



Focus on Camps

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EDITORIAL

Learning to listen

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive editor



“We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.”

This proverb, attributed to the first-century Greek philosopher Epictetus, is still good advice. In a time where there is no lack of speaking—whether with actual voices, through written words or even with visual symbols—the art of listening is one we need to continually cultivate.

Several years ago, members of Mennonite Church Canada had the opportunity to practice listening skills through the extended process called “Being A Faithful Church.” Through written words and in-person encounters, the nationwide church sought to have productive conversation around questions of sexuality and biblical interpretation. We sought to express our thoughts and feelings well and, in the best encounters, to listen to those with whom we differed. We were invited to “create space” for those with different understandings and experiences. We were urged to pay attention to the “prophetic nudging of the Spirit of God.” To listen.

How do we listen well to others? Recently I revisited the editorial in the Sept. 25, 2017, issue of *Canadian Mennonite* and was reminded of the need for a special kind of listening. I wrote:

“The challenge is to not get so entrenched in our own corner that we are unable to provide ‘gracious space for the other;’ as one of my colleagues put it. This means moving beyond judgment

to a posture of listening and caring. It means changing our speech and attitudes toward those we are tempted to chastise or belittle. Paying attention to how we care for each other.”

The feature in this issue, starting on page 4, provides an opportunity for listening and caring. In it five transgender Mennonites share some of their stories and perspectives. They are part of our church family, and we gratefully acknowledge the gift they offer by sharing these aspects of their lives. *Canadian Mennonite* invites their siblings in the faith to listen and learn about who they are and how they experience the world.

Good listeners show their care by their posture of openness to the one speaking. That might be expressed through a nod or a simple “I hear you.” Sometimes listening well means simply sitting in silence, with the one who has spoken.

After both ears and heart have been engaged, the mouth and hands might have a turn. If we have heard well, we might offer a concrete action of caring, like words of love or an apology. The temptation might come to toss Bible verses or theological arguments at the person who has spoken. But good conversation—the kind that builds up Christ’s community—is not a debate.

As we listen to the stories of other people, we tune our ears to how the Spirit of God might be speaking to us. This is an opportunity to consider our own beliefs and actions, with an attitude of humility. We can pay attention to our own fears and anxieties; we can acknowledge our own questions. How

might our own perspective be limiting us from truly hearing others? Have our plugged ears kept us from acting out Christ’s love?

In the book *Heavy Burdens: Seven Ways LGBTQ Christians Experience Harm in the Church*, Bridget Eileen Rivera points to Matthew 23:4 where Jesus speaks of religious people who “*tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and... lay them on people’s shoulders.*”

The stories and statistics point to a church that has often made life difficult for those who don’t fit the accepted patterns. Rivera writes, “Countless LGBTQ believers find themselves struggling under the weight of burdens that no Christian should ever bear, burdens given to them not by Christ but by stigma, prejudice, and discrimination.”

A hopeful word comes from author Wendy VanderWal-Gritter: “When we tell our own stories, sharing the brokenness of our lives, or when we listen to the stories of others, we take a step toward more fully becoming the body of Christ, a body that rejoices when a member rejoices and mourns when a member mourns. In stories we can also testify to the inner healing and new life we’ve received from the Holy Spirit” (*Generous spaciousness: Responding to Gay Christians in the Church*).

It’s time to listen.

Correction

Kerry Reimer’s gender was inadvertently misidentified as female in “Restorative justice program faces uncertain future,” Feb. 7, page 17. *Canadian Mennonite* regrets the error. ❧



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PHOTO: SILVER LAKE MENNONITE CAMP

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FEATURE



'God didn't create you wrong'

Transgender Mennonites share experiences and theology

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

ISTOCK.COM PHOTO BY ANNE-MARIE MILLER

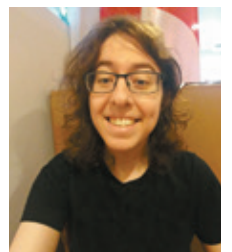
Although some Mennonite churches in Canada have wrestled with whether to accept LGBTQ+ people in their congregations, the conversation around queer issues is rapidly expanding in the public sphere. Gender identity is one topic that has been gaining popularity in the last several years, yet the experiences of transgender and gender-diverse Mennonites remain relatively unexplored in the Mennonite church. What are the trans members of the Mennonite family encountering in the church and the broader world?

The reality is that living as a trans person is difficult in most of the world.

Twenty-seven-year-old Hillary Siemens (who uses the pronouns she/her) lives in Winnipeg and attends Home

Street Mennonite Church. As a trans woman who works from home as a call centre representative, she is misgendered daily because of her low voice. "It's not a great feeling to hear 'thank you sir' every day. It's very hard to face," she says, acknowledging this is hard to solve unless she changes her voice.

Siemens came out to herself in May 2019 after a long process. Like many other trans folks, Siemens didn't know she was trans when she was younger. She jokes that it took her a while to clue in—one night, a month after one of her friends sent her some trans information, the realization and the tears hit



Hillary Siemens

In this society structured in binaries, it's difficult for people to explore their understanding and expression of gender. Especially when, like trans people, they don't often see themselves represented in media.

These stories tell of relatively good experiences within the church. But that is certainly not the case for many trans Mennonites, who have been deeply hurt by the church. Many do not feel safe to come out or speak about their experiences.

her. Everything was starting to make sense. In this society structured in binaries, it's difficult for people to explore their understanding and expression of gender. Especially when, like trans people, they don't often see themselves represented in media.

Twenty-two-year-old Alex (they/them) identifies as genderqueer, a label they place under the transgender umbrella. They do not identify as either male or female—rather, they fall completely outside of the gender binary. When Alex (a pseudonym) came out to their mom, she was accepting but didn't ask many questions or do her own research. She has rarely broached the topic since. "It's been a year-and-a-half, and she still slips up with misgendering me," they said.

Alex, a university student, grew up attending a Mennonite church and worked at a Mennonite camp in high school. In their experience, the church tends to avoid tough topics: "If it's something they're uncomfortable with, whether it's because they disagree with it or just don't know much about it . . . they just won't address it."

Joy and exclusion

A popular narrative is that trans people are plagued with a lifetime of struggle and hatred for their bodies. While true for some, many gender-nonconforming people regularly experience gender euphoria—moments of joy and pride when they are able to express who they really are—says Josephine Kroeker, 39. She is a stay-at-home mom who runs a micro-bakery out of her kitchen in Saskatoon. She is a trans woman whose journey to realize her identity launched from one such positive moment.

She was out dancing with her partner and friends on Pride weekend in 2019 and tied her button-down shirt into a crop top, which accentuated her bust, a part of herself about which she had

always been self-conscious. But when she looked at a photo of that night, she felt excited instead of ashamed.

Most of Kroeker's physical transition so far has happened during the pandemic. "For a lot of people going through something similar, this has been a gift," she says. Limited public events and more time at home mean Kroeker has been able to explore her gender presentation, experimenting with clothing and makeup without having to face discrimination in public.

Kroeker says it's hard to read the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* and see people like her excluded from the church in its pages.



Josephine Kroeker



Ellis Hamm

"It makes for some aggravating reading," she says. She knows many congregations don't adhere to all the Confession's pillars, but she believes that the church's foundational document and Mennonite Church Canada policies still exclude queer people.

Positive examples of church-trans relationships

Kroeker's relationship with her own congregation, Wildwood Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, is a positive one. She is an active member of the affirming congregation, preaching and leading worship in services, and that didn't change after she transitioned.

When 26-year-old Ellis Hamm (they/them) came out to their community at Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, the pastor asked if they wanted to have

a naming ceremony at church to acknowledge the new name they had chosen as part of their transition.

Hamm, who is studying education at university, identifies broadly as nonbinary and trans. "What is cool about Hope is how ready people are to find new ways to celebrate and welcome you (or re-welcome you)," they say. When the congregation moved to a new building that had no gender-neutral washrooms, they immediately designated several of them as gender-neutral. This was significant for Hamm because it indicated Hope Mennonite was a safe space for them to come out.

One of the first people Siemens came out to was a person from her church. Since then, the pandemic has prevented her from attending many worship services in person, which has also limited the chances of hearing herself being misgendered by fellow congregants. But so far she has experienced only support from the pastors and fellow congregants she's encountered.

But not all experiences are positive

These stories tell of relatively good experiences within the church. But that is certainly not the case for many trans Mennonites, who have been deeply hurt by the church. Many do not feel safe to come out or speak about their experiences. They have been told to live in secret or leave the church because the environment has become too harmful. Still others may not know they're trans because condemnation has prevented them from imagining the possibility.

Living as a trans person is also dangerous for many. In 2020, the Human Rights Campaign documented 44 violent deaths of transgender people in the United States, many of whom were Black and Latina trans women. Statistics Canada reported in 2018 that transgender and gender-diverse people

in Canada were more than twice as likely as cisgender people to have experienced unwanted sexual behaviours in public places that made them feel unsafe.

“There is a lot of violence against trans people, especially trans people that are visible and don’t fit traditional white beauty standards,” Siemens says.

One in three trans youth in Canada attempted suicide in 2015, according to the Centre for Suicide Prevention. The Trevor Project reported that 52 percent of all transgender and nonbinary young people in the United States seriously contemplated suicide in 2020.



Rowan Wiebe

“My church is the one place where I have been consistently safe,” says Rowan Wiebe (they/them), 27, of Calgary. “If every queer kid growing up in a church today had that place, the suicide rate would tank in this country for LGBT youth.”

In 2019, the Trevor Project reported that LGBTQ+ youth who have at least one supportive adult in their life were 40 percent less likely to report a suicide attempt that year.

“Just one person can make a huge difference in someone’s life,” Hamm says, emphasizing how important a role pastors and congregations have.

Ways churches can be supportive

In 2021, *Canadian Mennonite* officially updated its policy to accept the use of singular they/them pronouns, after previously declining to use the terminology and receiving complaints and calls for change from readers. This joins a vocabulary shift that is increasingly being adopted by mainstream culture.

Some key terms

- **LGBTQ+:** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, plus all the other sexual orientations, sexes and genders that aren’t included in these few letters.
- **Sex:** A categorization based on the appearance of the genitalia at birth.
- **Gender identity:** A person’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither. How individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. A person’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.
- **Transgender (or trans):** A term for people who identify with a gender other than the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Cisgender (or cis):** A term for people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Non-binary:** A person who doesn’t identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as both male and female, somewhere in between or neither, falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do.
- **Queer:** A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but it has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Transitioning:** Processes that some transgender people undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. This typically includes social transition, such as changing name and pronouns; medical transition, like hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries; and legal transition, including changing legal name and gender on government identity documents. Trans people may choose to undergo some, all, or none of these processes.

—COMPILED BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

“If you need a trans voice on anything, you can find it, because trans people have had to advocate for everything they’ve ever needed,” Hamm says. “What we need now is cis people talking to people like them and saying, “Look there are people that are different than us and they are also human beings.”

Stock your church library with books by trans authors and sing worship songs written by queer composers, host trans speakers and have pastors say their pronouns at the pulpit, Wiebe suggests. “I think churches in general, a lot of it’s the basics they’re missing,” they say, mentioning creating gender-neutral washrooms, wearing pronoun pins, officiating gay weddings and baptizing queer people.

Wiebe grew up volunteering at the Mennonite Central Committee thrift shop with their grandparents and

attending their grandparents’ Mennonite Brethren church, as well as a Christian Missionary Alliance church. Wiebe, who identifies as non-binary, studied political science and leads a queer advocacy group. They were assigned female at birth, and growing up they felt a lot of pressure to dress and act in ways that fit the traditional expectations of what a girl should be. But neither male nor female was an identity they fit.

None of Wiebe’s family are practising Mennonites anymore, and Wiebe now attends an Evangelical Covenant church in Calgary. The congregation helped Wiebe choose a new name, and all seven pastors use Wiebe’s correct name and pronouns.

‘God talk’ in a trans world

When Wiebe was 18, they stopped

attending church for a while because they couldn't find an affirming congregation. Instead, they went to a park every Sunday morning and read Scripture, spending time with God. "I don't think I ever stopped believing in God, I just stopped believing in other people," they said.

