLEEN JONGEJAN HARDER

News brief

CPT is now Community Peacemaker Teams

After 35 years of committing itself to the transforming power of nonviolence through activism grounded in partnerships with local peacemakers worldwide, Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) is now Community Peacemaker Teams. The organization chose the word "community" because it reflects the diversity of its membership. Everyone at CPT is encouraged to bring their expression of spirituality or faith, or what motivates them, to the work of peace-building while grounded in CPT's shared values of equality, human dignity, justice and peace. "Community" also reflects the essence of its work. It evokes a sense of togetherness and solidarity with its partners and within CPT, while highlighting the openness and accountability central to its work. The name change also recognizes CPT's journey of undoing oppressions. As an organization that seeks to address structures of power and privilege, it is important that its language be inclusive and life-affirming. In the CPT community, all are welcome to partner towards collective liberation. Its commitment is unwavering in challenging and dismantling the systems of power, violence and oppression that prey upon the most vulnerable among us: this is the basis of our work. CPT is excited about its growing membership and living into a diversity where the sacred is recognized and revealed in many traditions and tongues, identities and images, colours and cultures.

—CPT



community peacemaker teams

PEOPLE

Moses Mugisha's gift of song to God

By Lisa Williams

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

Born in the African country of Rwanda, Moses Mugisha and his family moved to Tanzania, because of poverty and other circumstances. They lived there as refugees for almost six years.

"I always loved to sing. I would find myself walking long distances just to get to church to practise, and then again the next day for services," he says. "I grew up in that environment, singing even though life wasn't always easy in Africa."

Mugisha began his music career at the young age of seven, singing in choirs in congregations where his father was pastor.

"I had amazing teachers and mentors," he says. "They taught me not just about singing but also taught me how to walk with, and build a relationship with, God," he says.

It was during his time in Tanzania that people in his congregation began to notice a gift in him.

"I was 17 at the time, and I realized that I didn't just love singing, but I loved to do it for God," he says. "That's when I became more serious about it, knowing that I wanted to do it for the rest of my life."

The first song he released was with a choir from the congregation where his father preached.

"I was surprised when they asked me to write a song. I was only 17," he says. "They asked me to write what God was speaking to my heart."

He wrote the song "Msalaba," which means "The Cross," and presented it. The song is still played on the radio in Tanzania, especially at Easter. It helped to pave the way for Mugisha.

One night in Tanzania he was quietly working, listening to music, when he heard someone speaking gently, "My arm is not too short to save, and my ears are not too dull to hear your cries."

He looked around and saw that he was alone. He thought that perhaps he had heard his neighbour speaking. He went to his father's study and asked if he knew those words. Opening the Bible to Isaiah



PHOTO COURTESY OF MOSES MUGISHA

'I want to serve God with the gift that he has given me,' says Moses Mugisha, a 21-year-old gospel singer/songwriter living in Ottawa. 'Without God I wouldn't be me. I wouldn't have this talent. I owe it back to him.'

59, they read the words exactly as Mugisha had heard them whispered.

That night as he slept, a melody came to Mugisha. When he awoke, he quickly recorded it and finished the song.

"That was the first time I heard God's voice. You don't really get over that," he says.

The story does not end there. How could he get the song produced with no money? In fact, the family was really suffering and unable to meet their rent, forcing them to move.

"I knew that God had spoken to me and had a reason for giving me that song," Mugisha says.

He went to a studio and asked to speak to the producer. "Don't I know you?" asked the producer. "Didn't you write that song that is played on the radio: 'Msalaba?'"

"It was in that moment that I knew God was taking care of everything," Mugisha says.

The producer agreed to produce the

song free of charge. To this day, he stays in contact with Mugisha and follows him on YouTube.

In 2020, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada asked Mugisha to write a song reflecting the journey of courageous imagination that the regional church is on together as a family of faith. The lyrics, written in both English and Swahili, invite listeners to come together to build the body of Christ and reach out as the children of God.

"Our spirits are open to God's calling so we can dream beyond, beyond and beyond," he says. "God is the one that enables us, and if we are enabled by him, we can reach through to the nations and bring the healing that the world needs."

Mugisha continues his career in Ottawa writing songs, releasing videos, organizing concerts even during a pandemic, and leading worship at Goshen Mennonite Church, an MC Eastern Canada faith community.

"Sometimes it is overwhelming, but I pray that God keeps on using what he planted in me to reach other people," Mugisha says. "You don't have to be rich or a certain age. God just wants us to obey his voice and walk in his world." ❧



UNSPASH PHOTO

Moses Mugisha began his music career at age seven.