Others interviewed expressed similar sentiments: Even if they struggled with the church, they maintained faith and relationship with God. For many, exploring and developing a rich queer theology has bolstered their sense of belonging in God's family.

"God created us in God's image. God is a creator; thus we have become creators," Hamm says. "Trans people are such a cool, tangible example of human beings being creators. . . . God didn't create you wrong, God created you, and you are trans, and you will continue God's act of creation in your life."

While some Christians draw on biblical binaries, like Adam and Eve, to explain their stance against queer identities and relationships, Wiebe points to the many nonbinary elements also present in the creation story that queer theologians write about. God made day and night, but God also made dusk and dawn. God made earth and sea, but also swamps and beaches, the birds of the sky and also ostriches. "God has always loved ambiguity, God has always created more than we can imagine or put in boxes easily," Wiebe says.

Hamm adds, "Often trans people understand the complexities of God in ways that other people don't get, because we talk about God being more than one thing at a time and holding these different identities." As a Trinity, God is simultaneously a communion of three. God is known through a multitude of metaphors and is yet beyond them all. Genderqueer people especially have the gift of understanding multiple identities, Hamm says.

Alex recently started going to queer theology nights at the United church they currently attend. They studied scriptural references and the linguistic roots of words. They discussed the

While some Christians draw on biblical binaries, like Adam and Eve, to explain their stance against queer identities and relationships, Rowan Wiebe points to the many nonbinary elements also present in the creation story. . . .

nonbinary identities of Jesus: divine and human, dead and alive, part of history yet beyond time, male but also described as Wisdom, characterized as female.

"It's so cool to see queerness actually referenced in Scripture. It's so exciting," Alex says, animatedly. "This is the first time I've ever had that be a topic of discussion." Alex thinks that, if more people were exposed to queer theology, it would help validate trans and queer Christian identity, a reality that has existed for centuries.

Even if congregations don't think they have any trans members, that doesn't mean they don't, and it's not a reason to avoid the topic, Alex says. It's also why people can't give up on the church.

"For some queer people it's easy to toss the whole church away and just forget about it, if that's been a source of pain for them," they say. "But there's never not going to be some kid [in church] who's growing up who realizes they're trans. There's never not going to be somebody going through that." ❧

❧ For discussion

1. What have been your struggles in accepting the body you have? How did you learn about gender identity as a child? Do you see gender as something that is either male or female, or do you see it as more of a spectrum?
2. How have you seen gender diversity being expressed in your community? Are there gender-nonconforming people in your congregation? Are they welcomed in your community or viewed with uncertainty? Why might some people feel uncomfortable around those who are gender diverse?
3. According to the Trevor Project, many transgender and nonbinary young people contemplate suicide. Why do you think this is the case? Why would they feel less safe than other young people?
4. "Using appropriate pronouns is one way of signalling an affirming space for gender-diverse people," writes Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe. Where have you seen this vocabulary shift to using singular they/them pronouns? How long do you think it will take our society to be comfortable with this change?
5. How welcoming is your congregation for people who do not fit the traditional norms? How could your congregation be more supportive to gender-diverse people?

—By Barb Draper

See related Gender/Sexuality resources at
www.commonword.ca/go/1622

CommonWord
Bookstore and Resource Centre

OPINION

/// Readers write

✉ MC Canada executive ministers release statement on 'freedom rallies'

The day after thousands of truckers and other protesters converged on Parliament Hill in late January to call for an end to COVID-19 mandates and other public health restrictions, Mennonite Church Canada's executive ministers released a statement decrying the white nationalism being expressed at related protests that are springing up across the country. It reads as follows:

"As leaders within Mennonite Church Canada, 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; Galatians 3:28). We call on all Christians to walk in Jesus' way of love.

"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 2:4-5)."

DOUG KLASSEN

Executive minister, MC Canada

GARRY JANZEN

Executive minister, MC British Columbia

MICHAEL PAHL

Executive minister, MC Manitoba

LEAH REESOR-KELLER

Executive minister, MC Eastern Canada

JOSH WALLACE

Interim executive minister, MC Saskatchewan

TIM WIEBE-NEUFELD

Executive minister, MC Alberta

✉ Love your neighbour during a climate crisis

Re: Climate-change vision must develop and strengthen," Jan. 24, page 13.

I'm glad that Andre Wiederkehr is disturbed and moved by the climate crisis, and ready to get to work in his own backyard.

He makes a mistake, however, when he positions this necessary work as the antithesis of political action.

When the pandemic hit, all of us cared for each other by staying home. But that wouldn't have worked without the federal government's emergency response benefit, provincial governments' investments in medical systems, or the vast co-operation of governments, corporations, non-profits and civil society required to distribute millions of doses of a life-saving vaccine.

The climate crisis is a collective problem that requires collective action. Two-thirds of our carbon emissions come from industry. Less than a third comes from personal use. Even if each of us transformed our homes and habits tomorrow, it wouldn't be enough.

We need a just transition that centres the concerns of Indigenous people and workers in the energy sector. This will require energy rebate programs so people can afford to retrofit their homes, better public transit systems so people don't have to drive, and winding down the fossil-fuel industry. This is the work of federal, provincial and municipal governments.

It's time for Mennonites to raise our voices in the political sphere to pressure our governments to act.

We must write letters to our elected representatives—as thousands did in support of Bill C-262. We must put up signs—as churches did when they

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For information on all the courses, visit: cmu.ca/xplore.

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pressured governments to address the injustice of Winnipeg's water supply. We must march in the streets, as civil rights activists did to demand desegregation.

Here's an opportunity: March 12 has been declared a nationwide day of action to call for a "just transition" (<https://bit.ly/34tTfkW>). Find an action near you to attend.

This is what it means to love our neighbour.
JOSIAH NEUFELD, WINNIPEG

✉ **A good reminder that God is with us**

Re: "She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes," Jan. 10, page 12.

I want to thank Troy Watson for his thoughtful comments in this column. It was so reassuring that God will be present even when we don't feel the presence. At times of great stress in my life I wondered if God was with me.

Watson and our pastors at Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon remind me that God is indeed with me.

BARBARA ENS, SASKATOON

✉ **Books are a 'thrift' item that can keep on giving**

Re: "Book club continues during pandemic," Jan. 24, page 38.

Reading books is a wonderful way to spend time and experience new worlds. And book clubs are a way to make new friends and find different books to read.

This article stood out to me for a variety of reasons.

One is that my husband Laur and I had just finished a shift of volunteering at the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Thrift Store on Grantham Ave. in St. Catharines, Ont., where they have a wonderful selection of books.

And I just got an email from MCC Thrift that mentions how buying books at MCC helps us to meet our goals of reading more. And you don't have to figure out what to do with these books after you've read them; you can "re-donate" them to MCC Thrift.

JAN CARRIE STEVEN, ST. CATHARINES, ONT.

The writer attends Grace Mennonite Church in St. Catharines.

✉ **Can we learn to share?**

Re: "CPT is now Community Peacemaker Teams," Feb. 7, page 25.

For something to be ours, it doesn't have to be only ours. Ours is not always about ownership. Sometimes it is about love, connection and belonging.

As sponsors, Mennonite Church U.S.A. and MC Canada are something like two of CPT's parents. For 35 years our church has gladly, and usually proudly, said, "Yes, CPT is ours." That has strengthened CPT, and CPT has ministered to the church in liberating love all this time, too.

Thankfully, our denominations and CPT have grown in faithfulness, and especially in dismantling oppression. Following the lead of the teams of peacemakers in such challenging and diverse settings, one of the places that journey has taken CPT is to broaden membership to include people of other faiths and spiritualities in addition to Christians. That change brought more growth.

The Christian Peacemaker Teams name no longer fits because it is no longer only ours. The "Christian" in the name oppresses and "invisibilizes" some of the beloved CPTers who struggle for peace with us.

So CPT is now renamed Community Peacemaker



We Declare
what we have seen & heard

Gathering 2022 Edmonton, Alberta
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Join us on Treaty 6 territory as we re-examine what it means to tell the Good News and bear witness to the Gospel of peace.

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 **Mennonite Church Canada**
Our nationwide community of faith

Teams. It is still CPT, still faithful and faith-filled peacemaking.

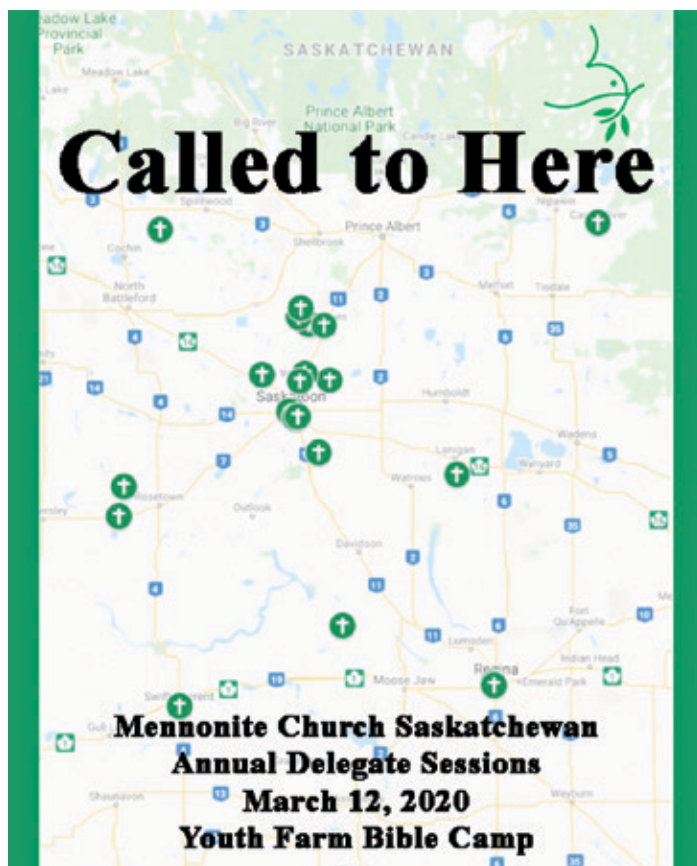
CPT is still ours. And it is not ours only. CPT also deeply belongs to other communities. And that is something to celebrate.

If our parents, our preschool teachers, our children and the gospel of Jesus Christ haven't yet taught us to share, it's time. CPT has not left us. Let's not leave CPT.

CAROL ROSE, TUCSON, ARIZ.

The writer is a CPT reservist, a former CPT director, and co-pastor of Shalom Mennonite Fellowship, Tucson.

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



/// Milestones

Baptisms

Henni Dyck—Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg, Dec. 19, 2021.

Sarah Janzen, Isaac Schlegel—Home Street Mennonite, Winnipeg, Aug. 15, 2021.

Mackenzie Nicolle—Home Street Mennonite, Winnipeg, Nov. 28, 2021.

Weddings

Baergen/Hindmarsh—Cara Baergen and Daniel Hindmarsh, First Mennonite, Edmonton, Jan. 14, 2022.

Duff/Richards—Matt Duff and Krystal Richards (Poole Mennonite, Ont.), at Poole Mennonite, Nov. 6, 2021.

Deaths

Brubacher—Elizabeth Margaret (nee Horst), 90 (b. Oct. 26, 1931; d. Dec. 24, 2021), Rouge Valley Mennonite, Markham, Ont. (Corrected from Jan. 24, page 8 listing.)

Cressman—Helen, 83 (b. April 20, 1934; d. Jan. 12, 2022), Nith Valley Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Dyck—John Henry, 78 (b. April 4, 1943; d. Jan. 14, 2022), Springridge Mennonite, Pincher Creek, Alta.

Friesen—Mary 93 (b. Aug. 18, 1928; d. Jan. 12, 2022), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Guenther—Alan, 62 (b. June 28, 1959; d. Jan. 17, 2022), Olser Mennonite, Sask.

Harder—John A. 86 (b. Nov. 25, 1935; d. Jan. 7, 2022), Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Hildebrand—Kathy Agnes (nee Martens), 85 (b. Aug. 31, 1936; d. Jan. 11, 2022), Sterling Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Iltzi—Nyle Wilfred, 86 (b. April 19, 1935; d. Jan. 11, 2022), Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Kennel—Esther (Schwartzentruber), 94 (b. April 4, 1927; d. Jan. 31, 2022), Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Klassen—Helga, 72 (b. July 1, 1949; d. Jan. 14, 2022), Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Koop—Peter, 93 (b. Nov. 24, 1928; d. Jan. 6, 2022), Springridge Mennonite, Pincher Creek, Alta.

Rempel—Tina, 84 (b. April 26, 1937; d. Dec. 28, 2021), Grace Mennonite, Steinbach, Man.

Seager—Irene, 81 (b. May 25, 1940; d. Jan. 25, 2022), Grace Mennonite, St. Catharines, Ont.

Shantz—Helen, 85 (b. Jan. 24, 1936; d. Jan. 20, 2022), Shantz Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Sterna—Lyle, 83 (b. Sept. 13, 1928; d. Jan. 25, 2022), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Wilson—Sarah (nee Rempel), 83 (b. April 16, 1938; d. Jan. 13, 2022), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Tiessen—Agnes (nee Froese), 92 (b. July 11, 1929; d. Jan. 19, 2022), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

FROM OUR LEADERS

Fatigue, polarization, uncertainty

Al Rempel

These three words, at least for me, capture strong feelings I experience as I work with congregations and pastoral leaders at this time.

We have entered a time when we are not where we were and not yet where we are going. We may not even know what the postal code is yet of where we are going. A shorthand way a number of people have used to describe this space is with the use of the word “liminal.” We are on the edge.

Susan Beaumont has a book that is worth its cost simply for its title: *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going*. I want to recommend the Alban Institute title for you to read. It has many helpful insights for this journey at this time in the life of congregations, no matter what your circumstance. You will find in it helpful guidance and encouragement on liminality and the skill of discernment.

Discernment most often is not akin to a memo from God. Rather, Beaumont writes: “With patience and attention, the discernment process ultimately elicits clarity, energy and commitment among participants.”

I find these ideas inspiring and

clarifying when surrounded with the challenges of this pandemic timeframe. There are particular differences between

and dialogue. In our tiredness, opinions and frustration with changing dynamics, who is God calling us to be?

**‘With patience and attention, the discernment process ultimately elicits clarity, energy and commitment among participants.’
(Author Susan Beaumont)**

approaching our challenges with discernment versus decision. For example, discernment purposefully invites us to set aside our biases and ego.

To me, the principal difference is the role we give ourselves and the role God has. People who know me recognize that I am fond of reminding myself, and others, that “God is God and I am not,” a phrase I first heard from my friend and colleague Jack Suderman. How will we hear, respond and follow God?

A final consideration to my friends on the journey

I am mindful of the challenge uniquely experienced during this time when social-media platforms are more “echo chambers” than communities of ideas

Where the Spirit of God is present, the Apostle Paul says there will be “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22).

While we trust God for guidance along the way, let us remember who we are and whose we are. ☸



Al Rempel is Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's regional minister working with congregations and pastors as part of the church leadership team. He assists congregations in the area of church governance and helps them to discover God's leading through thoughtful questions and resources.

A moment from yesterday



This is a photo of the home of Bernhard Klippenstein (1880-1973) and Maria (nee Dyck) Klippenstein (1882-1956) in Waldheim, Northwest Territories. They moved from Altberghal, near Altona, Man., to Waldheim around 1902. They returned to Altberghal around 1907. I enjoy this photo with the thatched roof, the pole fence, the horse and buggy with top, the women's hats, the wild flowers in the grass, and the photographer's bright blue stamp on the left. The photo elicits questions: How did they thatch the roof? Where are they going? What plants did they use for food and medicine? Where did they get the windows from? Were the bricks in the chimney homemade? Why did they move to the N.W.T.? And why did they move back to Manitoba? Looking at the past is like visiting a foreign country; the first task is to understand it.

Text: Conrad Stoesz

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Archives / Lawrence Klippenstein Photo Collection



archives.mhsc.ca

IN THE IMAGE

Unexpected sparkles

Ed Olfert

A friend called last week. Tony (a pseudonym) had undergone surgery in a Saskatoon hospital, had recuperated for a number of days, and was needing a ride home to Prince Albert, Sask.

I've known Tony for 25 years. He was one of two core members in what was, I believe, the first Circle of Support and Accountability in Saskatchewan in 1997. That first circle was made up of Mennonite and Roman Catholic volunteers. It was a fine group.

Tony, however, had some struggles in those early years, and he spent most of another year incarcerated. When he came back to us, he was ready to grow and made huge strides. Tony is a good and trusted friend. I can think of no one more gentle spirited or more giving.

Tony's home in Prince Albert is actually the home of another volunteer from that early circle. Father Herbert (a pseudonym), who is 94 years old, was newly retired as a prison chaplain those many years ago. He opened his home to Tony. Now, in Herbert's aged years, the roles have somewhat changed, and Tony has become a caregiver.

It had been years since I'd seen Herbert, and I wasn't quite sure of his level of understanding and functioning.

Tony led me down steep and narrow stairs to the basement in Herbert's humble home, and there he stood, energetically sorting through collections of stones.

Herbert greeted me warmly, then he pulled close a container filled with polished stones and poured them out on his workbench. They shone with multitudes of colours, shapes and textures.

Suddenly, in that confined space, Herbert turned squarely to face me. "Thank you for bringing home my son." The impact of his words was a bit staggering in their humble power.

He carried on: "The church, the Catholic church, offers classes when people are preparing for marriage. But there are no classes for parenting. None. In the penitentiary, I saw so many men, good men, who had never received parenting. Like my son."

By now it was clear to me that his passion for his stones was also a way of talking about justice and the brokenness that exists around us.

"Do you know that you can pick a stone, any stone, off your driveway, and clean the crud off it, polish it, and it becomes beautiful?"

He scooped up a pill bottle, poured out more polished stones. "Here, fill this

bottle to take home with you! Here's some polished petrified wood. Take some of those!"

Herbert picked up a stone, a little bigger than the others. It was dark, very striking, and the surface was covered with tiny "c" shaped markings.

"This was once a bit of mud, laying in a wet place," he said. "These little markings are seeds that stuck against the mud. Now it is all petrified, and those little seeds, those impurities, become part of this stone's beauty"

I thought of Tony, his impurities also becoming part of his beauty.

The gentle wisdom in Herbert's words continued: "I'm preparing to polish facets in some rocks. I can set my machine for how many surfaces I will grind. I can set the angle of my grinding. If I do it right, the angles and the surfaces, then the light will enter, will bounce around the different surfaces, and then will bounce back out again!"

The analogy of light going in, bouncing off refracted edges, and coming out enhanced was again a powerful image of the refraction that Herbert's care and love had wrought in his son, my friend Tony. Tony's light bounces back out.

A 94-year-old man, a priest, taught me passionate lessons of beauty in this humble basement. It is a beauty that connects to every part of God's creation. ☘



Ed Olfert (p2peho@gmail.com) gives thanks for unexpected sparkles.

Et cetera

'Spiritual father' of new South Africa remembered

While Nelson Mandela, the "beloved Madiba," was the father of South African democracy, Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu was the "spiritual father" of "our new nation," the president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, said in the main eulogy at a state funeral for the Nobel Peace laureate on Jan. 1. Tutu died on Dec. 26, 2021, at the age of 90. It was a small service in the cathedral where Tutu and others confronted the apartheid police during the old era. "It is only the few among us, the rarest of souls, who attain the stature of global icon during their lifetime," said Ramaphosa. "Our departed father was a crusader in the struggle for freedom, for justice, for equality and peace, not just in South Africa, the country of his birth, but around the world as well."

Source: World Council of Churches



LIVESTREAM OF DESMOND TUTU'S FUNERAL
Cyril Ramaphosa, the president of South Africa, says the eulogy during the funeral of Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu at Cape Town's St George's Cathedral on Jan. 1.

MIND AND SOUL

CPT changed its name

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

The organization formerly known as Christian Peacemaker Teams has changed its name, replacing the meaning of that first letter with “Community.” I have two reactions. First, the name change is good for the organization. Second, it shows that the broader church has not caught the vision of the peacemaker Jesus.

As an organization, CPT supports nonviolent peacemaking efforts in Colombia, Palestine, Iraq, Europe (focusing on migrants and refugees), and in North America in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. CPT, following the gospel, has sought to do the active work of making peace differently than the way it is usually presented in the contemporary media and movies. (Superheroes anyone?) I participated in a CPT delegation to Iraqi-Kurdistan in 2018.

The name change is good for CPT for two reasons. Many who were participating on teams and delegations, and in other forms of support for the organization, were other than Christians.

In addition, CPT works in settings and with people for whom “Christian” is confusing or traumatizing. Sadly, the name of Christ is a barrier in some contexts where it has been used to support state violence or other abuse and oppression.

As Rachele Friesen, the CPT Canada coordinator, says, “I spend too much time explaining who we are not and not enough time explaining who we are and what we stand for.”

The name change does not mean that CPT has left the church. CPT sees the name change as an indication of how the organization has grown because of the good peacemaking of supporters in the church.

Still, while CPT remains fervently committed to working with the church, I believe the name change is a realistic acknowledgment that the Christian churches generally have not caught the peacemaking vision that led to the creation of CPT. The crystalizing moment was the 1984 Mennonite World Conference assembly, when Ron Sider of the United States and Milena Rincón of Columbia called for the peace churches to develop a 100,000-strong nonviolent peacemaking force, as well trained for peacemaking as the militaries of the world are for their own missions. This force would be ready to step into violent conflicts and stand between warring parties.

CPT set up stipended positions, as well as “reservists” who would commit a few weeks a year on one of the teams. Teachers, insurance salespeople and

other everyday people-in-the-pews would follow Jesus toward transforming violence. The peace churches have generally failed to mobilize according to that original vision. Consider this: When has your congregation provided any specific training in nonviolence, conflict resolution or peacemaking?

Political scientist Erica Chenoweth has created an extensive database on the power of nonviolence. Researching hundreds of movements for political change since 1900, her database shows that nonviolence is more effective than violence. Nonviolent movements succeed in their goals to change the government or the political circumstances that oppress people more often than do violent movements. Nonviolent-caused political change also lasts longer, perhaps because the nonviolent process creates new norms of citizenship participation.

CPT hopes to remain a globally relevant peacemaking influence. In speaking of my CPT experience to many churches, I’ve noted that many Christians do not see peacemaking as pragmatic, despite CPT. So, while CPT has changed its name, perhaps the followers of the Prince of Peace—in whose name so much violence has been done—could support the work even more fervently. ❧



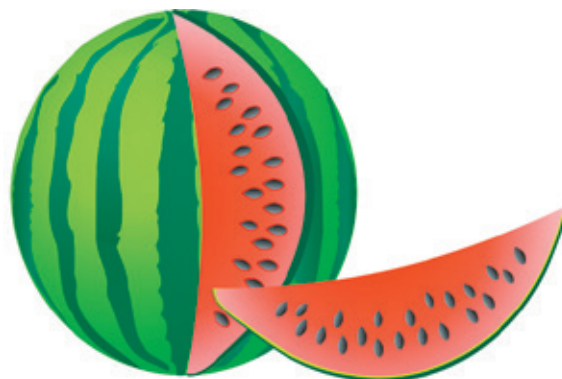
Randolph Haluza-DeLay now lives in Toronto, on the land of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinabeg, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Wendat.

Et cetera

Mennonites plant large fields of watermelon

The Mennonite colony of Nuevo Progreso in Campeche, Mexico, planted many fields of watermelon last fall, seeding about 800 hectares. The colony was also planning to plant about 50 hectares of tomatoes and 10 hectares of hot peppers in November and December. All the fieldwork required by these crops will provide employment for hundreds of people for many days. Watermelons are generally a good cash crop, with many sold in large cities, but there can be a problem if the market is overstocked and prices plummet.

Source: *Die Mennonitische Post*, Jan. 7, 2022



CLIPARTBEST.COM IMAGE

TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

Wrestling with fairy-tale endings

Joshua Penfold

Warning: Spoiler alert for Disney's Mary Poppins Returns.

I have a mental list of Disney movies I wish would end differently, movies that might actually pack a better punch if they didn't have the fairy-tale ending where everything resolves perfectly with a pretty happily-ever-after bow on top.

I don't like how *Mary Poppins Returns* ends. The Banks family is losing their house because they can't provide the proper documentation and, just as Michael Banks is leaving the bank, he turns to Wilkins and says, holding his children close to him, "Take the house, go ahead, I have everything I need right here."