To listen to the song Moses Mugisha wrote for MC Eastern Canada's Courageous Imagination initiative, visit <https://bit.ly/3Ga9NfM>.



/// Staff changes

500th anniversary of Anabaptism project hires senior staff



Mollee Moua



John D. Roth

HARRISONBURG, Va.—**John D. Roth** of Goshen, Ind., and **Mollee Moua** of Kitchener, Ont., have been hired by MennoMedia to oversee the development of a suite of resources to be released in 2025 in conjunction with the

500th anniversary of the start of Anabaptism. Roth, a well-known Mennonite author and professor of history, is taking early retirement from Goshen College after 36 years to spearhead the initiative as project director. He will work from Goshen. “I’m thrilled to be part of this creative project to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Anabaptist beginnings,” says Roth. “This rare opportunity for collective reflection, confession, celebration, and renewal happens only once every 500 years.” Moua joins

the MennoMedia staff from Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, where she was serving as the regional church’s Courageous Imagination project manager. Currently serving on the editorial board for *Leader* magazine, she is also working to complete her master’s degree in theological studies from Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont. She will work from Kitchener as managing editor. “This is an amazing opportunity to be part of a team creating resources that will connect Anabaptists to our shared historical roots and spark excitement as we invite Anabaptists worldwide to participate,” says Moua. “We are excited to welcome John and Mollee to help us envision what a suite of resources could include,” says Amy Gingerich, MennoMedia’s publisher. “It’s our hope that this suite will help Anabaptists look back at what has sustained our faith and live forward in our faith.”

—MENNOMEDIA

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MC Canada leaders denounce white nationalism

Mennonite Church Canada executive ministers released a statement on Jan. 30 decrying the white nationalism expressed at protests across the country.

canadianmennonite.org/denounce



Common Read continues with 'Been in the Struggle'

A new book about the importance of spiritual disciplines in the work of antiracism is the latest Common Read pick.

canadianmennonite.org/bits



MCC Ontario cancels meat canning for 2022

Staffing shortages and pandemic-related challenges mean that Mennonite Central Committee Ontario has had to cancel its meat canning events for a third year.

canadianmennonite.org/nocanning



Watch: How to read church financial statements

In this short video, Mennonite Church Manitoba's Michael Pahl gives a brief introduction to reading church financial statements.

canadianmennonite.org/financial

Staff change

MC Eastern Canada appoints new regional ministry associate



Stephen Reist has been appointed Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's newest regional ministry associate (RMA), joining RMAs Kevin Derksen and

Cathrin van Sintern-Dick as part of the church leadership ministry team. RMAs attend geographical cluster gatherings and connect with pastors across the regional church. In addition, they collaborate as a team with the regional minister and the church leadership minister to resource MC Eastern Canada's leadership needs. "I believe God is inviting the wider church to move away from viewing leadership as a solo act and embrace leadership in the context of a supportive, accountable, collaborative community of leaders," Reist says. "I read in the Book of Acts and many of the New Testament letters references to what seems to be a network of leaders working together, supporting Paul's ministry, moving from church to church as needed. I think that, as the form of church changes in Canada over the next few decades, our models of leadership will also adapt. Like the early church, we will need to support each other, if we are to adapt well and faithfully." Reist has served in several congregational settings as well as starting and supporting a community ministry initiative. He is currently interim pastor of Danforth Mennonite Church in Toronto. He began his ministry with MC Eastern Canada on Jan. 15, 2022.

—MC EASTERN CANADA

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Calendar

British Columbia

Feb. 26: MC B.C. annual general meeting, to be held virtually on Zoom. Register through your church office.

Alberta

March 19: MC Alberta annual delegate sessions, to be held virtually on Zoom. Theme: "Encountering, embracing, embodying Christ in the world."

March 20: All MC Alberta worship, to be held virtually on Zoom. Hosted by First Mennonite Church, Calgary.

Saskatchewan

March 12: MC Saskatchewan annual delegate session, at Youth Farm Bible Camp, Rosthern.

Manitoba

Feb. 23, March 30, April 27, May 25: Virtual open houses at

Canadian Mennonite University, at 6 p.m. For more information, email asherlock@cmu.ca.

March 5: MC Manitoba annual gathering (9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.) and leadership day (2 to 4 p.m.), to be held virtually on Zoom. Theme: "Shared life: Together with God." For more information, visit www.mennochurch.mb.ca/events.