Bam! Wouldn't that be a powerful ending? Tragic? Yes. Unjust? Yes. Unfulfilling? Yes. But it would be a heart-wrenchingly beautiful picture contrasting the value of family over possession, of relationship over wealth. Oh, it would have been beautiful.

But Disney, quite naturally being itself, creates a fairy-tale ending where the good guys win and the bad guys lose. It's satisfying to watch, but there's little connection to reality for us to learn from.

The Book of Daniel could make for a

great epic Disney movie. There's a group of three Jewish guys with funny names who band together against the evil king Nebuchadnezzar, refusing to bow down and worship an idol. They're thrown in the fiery furnace, God protects them from the flames and no one can deny their God's saving power.

It's a great story of putting one's faith in God. But what I found equally, if not more, incredible and important was this part of their speech to King Nebuchadnezzar: "But even if he does not [save us], we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:18).

Yes, they trusted in their God, they believed that God could rescue them, but they also held within their theology the possibility that, although God could, it didn't mean God would save them.

Reading the account I almost wished that the three of them would have been burned. I wished we had more stories of people who, similarly, were faithful yet God didn't miraculously intervene. Thankfully, we do. Some in the Bible, but many, many more throughout church history, especially in *Martyrs Mirror*, a fat book that records the plethora of Christians who died for their faith, many being burned to death.

Although there are many fantastic tales of miraculous things happening to people of faith, *Martyrs Mirror* reminds me that they are not a common occurrence. Most of the faithful martyrs had the same attitude and belief as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that their God could save them. But, in most cases, it was the willingness to die for their faith that was the witness to God rather than the fairy-tale, miracle-rescue ending.

We hold to a faith that promises that in the very end good will win over evil, that all shall be well, that love and justice will prevail, but it may not resolve in our lifetime, at least not in the perfect fairy-tale way that Disney wraps things up. It's important for us to hear all the stories, the epic rescues and the tragic losses.

I suppose there is a pretty big story arc of Israel's crushing failure to be faithful followers, so the Bible certainly isn't just fairy-tale endings. In fact, the biblical story isn't over. We are all a part of it, too, as we live out our faith, partnering in the ushering in of the kingdom, awaiting the return of Christ and the redemption of all things. Maybe a Disney fairy-tale ending isn't always a bad thing. ☿



Joshua Penfold
(penfoldjoshua@gmail.com)
waits for a happily-ever-after better than Disney can provide.

Et cetera

Lutherans and Anglicans to hold joint assembly

Delegates of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada will meet together in July 2022 for a joint assembly in Calgary. The two churches signed the Waterloo Declaration in 2001, bringing them together into a full communion relationship, which includes approval for clergy to serve in either church. The event in Calgary will be their second joint assembly in 20 years and will emphasize the importance of nurturing relationships. The logo for this joint assembly illustrates the theme, "Let there be greening," representing the interaction and relationship between the earth, leaves, trees and people.

Source: *Anglican Journal*, January 2022



SCREENSHOT FROM
WWW.ANGLICANLUTHERAN.CA/ASSEMBLY/.

A little SALT goes a long way

A 40-year journey of learning

By Jason Dueck

Mennonite Central Committee

In the summer of 1982, 20-year-old Sophie Tiessen-Eigbike was about to get on a plane bound for Zimbabwe. She didn't know it yet, but this trip was going to change the trajectory of her life.

She was going to Zimbabwe for a year-long term with Serving and Learning Together (SALT), a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) program that was in just its second year.

This year, SALT is celebrating 40 years of sending Christian young adults from the United States and Canada to serve alongside MCC partners around the world. Since its start, more than 1,300 young adults have served terms in 58 countries, encountering an immersive and communal cross-cultural experience.

And as the first SALT'er in Zimbabwe, Tiessen-Eigbike remembers her time as exactly that.

"One thing that stuck out so much in my first month were the different smells," she says. "I remember we were doing this big conference for all the BIC [Brethren in Christ] folks. This is gathering for well over a thousand people in one place, so they're doing all the cooking. And they would be slaughtering cows, and they'd

be cooking them, and the smell of cow cooking—you can smell that for, like, five kilometres."

New and different food is just one part of an entire culture. And over the year she spent in Zimbabwe, Tiessen-Eigbike says the mosaic around her began to inform every part of her worldview, especially her faith.

"I started to read Scripture a little bit more through the context of an African village," says Tiessen-Eigbike, who grew up in Vancouver. "I experienced Christmas out in the open in 40-degree weather, and it made me think of some of the biblical stories in a whole different way."

What started as another lens through which to view the Bible turned into wider and deeper questions. Questions that led to answers in places she might not have thought to look before.

"How do we value time? How do we value death? How do we value a family? How do we balance what the Spirit actually really means?" she asks. "Looking at that through the trajectory of a worldview and translating that into a theological worldview was really very pivotal."

Before she had left for Zimbabwe,



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOPHIE TIESSEN-EIGBIKE

Sophie Tiessen-Eigbike, bottom right, poses with some of the second SALT cohort of 1982 during orientation in Akron, Ohio.

Tiessen-Eigbike's plan was to become a secretary. But as she was finishing her SALT term, she knew she wasn't the same person as when she had left home. She had changed, and so had her dreams.

Over the next 40 years, Tiessen-Eigbike would take on a dozen or so different roles around the world for MCC, both overseas and locally, including a return to Zimbabwe for a few years. But there was one immutable bit of foundation that she learned through SALT that has guided her through all those different roles.

"I would say my biggest takeaway from SALT was the concept of walking alongside—that it wasn't about doing stuff for people. It wasn't about saving people. It wasn't about 'Oh, these poor people.' It was about walking alongside. Jesus walked with people, saying what can we learn from one another?" ❧



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOPHIE TIESSEN-EIGBIKE

In December 2018, Sophie Tiessen-Eigbike and her husband Christopher Eigbike visit the church she had served at while with SALT in 1982.

A statistical look at global wealth and poverty

By Will Braun
Senior Writer

We all inhabit a genuinely complicated world—a world of generosity and incomprehensible inequality.

I have compiled various numbers and statistics that relate to the wealthy and the poor, and the efforts to bridge the divide—topics of interest to biblical writers.

Numbers, too, are complicated, and they are both informative and deceptive.

The wealthy

According to *Forbes* magazine, there were 2,755 billionaires in the world in 2021. This was 660 more than the year before. Of the world's billionaires, 86 percent were richer in 2021 than the year before.

"Altogether the world's wealthiest are [USD]\$5 trillion richer than a year ago," *Forbes* reported. That was a jump from an incomprehensible \$8 trillion in combined wealth to an equally incomprehensible \$13.1 trillion. For comparison, the U.S. government spent about \$6.5 trillion in 2020.

Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, leads the pack with a net worth of USD\$177 billion. Elon Musk is next at \$151 billion.

Wealth is relative. While not in the "Bezosphere," most of us are wealthy by global standards. Stats Canada says the "median after-tax income of Canadian families and unattached individuals was \$62,900 in 2019." That is incomprehensible to billions of people.

In 2020, the "median hourly wage for Canadian employees" was \$25.50, up from \$24.18 the year before. If paid over a full year of 40-hour work weeks, \$25.50 per hour works out to a total of \$53,040 before any deductions.

The poor

For reference, *CNN Business* calculates the "world's annual average wage" at \$20,328. This is adjusted for purchasing power in different regions. It means the equivalent

of what USD\$20,328 can buy in the U.S. Still incomprehensible to hundreds of millions.

The numbers are numbing, but the United Nations says that, pre-pandemic, about 700 million people—roughly 10 percent of the global population—were living below the global poverty line of USD\$1.90 per day. The pandemic could push another 70 million into extreme poverty.

For comparison, according to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 35 percent of the world's people lived in extreme poverty in 1990. In short, significant progress has been made, but there's a long way to go. And COVID-19 has halted progress.

Official generosity

Government foreign aid—more specifically, Official Development Assistance (ODA)—is one dimension of poverty alleviation. In 1970, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a goal that would see "economically advanced" countries devote an amount equal to 0.7 percent of their gross national income to developing countries. Former Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson led a commission that recommended the 0.7 percent target.

Canada has never even reached 0.5 percent. For 2019-20, Canada's ODA was just 0.31 percent of Gross National Income (GNI). On average, that percentage was higher when Stephen Harper was in power than under Justin Trudeau.

I asked Global Affairs Canada about the government's position on attaining the long-standing goal of 0.7 percent. In a email, spokesperson Geneviève Tremblay noted various new and renewed funding commitments. With these, she said, "Canada remains in the Top 10 of OECD donors," referring to the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development, an international body that serves as something of an umbrella for international aid efforts. Canada ranks 9th among OECD countries in terms of total amount of ODA in 2020 and 13th in terms of ODA to GNI percentage. Sweden and Norway lead that category.

While not mentioning the ODA-to-GNI proportion, Tremblay said, "The Government has committed to increase international development assistance each year to realize the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals."

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to "eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere" by 2030. The most challenging goals relate to inequality, climate, biodiversity loss, and "the increasing amount of waste from human activity."

From trillions to millions

On a more relatable level, various faith-based organizations seek to address poverty. The charts on the next page give a numerical snapshot of 13 Canadian organizations. I put the two biggest ones in their own chart. The numbers listed are publicly available on the Canada Revenue Agency website. Unless otherwise noted, figures are for 2020-21.

Numbers are limited in what they can communicate, as are short promo articles about poor kids holding cute goats. The numbers in this article are either big or small, depending on where you sit. Those who like charts will draw their own conclusions. As they should. Those who don't like charts will turn the page. As they should. Some administrators will surely want to add explanations.

It's all complicated. Just like all of our lives. Part of our responsibility is to dive into the complexity and grapple with it. ☘

	Total expenditures	Expenditure on paying staff	Staff payment as % of total expenditures	Amount spent on fundraising	Fundraising as % of total expenditure	% spent on admin.	Amount received from governments
MCC Can.	34,800,000	6,400,000	18.4%	550,000	1.6%	4.9%	7,200,000
MCC B.C.	16,000,000	5,200,000	32.5%	450,000	2.8%	6.8%	1,600,000
MCC Alta.	6,800,000	2,300,000	33.8%	380,000	5.6%	9.1%	700,000
MCC Man.	10,800,000	1,600,000	14.8%	3,000	0.03%	10.4%	600,000
MCC Ont.	20,400,000	6,700,000	32.8%	800,000	3.9%	6.5%	2,600,000
MCC Sask.	3,400,000	1,000,000	29.4%	45,000	1.3%	20.0%	300,000
CFGB	47,200,000	4,100,000	8.7%	1,500,000	3.2%	3.4%	28,500,000
MEDA	31,300,000	7,000,000	22.4%	900,000	2.9%	8.5%	23,000,000
Oxfam	28,500,000	7,000,000	24.6%	2,600,000	9.1%	7.1%	16,100,000
World Renew*	22,400,000	3,700,000	16.5%	1,400,000	6.3%	5.5%	300,000
Samaritan's Purse*	37,700,000	9,200,000	24.4%	1,500,000	4.0%	9.4%	220,000
Totals	\$259.3** million	\$54.2 million	23.5% average	\$10.1 million	3.7% average	8.3% average	\$81.1 million
World Vision Canada	394,900,000	45,600,000	11.5%	43,600,000	11.0%	6.1%	22,000,000
Canadian Red Cross	553,400,000	198,200,000	35.8%	36,200,000	6.5%	2.5%	391,400,000

*Figures for 2019-2020

**Significant portions of provincial MCC office expenditures are monies forwarded to MCC Canada.

MCC is Mennonite Central Committee

CFGB is Canadian Foodgrains Bank

	\$40,000 – \$79,999	\$80,000 – \$119,999	\$120,000 – \$159,999	\$160,000 – \$199,999	\$200,000 – \$249,999
MCC Can.		10			
MCC B.C.	2	7	1		
MCC Alta.	6	4			
MCC Man.	6	4			
MCC Ont.	3	6	1		
MCC Sask.	8	1			
CFGB		9	1		
MEDA			6	2	2
Oxfam		6	4		
World Renew*		8	1	1	
Samaritan's Purse*			9	1	
World Vision Canada*			1	3	6
Canadian Red Cross				2	6***

*** Canadian Red Cross also has one person in the \$300,000 to \$349,999 category and another in the more than \$350,000 category.

Canada Revenue Agency requires charities to provide a breakdown of the salary categories into which their 10 highest-paid employees fall.

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Sowing for peace in multicultural Toronto

By Lisa Williams
Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
TORONTO

The Mennonite tradition has a very precious heritage as a peace church,” says Junggyu Anthony Yang. “If we focus more and more on peace in our daily lives, then we truly become the children of God.”

Yang and Hyejung Jessie Yum live in Toronto, where they work with Koreans and other Canadians through Sowing for Peace. “Sowing for Peace is a ministry to cultivate a peace culture in a multicultural context,” says Yum. “As we see the community’s needs, we can then respond and serve that community. We work with a committee of people who support Sowing for Peace in many ways.”

As ministering pastors, peacemakers and teachers for a number of years in California, Yang and Yum moved to Toronto when Yum received an opportunity to come to Emmanuel College at the University of

Toronto. She is a doctoral candidate and adjunct instructor with a research focus on constructing a postcolonial Mennonite peace theology in multicultural contexts. Yang is currently a mechanical technician in Valcourt, Que., recently completing a journalism position with a Korean newspaper.

When they arrived in Toronto, Yang soon noticed that Korean Canadians with whom he interacted were struggling. “I realized that the people I was meeting were suffering as they tried to deal with conflict in their lives,” he says. “Many have never been taught how to deal with conflict.” He coordinated a community centre at the newspaper where he worked. He opened transformation classes at the centre. “I listened to their stories and provided some good skills in communication and conflict

resolution,” he says.

He started a classic literature book club. “Book clubs are such a great way to introduce people to peace,” he says. “As we share about the books we are reading together, I am able to speak thoughts of peace.” The book clubs have run five seasons of 12 sessions over the last two years. “For many new immigrants, it is not easy to find a safe space to share their thoughts in trust,” he says. “I try to facilitate each book club as safely and equally as I can.”

Yang also runs a separate book club focused on Scott Peck’s book, *The Road Less Traveled*.

“For Korean immigrants who are adjusting to a new society, there is little time and energy to prioritize thinking about themselves,” says Yum. “This kind of workshop provides an opportunity and space to actually take the time to reflect on themselves.”

“Each time this club runs, the people become a community,” Yang adds. “People speak of their brokenness and their wounded hearts, and as we have shared together I have seen healing take place in their lives.”

Whether people are sorting out their futures in circle-process groups, participating in conflict transformation or racial justice workshops, or discussing life concerns at book clubs, Yang and Yum are sowing seeds of peace in multicultural Toronto.

It was during one of these workshops with their own congregation, Danforth Mennonite Church, when the congregation began to embrace the possibilities and potential in the ministry of Sowing for Peace. The couple actively preach on peace in their home congregation, and Danforth now officially supports them. The congregation asked Mennonite Church Eastern Canada to license them as pastors, which took place in March 2021.

Reflecting on I Corinthians 3, Yum says: “We do not know how seeds will grow—that’s what God knows. However, we are responsible to spread the seeds of peace. The ministry does not depend only on our ability. If this ministry is in God’s will, it will grow in God’s time. We are trusting God.” ❧



PHOTO COURTESY OF HYEJUNG JESSIE YUM AND JUNGGYU ANTHONY YANG

Hyejung Jessie Yum, left, and Junggyu Anthony Yang work with Korean and other Canadians through Sowing for Peace in Toronto. They are members of Danforth Mennonite Church in Toronto and licenced pastors through Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

'In the hands of the Spirit now'

Grace Mennonite Church holds its final service and congregants ponder their future

By Emily Summach

Saskatchewan Correspondent

PRINCE ALBERT, SASK.

After 80 years, Grace Mennonite Church held its closing service on Jan. 31. The service marked a months-long discernment process and a bittersweet celebration of all that God has done through the church.

Grace Mennonite began with a mission, and the church's legacy of mission in the community will continue.

In the 1890s, Mennonites began settling in the Rosthern, Sask., area. Both the Land Titles Office and the nearest flour mill were located in Prince Albert, and so settler families often made trips to that region. When drought struck in the 1930s, many Mennonite farming families moved north towards the Prince Albert area, where both moisture and natural resources were more plentiful. It was this migration that planted the first seeds for what would become Grace Mennonite.

According to Ray Funk, Grace's board chair, the leadership of the Home Mission Board of the General Conference at the time was well aware of this migration and were concerned with the spiritual well-being of these scattered and isolated families.

"Most Mennonite churches in Saskatchewan grew organically from the Mennonite settlements," he says with a laugh. "But Grace was deliberately planted on the frontier of 'Mennonite Land.' It wasn't one of the mother churches. Prince Albert was a place that people moved to and, to our later detriment, a place people moved away from."

It was this sense of being scattered and then drawn together towards a larger mission that shaped the culture at Grace over the years. The church moved beyond typical church ministries such as Sunday school, and noticed and attended to the needs of the wider community. This included involvement with community

outreach programs, Ten Thousand Villages Christmas sales and, perhaps most significantly, prison ministry.

The late Orville Andres, a member of Grace, began a pioneering prison visitation program known as Person to Person. The ministry to inmates at the federal penitentiary located in Prince Albert, later expanded to other penitentiaries in Saskatchewan. Hundreds of people have volunteered with the program since its creation. Person to Person became the cornerstone of Grace's expanding restorative-justice ministries. In 2014, these

that mission carried on. It was fortunate the PRJ incorporated into a separate organization and was able to broaden their support base. There's quite a bit of legalities we have to go through to make the transfer, but it's definitely the feel-good piece of all this."

Another of Grace's flagship ministries, the Spruce River Folk Fest, will likely also continue. The annual summer music and cultural festival raises awareness and funds for landless Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan.

"We were glad that St. Alban's Anglican Church in Prince Albert took up the Spruce River Folk Fest as the sponsor," says Funk. "It's been a key expression of Indigenous-settler reconciliation in this area for 10 years, and it felt important to us to keep that going. The seeds that were planted will continue to grow."

For the remaining members of Grace, questions of their own future without a church to call home remains unclear.

"It's unsettling," says Funk. "It raises questions about one's Mennonite identity, both ethnically and physiologically. Those of us from Grace, and the handful of other Mennonite churches who have closed this year, are Mennonite by ethnicity and

baptism, but what does it mean to be Mennonite without a church home? Is there enough connective tissue to hold this all together?" he wonders.

"As far as what will happen to those of us who were at Grace at the end, we'll have a conversation with Josh Wallace, the Mennonite Church Saskatchewan executive minister. I'm not sure what, if anything, we'll end up doing, but we felt that opportunity for that conversation should be there. It's in the hands of the Spirit now." ❧



GRACE MENNONITE CHURCH PHOTO

Church members look at the property where the new church building was later constructed.

ministries were incorporated as Parkland Restorative Justice.

When Grace made the decision to close, the answer of what to do with the building and property was obvious to the membership. The property will be gifted to Parkland Restorative Justice (PRJ) to continue the legacy that was birthed at Grace.

"Gifting the property to PRJ really helped to mitigate our sense of loss," says Funk. "The prison ministry was so much a part of our church's story, so it felt good to preserve that part of our identity and to see

Eden expands, evolves as pandemic affects mental health landscape

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted many people's mental health and increased the demand for mental-health care. Helping to guide southern Manitoba through these unprecedented times is Brad Unger, the newly appointed chief executive officer (CEO) of Eden Health Care Services.

Eden is a faith-based organization founded in the mid-1960s that provides a wide variety of mental health services out of Winkler, Steinbach and Winnipeg. The organization is owned and operated by eight Mennonite church constituencies in Manitoba, including Mennonite Church Manitoba, and works in partnership with the provincial health system.

Unger started as CEO on Dec. 1, 2021 after spending five years as program director at Recovery of Hope, Eden's counselling centre. The Winnipegger has degrees in commerce and theology, and has worked in managerial leadership roles for several social enterprises and non-profit organizations.

He's entering the organization at a time when the need for its resources is higher than ever.

"Recovery of Hope, through the



Brad Unger

pandemic, has been doing its most work that it's ever done in its history," Unger says. "This last fiscal year was our busiest year in history, and this year will be even busier. It's a sign that people are accessing services. That's a positive part. . . . And on the other hand, it does show the incredible strain that people are experiencing."

Eden offers a myriad of services, including counselling, acute psychiatric inpatient units, outpatient programs, and housing and employment supports. The staff have done an incredible job adapting to ensure their programming remains accessible during COVID-19, Unger says with gratitude.

Eden has also recently expanded several of its facilities, matching the public's growing engagement with its services. Last fall, it opened the new Eden East Mental Wellness Centre in Steinbach, built with support from the Bethesda Foundation and Eden Health Foundation, which brings a multitude of expanded services to one hub.

"[We're] excited to serve the Steinbach community and surrounding area in a more robust way," Unger says.

Also in the works is the development

of Recovery of Hope's Winnipeg office, which underwent renovations to double its size. The new space officially opens this spring; it will include a group room to host workshops, training and group therapy, as well as further space for counsellors.

The team is also looking ahead to the next several years and starting to plan for redeveloping the acute unit in Winkler, whose building is nearing the end of its life and would require a significant capital campaign.

One client who received assistance from Eden Residential Care Services, says: "I would still be living in the old apartment, which was dirty and scary. I am very happy to have a shelter here, a place to call home. . . . At my old place I felt so alone, so when I finally became part of the team I felt loved."

One reason Unger was drawn to the Eden leadership position was his interest in the intersection of faith and mental health.

"The churches collectively are still having an active role in improving and investing in and guiding the mental-health-service delivery system broadly across all of southern Manitoba," he says. "It's a unique and interesting opportunity and gift that I think the church continues to give to the communities of southern Manitoba."

Unger says the pandemic's effects on mental health will extend beyond its declared end, so he doesn't foresee the pace letting up any time soon.

"To have the support and staff in place, and to be positioned to be able to respond to this need, makes us feel grateful," he says. "This allows us to really reach our mission: Providing hope, healing and community for those on the mental health journey. We're in a great position to help give back to church community and the community at large during this time." ▮

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/// News briefs

Anti-racism theme for next Common Read



Racism is pervasive in our society, say Regina Shands Stoltzfus and Tobin Miller Shearer in their new book, *Been in the Struggle: Pursuing an Antiracist Spirituality*. This book is the

Common Read selection for January to March 2022, a joint project of Herald Press, Mennonite Church Canada and MC U.S.A. As a black woman and white man who co-founded an anti-racism program in the 1990s, Stoltzfus and Shearer reflect on what they have learned over the years and provide a resource to encourage individuals and institutions to reflect on their spirituality and racial attitudes. The authors have a history of working together, raising awareness of racism within Mennonite

Central Committee and the Mennonite church, and they believe the struggle continues. They write, “We believe that sharp analysis, compelling stories, and thoughtful reflection can help support and develop a movement to finally make some headway at uprooting racism in our society.” The book, published by Herald Press, is available through CommonWord bookstore. On March 24, Shands Stoltzfus, the director of Goshen (Ind.) College’s peace, justice and conflict studies program, will speak on “Resistance strategies: Equipping ourselves and our communities for long-term justice work” at Conrad Grebel University College’s 2022 Sawatsky Visiting Scholar lecture.

—BY **BARB DRAPER**

Mennonite Trust Ltd. rebrands as Amity Trust

SASKATOON—As of Jan. 1, Mennonite Trust became known as Amity Trust. The Saskatchewan-based and licensed

deposit-taking trust company is led by a board of directors appointed by three Saskatchewan church conferences, and it offers products and services in the areas of investing, borrowing, and estate planning and administration. The goal of the rebranding was to make the trust’s mission of “helping people find financial peace” available to a wider audience. “We really wanted to expand our appeal to a larger client base,” says Cory Regier, Amity’s CEO. “We heard over and over again from people that they would have come to us sooner, but they assumed we only helped Mennonites. We knew that if our name was an impediment to helping people, then we needed to do something about that. The rebrand helps secure the future of the company and, most importantly, the mission.”