Until April 2: Artist Jane Gateson presents "Daily diaries by the Assiniboine River and Lake Winnipeg" exhibit, at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg. Opening reception on March 4, at 7:30 p.m. Artist talks/tours on March 12 and 15, at 1:30 p.m.

Ontario

Until March 7: "Not Traumatic Enough for a Shock Blanket" exhibit at the Grebel Gallery, Conrad Grebel University College. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/3G4MBjD>.

Feb. 24: POSTPONED TO OCT. 27. MCC Ontario will celebrate more than 100 years of relief, development and

peace in the name of Christ with best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell, at Bingemans Conference Centre in Kitchener, at 6 p.m. To purchase tickets, visit powerofpartnership.ca. Options include to attend in person or virtually. All funds raised will support MCC's efforts in Ontario and worldwide.

March 14-May 6: "Voices Together: A Celebration of Art and Music," the Grebel Gallery, Waterloo. Featuring more than a dozen works of art found in "Voices Together," the exhibition offers visitors a more intimate view of the art found in the new Mennonite hymnal. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/3GZ2aJE>.

March 24: Conrad Grebel University College presents its 2022 Sawatsky Visiting Scholar lecture, at 7:30 p.m. Speaker: Regina Shands Stoltzfus, director of Goshen (Ind.) College's peace, justice and conflict studies program. Theme: "Resistance strategies: Equipping ourselves and our communities for long-term justice work." For more information and to register, visit grebel.ca/sawatsky.

April 29, 30: MC Eastern Canada Annual Church Gathering, at Redeemer University, Ancaster.
May 13-15: "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.

To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send Calendar announcements eight weeks in advance of the event date by email to calendar@canadianmennonite.org. For more Calendar listings online, visit canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.




July 31 – August 4, 2022
Camp Valaqua, Alberta

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what we have seen & heard

Gathering 2022

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mennonitechurch.ca/gathering2022



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/// Classifieds


Employment Opportunities



CAMPUS HOSTS
 Conrad Grebel University College
 at the University of Waterloo

Conrad Grebel University College, a residence and teaching community affiliated with the University of Waterloo, seeks a married couple for the position of Campus Hosts, beginning spring/summer 2022. The role involves living in an apartment in the College's residence building and supervising the College during non-business hours. Rent and utilities are free in exchange for performance of duties. Applicants should be mature, responsible and able to relate to a broad range of people, especially students in residence.

Application deadline is March 7, 2022
 Read more at grebel.ca/positions



**Mennonite Church
 British Columbia**

Employment Opportunity
Executive Minister (MC B.C.)

Mennonite Church British Columbia (MC B.C.) is looking for an **Executive Minister (EM)** to work with the MC B.C. Leadership Board to shape and implement the mission and vision of MC B.C.

The EM will help foster and sustain spiritually vibrant congregations and develop and mentor leaders. The chosen candidate will be someone who assists in shaping, defining, and cultivating MC B.C.'s Anabaptist vision of faith for today. The EM will build healthy connections, grow community, and meaningfully engage with our culture and God's world in transformative ways.

Ideal start date is Summer 2022, for handover with current EM.

Find the job description here: mcbc.ca/article/12064

The application deadline is **February 15, 2022**.

Please send cover letter and resume to emstg@mcbc.ca.

All interested are encouraged to apply, and only the applicants that meet the expectations of the role will be contacted.



DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES

Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo is hiring a new Director of Student Services to build a community where students find belonging, form lifelong friendships, and develop as both successful university students and as whole persons, in alignment with the mission, values and identity of the College. The successful candidate will have significant leadership experience in university or college student affairs or in a similar setting. Applications will be reviewed beginning March 1, 2022.

Grebel is committed to employment equity and welcomes applications from all qualified persons. Canadian citizens and permanent residents will be given priority. For further information about the College, department, position description, and application procedures, see grebel.ca/positions

CONRAD GREBEL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE



HIDDEN ACRES
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Employment opportunity
Executive Director

Hidden Acres is a long-established, year-round Christian camp in Perth County, Ontario. We are seeking an Executive Director to guide development of the overall ministry of the camp and oversee program, personnel, public relations, fundraising and administration.

Position
 Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Executive Director (ED) manages camp operations in a manner consistent with the by-laws, vision and mission statement of Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp. The ED should have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, exhibit evidence of a consistent and growing faith, as well as a commitment to the Anabaptist vision. The ED will exemplify servant leadership and be a proven team player.

Employment to begin August 1, 2022.

Deadline for resumes is February 28, 2022.

For complete job description visit our webpage:
www.hiddenacres.ca

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March 7	Feb. 18 (early deadline)
March 21 Focus on the Arts	March 7

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