—BY **EMILY SUMMACH**



PEOPLE

God's grace kept them going

Couple reflects on 30 years of ministry in China

By Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

Reflecting on three decades of service in Asia, Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers Tobia and George Veith say that, while their time of service has at times been hard, it has also been one of the richest blessings of their lives.

The Veiths returned to Canada last fall after serving as mission workers since 1991, first with the former General Conference Mennonite Commission on Overseas Mission (COM) and later with MC Canada Witness. Since last October, they have been speaking about their experiences to church audiences throughout Canada, either in person or virtually.

Involved in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship during their years at the University of Saskatchewan, the pair felt called to serve with Chinese people and asked COM where the greatest need was in Asia.

"There was already a Mennonite church in Hong Kong inviting connections," says Tobia. "We wanted to connect and exchange cross-culturally in terms of our Anabaptist faith."

At a Jan. 10 online event with MC B.C., the Veiths shared about the many workers and leaders who enriched their lives and the life of the churches in the three places they served: Macau, Hong Kong and Harbin, China. Their first assignment was teaching in Hong Kong, and later they were called to minister in Macau, a former Portuguese colony, now a special administrative region of China. Macau is the top destination for gambling in the world, bringing in seven times the profits of Las Vegas, which presents unique challenges for the church in the region.

"During our many years in Macau we felt most encouraged and blessed to see individuals come to faith, be baptized and grow in their faith, and begin to become involved in the life of the church, taking on leadership in serving with their gifts," Tobia says.

When the Veiths first arrived in Macau, there was no Mennonite church, so they had to invest time in develop-

people choosing to work in casinos instead of pursuing post-secondary education; and spouses working different shifts in casinos, disrupting family life. Real estate prices and cost of living have jumped.

"The church finds it more difficult to do ministry," says George. "There's stress on people to make a go of things."

The last six years, the Veiths lived in Harbin at the invitation of believers at one of the local churches. They took part in the life of the church with preaching, leading Bible studies and equipping leaders, while also teaching English at a university there.

The Veiths say that what they will miss most about China are the relationships and the food.

"When Chinese people get together for a meal, it's a whole evening event with good discussions," says Tobia. "One of the saddest things about leaving is not knowing when we'll be able to go back for a visit."

"Coming back here, we notice it is not the same place as 30 years ago," says George. While they were overseas, the North American churches' attitudes towards cross-cultural ministry changed a lot.

"Given the discussion about colonialism, residential schools and the churches reacting cross-culturally, we need to examine what happened in our [own] history."

Tobia adds: "Perhaps a lot of initiative in cross-cultural ministry [in the past] was westerners going to other countries. More often now, MC Canada Witness has been responding to invitations. It's much more of an invitational partnership."

The Veiths both feel that missions today



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOBIA VEITH

Tobia and George Veith, who recently completed a term of service in China, enjoy the ice festival in Harbin, China, the largest snow and ice sculpture festival in the world.

ing relationships with other pastors and denominations. The other denominational leaders welcomed them, saying they could use a Mennonite presence there.

"By the time we left, there was a small congregation and two ordained pastors," says George. "It's an Anabaptist church committed to Anabaptist core values."

The gambling industry is so prevalent, explains George, that it has effects on everyday life. Some of these include young

involve a way of relating that is more mutual than in years past. Their style of relating was to listen and learn in working alongside Chinese believers.

“Colonialism is not the way to do missions,” says George. “It’s a two-way relationship. Mennonites may have engaged in that discussion longer than other groups have.”

The situation for the church in China is tenuous, say the Veiths. Registered churches in China are allowed to meet but, while house churches such as the Mennonite ones are not officially permitted, the government does not pursue the matter. Children are not permitted to attend church, but church members are finding other creative ways to relate to children.

In their online presence, the Veiths refer to church members and leaders by their initials only, to protect their identity.

When the Veiths left Canada in 1991, they were a young couple with a small baby. Now they are the parents of three adult children and are readjusting to life in Canada. They are settling in Winnipeg, where their children live. George plans to continue writing a curriculum for a leader training course in China that he began last year, and Tobia is hoping to teach English as a second language, and possibly substitute teach. She also hopes to find volunteer opportunities.

The Veiths continue to have a vision for the believers in China and encourage Canadian Christians to pray for the church there.

“We hope the church continues to grow and we pray that they will find younger leaders,” says George. He believes it is important to pray “that Christians would find creative ways to share their faith in a society that’s becoming more and more interested in becoming affluent. In a way, they’re facing the same realities we’re facing here.”

Tobia concludes: “We’ve been so blessed to be in partnership with people, our colleagues in Canada but, by and large, most of our colleagues have been Chinese brothers and sisters. It’s been God’s grace that sent us and kept us going. God did the much bigger part.”

‘It’s not an ending. It’s really just a beginning’

Witness ministry in China continues through support network and resourcing

By K.D. Sawatzky
Mennonite Church Canada

Witness workers Tobia and George Veith completed their term of ministry with Mennonite Church Canada International Witness on Jan. 31, but they continue to relate to Chinese colleagues during their retirement in Canada.

“After 30 years of serving in China, Tobia and George leave behind a network of congregations and leaders that they helped mentor and train in an Anabaptist understanding of faith,” says Jeanette Hanson, director of International Witness.

Along with these congregations, Hanson says there is a large network of education and church connections built over the last 40 years of peacebuilding and exchanges that MC Canada has supported through Mennonite Partners in China (MPC), a joint-ministry program offered by Mennonite Central Committee, Eastern Mennonite Mission, MC Canada International Witness and Mennonite Mission Network (MC U.S.A.).

MPC has undergone major changes in recent years. COVID-19 put an end to much of MPC’s exchange and peacebuilding work, and restrictive government policies make the future of such ministries uncertain. In 2020, MCC and EMM

discontinued their partnership with MPC.

The situation is tenuous, Hanson says, but Chinese church leaders are still eager to work with Mennonites in Canada.

“As a peace church in the 21st century, our relationship with the Chinese church is even more important,” says Hanson. We continue to support [Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary] grad Pastor Y [a pseudonym for security reasons], as he works with congregations and teaches, encourages and strengthens leaders in Anabaptist expressions of faith,”

Many members of the Witness Support Network for China ministry have met Pastor Y and other church partners in China in regular online gatherings, or on learning tours and pastor exchanges before the pandemic. They continue to learn firsthand from Chinese brothers and sisters what it means to faithfully follow Jesus in difficult times, says Hanson.

International Witness continues to focus on developing Anabaptist resources for Chinese church leaders, something George will continue to do from Canada in his retirement.

“Although George and Tobia are returning from their Witness work in China, the relationships that they have with the newly formed Anabaptist groups in China will continue,” says Delilah Roth of Rosthern (Sask.) Mennonite Church, who is a member of the Witness Support Network for China ministry. “It’s not an ending. It’s really just a beginning.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE AND TOBIA VEITH
A 2021 photo of George and Tobia Veith with a group of church leaders, learning and teaching from an Anabaptist perspective.

For information on how to become part of the Witness Support Network for China ministry, visit <https://bit.ly/3sdykLg>, or email Jeanette Hanson at jhanson@mennonitechurch.ca



Staff changes

New youth minister for MC Saskatchewan



Zach Dueck has been hired by Mennonite Church Saskatchewan to serve as the regional church's interim youth worker for the next year. He will connect with youth in the province, mentoring young leaders and planning events. "I'm most excited to do what I've always loved to do," he says. "It's the reason I am constantly drawn towards these sorts of roles. I love creating spaces where youth can feel safe and comfortable becoming part of a community where they can explore their faith together with others. And being a primary part of creating experiences where they can do just that within our lovely little [MC Saskatchewan] community is easily what excites me most about this role."

—BY EMILY SUMMACH

Ottawa pastor joining environmental group



Anthony Siegrist will begin his new duties as A Rocha's Ontario director on March 1, where he will primarily serve the Hamilton, Toronto and Ottawa areas. He comes to the Christian environmental stewardship organization that works in conservation, environmental education and sustainable agriculture with a doctorate in theology and he recently returned to study for a master of science degree in environmental sustainability. The focus of his recent research project explored

how churches and mission agencies can further their engagement in creation care. "I'm thrilled to be joining the A Rocha team," Siegrist says. "I'm looking forward to... identifying ways to deepen the roots and extend the branches of the work here in Ontario." He will leave his pastoral role at Ottawa Mennonite Church on Feb. 28.

—A ROCHA

Executive director reappointed



Amy Gingerich has been reappointed as MennoMedia's executive director. The MennoMedia Board tapped Gingerich for a second four-year term as leader of the denominational publishing arm, based in Harrisonburg, Va. Gingerich was first appointed in 2018. This reappointment was affirmed by MennoMedia's two sponsoring denominations: Mennonite Church U.S.A. and MC Canada. "Amy's resilience has been a key factor in carrying MennoMedia through many changes, in particular, the struggles of COVID adjustments," says Doug Klassen, MC Canada's executive minister. "Her leadership, ambition, hopes and detailed plans/strategies portray a humble confidence that is reflective of the supporting denominations and on our call to be agents of healing and hope in our world." MennoMedia's accomplishments under Gingerich's leadership include: the implementation of antiracism strategies; the publication of *Voices Together*; expanding the *Leader* magazine brand to include a podcast and webinars; and the sale of more than \$1 million worth of books in the 2021 fiscal year, a feat not accomplished since 2012.

—MENNOMEDIA

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Mennonite Church Saskatchewan

Employment Opportunity
Executive Minister

Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, a regional church of MC Canada, comprised of 22 congregations in covenant with each other, invites applications for an Executive Minister.

Those called to lead the church into the 21st century with its growing diversity and change are sought for this position.

Gifts of a pastoral nature and leadership skills are valuable attributes for those applying.

The ability to reach out in support of pastors, in both rural and urban congregations, is an important component of the position.

For the Executive Minister job description, with preferred qualifications and current responsibilities, visit www.mcsask.ca or contact Andrea Enns-Gooding at searchcommittee@mcsask.ca. We will acknowledge receipt of all applications.

COVER STORY

2021 was a milestone year for Silver Lake

Silver Lake Mennonite Camp
SAUBLE BEACH, ONT.

As with so many organizations, the pandemic was a challenge for Silver Lake Mennonite Camp in 2021. However, we were blessed last summer to have the ability to run camp programs such as the Camper in Leadership Training (CILT) program; overnight camps in August; and day camps in Toronto, Hanover, Hamilton,

Kitchener, Leamington, Ottawa and Waterloo.

Alexei Derksen Hiebert, a camp staffer at Silver Lake, summarized the summer of 2021: “Going into the summer, none of us fully knew what to expect. Not being able to run in-person camps since 2019 left staff missing camp in a big way, so we jumped at the opportunity to return to Silver Lake.

“No year at camp is ever simple, and 2021 was no exception. With prioritizing health and safety, while also trying to deliver the best possible experience for campers, staff had their hands full. But everyone came together and showed so much attention and care for this place that we all love, and that made this summer one to remember.

“For me, the highlight was leading the CILT program. Seeing new leaders come together and form a close community makes me very hopeful for Silver Lake’s future.”

Thanks to the generous support of friends of Silver Lake, camp has a solid financial footing. The 60th-year funds that were raised are going towards building two new CILT cabins that will hopefully be operational for summer 2023. We are especially grateful to the Pauls’ family, who donated a cabin in honour of Henry Pauls.

Planning for summer 2022 is underway. With three stand-out assistant directors (Katarina Dyck Steinmann, Cadance Tan and Jonah Thiessen), and a full team of staff, Silver Lake is planning onsite overnight camps, out-trips, and day camps at camp and in Hanover, Leamington, Kitchener and Waterloo. We are excited to announce that, for the first time, a French out-trip is planned for Quebec in partnership with Camp Péniel, an Anabaptist camp in Quebec.

A friend of Silver Lake wrote: “Please know how very significant this work is to build up our beloved community. Happy, healthy leaders and kids make such a better possibility for all our tomorrows.”

That is the power of camp. ☘



SILVER LAKE MENNONITE CAMP PHOTO

Fifth-year staff members Elora Neufeld, left, Saskia Snyder-Penner, Kathyana Carvajal, Katie Goerzen Sheard and Benjamin Schwartzentruber lead their closing campfire at Silver Lake in expectation for a bright 2022 camp experience.

Modernized amenities, same old camp feel

Camp Elim
LAC PELLETIER, SASK.

Everyone making behind-the-scenes plans for Camp Elim has all their fingers crossed that this year we will get back to running the summer camp programs that we love. After two years on hiatus, we are ready to rally an amazing staff and host campers for what we hope will be the best week of their summer.

Elim overlooks beautiful Lac Pelletier in the hills of southern Saskatchewan. We

have a mix of modern and rustic cabins, a fully stocked boathouse for all the time we spend on the lake, a tabernacle that serves as the hub, a craft shack, archery range, and all the amazing natural space that we need to encourage our campers to enjoy the outdoors.

Our lakefront lodge is perhaps the best kept secret. When camp is not in session, we have three fully furnished,



CAMP ELIM PHOTO

Camp Elim campers take a leisurely paddle around Lac Pelletier.

multi-bedroom suites that are available for rent. It’s like being at your own little cabin overlooking the lake.

FOCUS ON CAMPS

Those who haven't been to Elim in many years, will find that our buildings and equipment have been modernized, but the feeling of being somewhere special remains just the same. The wind continues through the leaves of our tall trees, the lake calms in the evening for a beautiful sunset, the air is clean, and we are together with wonderful people.

Elim traditions carry on as we teach campers to canoe and build a fire, and you'll likely even find us singing some of the same songs from when you were young!

We are ready to continue the tradition of summer camp, which we believe will remain an important space for people of all ages to retreat to and have fun. To do

this, we need to grow our team! Camp Elim has positions available for all seasonal staff for 2022, and we continue to search for a passionate and organized individual to fill our year-round executive director position.

Wishing you many days of happy camping! ☸

Camp prepares for post-pandemic opportunities

Youth Farm Bible Camp
ROSTHERN, SASK.

The last two years have been an adventure at the Youth Farm Bible Camp. The summer camp program was on hold for 2020 and at low numbers last year. However, we were able to see other programs grow and impact the constituency we serve. During times of crisis and chaos, we have opportunities to take risks and use our creative juices.

During the pandemic, the riding-lesson program that we offer through Valley Equestrian Centre grew significantly. You can socially distance from one another when riding horses! We had more than 200 people in the weekly program and have four instructors leading the year-round facility.

In 2021, we started two new programs: a wilderness canoeing program led by our staff member Ang Harder, and an internship program. We are already seeing lots of interest in AHA! Adventures and some of this summer's trips are sold out.

Our four interns are currently in Nicaragua for a five-week cultural engagement and educational experience with Daniel Wiebe, a Youth Farm staff member, who spends eight months each year in the second-poorest country of the western hemisphere: Nicaragua. The internship experience gives young adults an orientation to ministry at Youth Farm, cross-cultural experience, classes and reading assignments, and much more.

We have also seen our corn maze continue to grow and impact the thousands



AHA! ADVENTURES PHOTO

Canoeers Patrick Quail and Rhona Gearty take part in a wilderness out-tripping event at Youth Farm Bible Camp on the Paull River in Saskatchewan.

of families that come each fall. We have a full-sized, museum-quality Tabernacle of Moses at our site, which many corn-maze participants were able to tour.

This next year the corn maze will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of David Toews signing the credit agreement with CPR to bring 21,000 Russian Mennonites to Canada, many of whom stopped at Rosthern. We are visioning having an Anabaptist/Mennonite historical interpretive centre onsite in the future.

The last few years has showed

para-church ministries that we need to be diverse in how we impact our world. We need to grow in the holistic ways we share Jesus with our community. We need to grow our compassionate ministries to care for those who have less power and wealth. We need to develop relationships with people who have diverse backgrounds and different opinions.

Jesus calls us toward unity in John 17. May our church institutions grow in that mission. ☸

FOCUS ON CAMPS

The essential gift of hope

Camp Squeah
HOPE, B.C.

Hope. It's a command, a gift, a noun, a verb. Of all that matters in life, the Apostle Paul states that hope is one of a trinity of essentials alongside faith and love. When we are loved, faith blooms in our hearts, and when the path darkens, hope keeps us remembering the love we've received and the presence of God.

This year at Camp Squeah has tested our hope in the face of trouble and despair. With the pandemic continuing to cause us all frustration and anxiety, we've had to patiently wait to see what the Lord would

do. It began with summer camps.

Our province waited until mid-June last year to determine what it was that summer camps would be permitted to do. Not a lot of time! But we scrambled, and the Lord provided means to care for a full summer of children safely. That was one great miracle—more than 400 children were loved for Jesus! We had half the staff we needed when staff training began, and when it ended we had an overabundance.

Mid-summer, our summer director and his wife were anticipating the arrival of

their second child. Being some distance from the nearest maternity facility, they had plans for a home birth, with a few back-up plans.

But life seems to have a way of changing things. About two weeks early, the first child to be born on site at Camp Squeah arrived healthy and safe. There may be no other greater reminder of joy and hope than the birth of a new little one. Little River Siemens helped us focus on what God is always doing in giving us what we need. And her namesake was a portent of loving opportunity just a few months later.

Last November gave us a deluge of rain. The ensuing landslides blocked every major highway near us. More than 1,200 people were trapped in our region. Squeah cared for between 150 and 200 different people over that week.

What more do people need than love and care? The hope that we offer to others by giving without thought of return is essential to life. Hope is what keeps us going and, in many ways, what binds us together.

We praise the Lord for his timely gift of hope in the face of difficult times.

Remember that by freely offering the love of God to others, you give the essential gift of hope to them. ☸



CAMP SQUEAH PHOTO

The sun sets in Hope, B.C., facing west towards the Fraser Valley that was deluged with rain last November. Camp Squeah provided hope and care for more than 150 stranded motorists who were trapped in the area by the flooding.

Why camp staffers are coming back

By Janet Peters
Camps with Meaning

The past two summers have been difficult for summer camps.

One of the struggles we face this year is the loss of many of our older, experienced staff. The uncertainties and shorter camp season has meant many of them have had to find other ways to fill the summer months and their bank accounts. Applications for our leadership staff positions have been slow to trickle in, and more encouragement and invitations have been necessary. But they are coming in!

I was especially struck this year in reading the answers to the questions:



PHOTO BY DARRYL NEUSTAEDTER BARG

Camps with Meaning staff and campers work together to keep the fire going in Manitoba.

“Why do you want to work at camp?” and “What has motivated you to apply?” Some of these applicants have been challenged and exhausted by the difficulties of running summer camps during a pandemic. So why are they coming back? I noticed three main themes in their answers:

- **Camp provides** a unique and special community. Our staff find a community that is centred on faith, creation care, kindness and inclusion. The camp community is a safe place, a sanctuary, a place that feels like home.

FOCUS ON CAMPS

- **Camp provides** a place to embody their faith. Not only does camp affirm their faith, it allows them to express it and develop it. Staff feel close to God and are given space to deepen their relationship with God. Working at camp also becomes a way to practise living out that faith tangibly and bodily.
- **Camp provides** a space in which to grow and develop as people and as leaders. Staff notice growth in who they are as people and in how they relate to others. They are

able build on their strengths, as well as to identify and work at their weaknesses.

This personal and spiritual growth within a strong community gives our staff a sense of purpose and belonging, which they find beautifully fulfilling. And as someone whose job it is to hire these folks, these responses fill me with wonder, hope and joy as we look ahead to providing that community and growth for the younger staff and campers who will

join us this summer. It also reminds me why I came back and continue to work for camp—because I, too, am embraced by an amazing community and am able to embody my faith and grow in so many ways. ✎

Janet Peters is the program director for Camps with Meaning, the camping ministry of Mennonite Church Manitoba that operates camps Assiniboia and Koinonia.

Music camp is back this summer

By Ashitha Mantrawadi
Conrad Grebel University College
WATERLOO, ONT.

This summer, Ontario Mennonite Music Camp is once again happening at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, from Aug. 14 to 26. The camp provides an exciting adventure for 12- to 17-year-olds that helps to build friendships, strengthen leadership skills, celebrate their love of music and explore their faith.

Natan Hastings-Fuhr and Hanan Kaekiza, first-time campers in 2021, enjoyed their experience.

“A normal day at camp is filled with many fun activities that include choir, small groups, various recreational activities, chapel, ensemble, practice hour, and free time,” says Hanan, who attends Ottawa Mennonite Church. “In the two weeks you are at camp, you can see all the bonds you have made through the music you make together.”

“It is amazing to have a place where you can play any and all music, and people will appreciate it, no matter what,” says Natan from Mannheim Mennonite Church in Petersburg, Ont. “I was a part of a band, and it was super cool to be able to play music with many talented people. We played lots of cool songs, and



ONTARIO MENNONITE MUSIC CAMP PHOTO

As a response to the pandemic, 2021 Ontario Mennonite Music Campers created videos of new and favourite hymns for churches to use in virtual worship services.

in two weeks we learned three songs that we played for everyone.”

The camp is also an encouraging place

for youth to explore their faith, since it is “not only an amazing camp, but it’s also Christian-faith based,” says Hanan. “Every morning we have chapel. The chapel service includes hymn singing, Bible verse readings, a brief talk about the Bible verse and a benediction. In our small group we would read and talk about Scripture. There are about five to six people in each group, and one counsellor leading each group,” she says.

After two years of virtual and hybrid activities, the music camp is a safe place for youth to make meaningful connections as well as learn more about their faith.

Going to music camp “was one of the best things that could have happened,” says Natan. “It is a place where you can let yourself be you, and no one will judge you no matter how weird you think you might be.”

The two-week summer program is for students who finished grades 6 to 12, with a leader-in-training program available for students who finished grades 11 and 12. ✎

For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/34Hb3ch>. To register, visit <https://bit.ly/3owOYEy>.



FOCUS ON CAMPS

Embracing the 'mystery of God'

*Squeah director reflects on years at B.C. camp*By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

Mention “church camp” and many people might think of camping or volunteering there a summer or two. But for Rob Tiessen, executive director of Mennonite Church B.C.’s Camp Squeah, camp has meant a decades-long experience.

Growing up in Vancouver’s Sherbrooke Mennonite Church, Tiessen faithfully attended summer camp at Squeah throughout his childhood and youth.

In 1991, he was invited to apply for a male counsellor position at Squeah and found it a place to match his gifts and passions.

When a position for full-time program director opened up, he pursued a bachelor of religious education degree at Northwest Baptist Seminary/Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C., taking recreation courses that would complement a camp leadership position. Then he earned a master’s degree from ACTS Seminaries.

He was hired as the program director 25 years ago, in 1997, and, in 2006, when the previous executive director left the position, Tiessen was hired and has served in that role in ever since.

Recently, he reflected on his time at camp, and how the camping experience has changed, as well as how camp has affected him personally.

Amy Rinner Waddell: *What changes have you observed over the years in terms of the kids who come, the camp programs, general trends in church camping?*

Rob Tiessen: Early on, the majority of campers came from MC B.C. homes. Over the years, the camper demographic has certainly shifted towards the majority of



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROB TIESSEN

The Tiessen family is at home at Camp Squeah. Pictured from left to right are Josiah, Rob, Eli, Nyah and Kim.

campers being Christian from a variety of different churches and denominations, to more and more coming from homes with no significant faith connection.

This has challenged our creativity in terms of how to share God’s love and the gospel story in relevant ways to such a diverse audience who are entering the story from so many different points of awareness.

B.C. Camping Association standards have been updated over the years, designed with one goal in mind: improve camper safety. This has necessarily added various layers of protection and supervision throughout numerous areas of camp programming and operation. Our summer staff community must now be significantly larger, and better trained, than in the early days of camping, to ensure adequate, safe supervision.

ARW: *What do you think the importance is of church camps in general? How have you observed the camping experience has changed or affected the*

young people who have attended?

RT: Faith-based camps offer a unique setting away from the daily routines of “normal” life, where kids are given opportunity to escape preconceived labels and explore life and relationships in a natural setting... surrounded by a community of leaders who share the love of Jesus with them. Programming designed to invest in their development fosters healthy images

(Continued on page 30)

AN UNFORGETTABLE SUMMER CAMP EXPERIENCE

OMMC is an exciting summer opportunity for youth who have completed Gr 6-12, pairing exceptional musical instruction with traditional camp activities!

grebel.ca/ommc

Ontario Mennonite Music Camp

Conrad Grebel University College

FOCUS ON CAMPS

(Continued from page 29)

of self, and encourages growth in self-esteem as well as leadership development.

At Squeah, we particularly value and place emphasis on spending time in the natural environment of God's creation. We cherish the sights, sounds and smells of nature, and we encourage a deeper connection with our Creator throughout the experience.

Time and time again I hear from churches that the young adults who commit to baptism share in their testimony that it was a significant life-changing, faith-forming experience at camp that influenced a deeper commitment to follow Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and ultimately to this step of obedience.

ARW: What's it like raising a family at church camp?

RT: Raising a family at camp comes with incredible blessings and joys, as well its fair share of challenges.

It's a great environment and community to raise children in, with so many positive, energetic role models to look up to. The natural environment, with all of the activities, trails, field, etc., are a parent's dream when it comes to encouraging your kids away from TV and computer screens.

It's a great place for the kids to develop their social skills as youngsters and then continue to develop their leadership abilities as they get opportunities to serve in various areas of camp.

I've been incredibly blessed to have such an amazing life partner, in my wife Kim, to share this journey with. Her support and

commitment to Squeah's ministry cannot be overstated. She is a main reason I've made it these 25 years.

ARW: How has your time at Squeah affected you and your perspective in life or faith?

RT: Over the past 25 years, I've been challenged time and time again to consider and acknowledge a situation from a different perspective. To embrace the mystery of God rather than only be satisfied with that which I can explain.

Nature is a wonderful teacher in this regard. It is not controllable. It can be fierce and unrelenting one moment, then peaceful and serene the next. This has served to emphasize my perspective on being a lifelong learner. I'm daily more aware of my need for God's grace, love and mercy, and pray I spend more time extending that same grace and love to others than worrying about being right or wrong in our decisions and actions.

ARW: What do you see as the future of church camps, and what is your continued vision for Camp Squeah?

RT: Especially coming out of COVID-19, I see camp as the perfect place for churches to rebuild community in the body which has been segregated by this pandemic.

There's something special that happens in terms of relational connections when people step out of their routine hustle and bustle to set aside time devoted to connecting with one another in a special place and space that is camp.

It remains our vision to continue stewarding Camp Squeah, in response to

God who loves and calls us, as a place of refuge in a natural setting, where people of all ages can build relationships, grow and be nurtured.

I feel blessed to have been supported along this journey by so many gifted and talented servant-hearted brothers and sisters. ❧

❧ Staff change

Hidden Acres has new acting executive director

NEW HAMBURG, ONT.— As of Jan. 1, Chris Pot began serving as acting executive director of Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp following the resignation of Chris Oldham, effective Dec. 31, 2021. After months of prayer and discernment, Oldham felt that it was time to move on from the position as executive director of Hidden Acres, according to the camp's board of directors. The board and staff thank Oldham for his dedication and hard work during a very difficult two-and-a-half years. He was called to Hidden Acres "for such a time as this," and Hidden Acres is blessed to have had him in leadership and appreciate everything he did for the camp, according to the board. Pot will serve as acting executive director for eight months while a new executive director is sought.

—ADAPTED FROM NATURAL LINKS, MENNONITE CAMP ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



MENNONITE CAMPING ASSOCIATION

BRITISH COLUMBIA
Camp Squeah

ALBERTA
Camp Valaqua

MANITOBA
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ONTARIO
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Fraser Lake Camp
Willowgrove Day Camp
Hidden Acres Mennonite
Camp & Retreat Centre



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INSIDE

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AMBS window

Tailored to fit: *Invite AMBS* program customizes resources for the church

Congregations and organizations are learning directly from AMBS faculty members on a topic of their choice through the **Invite AMBS** program — both in person and virtually.

"I see Invite AMBS as an answer to the requests we're receiving from congregations to receive education from AMBS and to be in partnership with us," said **Steve Norton**, who oversees the program for AMBS's Church Leadership Center. "Invite AMBS is the most direct way this can happen, since faculty members go directly to the churches or conference gatherings."

The requests come in different forms, Norton said. Invite AMBS speakers have preached for individual congregations, served as plenary presenters for conference gatherings and offered customized workshops or seminars for specific groups. Those who inquire decide which topics they want input on or make suggestions based on their needs, and Norton matches them with a faculty member with knowledge of the subject.

Requests for speaking engagements have come from across the U.S. and Canada, he said: "The program is clearly resonating with churches and conferences, as we're seeing faculty members continually receive requests."

Two groups who engaged Invite AMBS speakers in 2021 share about their experiences here:

Antiracism ministry consulting

Faculty member: Nekeisha Alayna Alexis,

MA, Intercultural Competence and Undoing Racism coordinator

Chrissie Muecke, Rochester (New York) Mennonite Fellowship (RMF):

Our congregation began as a house church in the mid-1970s and has about 50 members.

While we now have a building, we maintain elements of a house church. The "priesthood of all believers" is a core value of the fellowship, leading to the decision not to have a pastor. The work of the church is carried out by ministry groups formed each year through a gift pledge process.

We established an antiracism accountability group in the summer of 2020 following the death of George Floyd. This group of eight people attended protests and rallies, wrote letters and statements in response to local and national racism and violence, *(continued on p. 2)*

"We realized that much of what we had been doing was reactionary and not sustainable. We needed a more comprehensive plan so that the work would be lasting."

Above: Invite AMBS speakers Nekeisha Alayna Alexis (Credit: Peter Ringenberg) and Drew Strait (Credit: Mennonite Church USA)

(continued from p. 1)

facilitated worship services and adult education groups around issues of racism, and coordinated a churchwide retreat led by Nekeisha via Zoom called "Becoming the People We Want to Be." We connected with local organizations to learn more about their work. We met weekly for prayer, discernment, sharing and discussion.

After several months, we realized that much of what we had been doing was reactionary. There would be an incident of violence or police brutality, and we would quickly do something in response. We knew that this was not sustainable and that we

needed a more comprehensive plan so that the work would be lasting. We also recognized that focusing a lot of attention outside of ourselves did not address the racism and White supremacy that existed within our mostly White congregation. That's when we invited Nekeisha to work with us.

A grant from the Mennonite Church USA Justice Fund helped pay for our work with her.

We had four two-hour Zoom sessions with Nekeisha, which she developed based on the goals we outlined for her. She provided pre-work in the form of articles, reflection questions and writing prompts for us to complete. She made significant shifts along the way in response to what came up. For example, we originally asked her to facilitate a session about using money in antiracism work, but we discovered it was more important to first address our relationship to the rest of the fellowship. While our group was very enthusiastic and committed, we sometimes moved too quickly for the rest of the congregation and did not communicate clearly and effectively.

During our time with Nekeisha, we developed vision and mission statements to guide our work as a committee, identified roles and tasks to help our group run more effectively, and developed a series of short- and long-term goals for our work.

We worked through inter-personal challenges that arose in our small group and with the congregation. We went through a process to change the bylaws of the church so that an antiracism ministry is now one of the permanent ministry groups. We facilitated conversations for the congregation to discuss ways racism shows up in our own lives and in our church.

Going forward, we want to "transform inside" and "engage outside," to use Nekeisha's wording. Our antiracism ministry group will meet monthly to continue making progress toward our goals. We are hiring an antiracism trainer to do some further training with our entire church. We are reviewing all manuals and policies in the church using an antiracist lens. Nekeisha provided several assessment tools to help us identify positive changes we are making and areas we still need to address.

We plan to join the Rochester Police Accountability Board and help address local issues around policing and violence. We want to deepen our connection with Teen Empowerment, a local organization that hires youth organizers to help build strong communities and work on policy initiatives for institutional and systemic change. The teens created a documentary called *Clarissa Uprooted* about an African American area of

(continued on p. 5)

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AMBS Window

Winter 2022 | Volume 32, Issue 1

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Invite AMBS: Schedule a speaker

Let us know the topic or speaker your congregation or organization is interested in, and we'll develop something for you.

SAMPLE TOPICS

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Learn more: ambs.ca/invite

Equipping leaders to meet the challenges of ministry

Some years ago, I was riding with a group of people in the covered bed of a pickup in Venezuela. As the pickup pulled to a stop, I said to one of my traveling companions, "I wonder where we are?" — to which she replied, "I guess we are *somewhere!*" That exchange has been a running joke between us over the years. We are surely always *somewhere*.

AMBS is a creative, student-centered and hope-filled learning community. We know that wherever leaders find themselves, they will be leading *somewhere*. And when has it been more challenging to make sense of the "somewhere" we find ourselves today? Today, pastors plan worship, offer pastoral care and lead discernment processes through entirely new media. Peacebuilders do their work in highly polarized contexts. Congregations are returning to in-person meetings wondering who is coming back.

The faithful church bears relevant witness to Jesus in every place we find ourselves. At AMBS, we are listening deeply to church leaders in the U.S., Canada and around the world. They are telling us that AMBS offers an excellent foundation for ministry and leadership. Yet today, more is being asked of these leaders.

We are working hard to support leaders in this time and place. These times are requiring leaders to expand their administrative and organizational skills. Leaders are expected to manage polarized

communities as they discern a common sense of purpose with these communities.

Through **Invite AMBS**, our faculty members are helping leaders assess and respond to challenges they face in their ministry contexts, whether it is increasing secularization in a post-Christendom context, rising Christian nationalism or systemic racism (see pp. 1, 2 and 5).

AMBS is developing a new **applied leadership curriculum** — a series of learning modules that will be delivered in multiple, flexible ways to provide practical skills and processes to meet the challenges current and future leaders are and will be facing.

We have also submitted a petition to our accrediting agency to offer a competency-based **Doctor of Ministry in Leadership** that will enable experienced leaders to deepen their formation and expand their skillset for greater effectiveness.

Our aim at AMBS is to educate highly effective leaders to meet the challenges of ministry with a relevant witness that makes a difference in every place. • — *David Boshart, PhD, President*



Credit: Jason Bryant

Thank you to our board members!

The AMBS Board of Directors includes representatives from the seminary's sponsoring denominations (Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada) and other constituencies. We recognize and thank our outgoing board members for contributing their time, experience and expertise:

- **Bruce Baergen** of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (board member 2008–12; chair 2012–22); First Mennonite Church of Edmonton; Mennonite Church Alberta
- **David Brubacher** (MDiv 1991) of Vineland, Ontario, Canada (2012–22); Grace Mennonite Church, St. Catharines, Ontario; Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

We welcome and thank our incoming members:

- **Rev. Addie Banks** of the Bronx, New York (2022–26); Manhattan (New York) Mennonite Fellowship; Atlantic Coast Conference
- **Peter Goerzen** (MDiv 2015) of North Newton, Kansas (2022–26); Tabor Mennonite Church, Newton; Western District Conference

View a list of AMBS's board members: [amsb.ca/board](https://www.amsb.ca/board)



Bruce Baergen



David Brubacher



Rev. Addie Banks



Peter Goerzen

Meet our Journey graduates!

Six participants from Mennonite Church USA congregations completed the **Journey Missional Leadership Development Program** in 2021. The distance-friendly certificate program develops leaders centered in Jesus Christ for ministries in local churches and communities. It's designed for pastors, those exploring a call to ministry, church planters and lay leaders.

The program — which consists of online study, biweekly meetings with a mentor, and face-to-face gatherings — currently has 18 participants in the U.S., Canada, Southeast Asia and Uganda.

"I'm deeply impressed by our Journey graduates' hunger for learning, wholehearted investment in ministries of various kinds in their churches and communities, and growth in many different areas — including spiritual disciplines, Bible study and theology, personal character, leadership and more," said **Jewel Gingerich Longenecker**, PhD, Dean of Lifelong Learning. "Their commitment to God and the church, together with their development during the Journey program, are truly inspiring!"



Jan Croyle, Wadsworth, Ohio. Jan had been an accountant for 35 years and felt God was calling her to something more. Through her experience with the program, she is now Pastor at her congregation, First Mennonite Church in Wadsworth (Central District Conference). Her mentor was **Marilyn Rossiter** of Summit Mennonite Church (Ohio Conference).

"When I began this program, I had no idea what God had planned for me. I ended my Journey program not simply with a piece of paper, but with a whole new world opened for me to truly experience and say 'yes' to the Spirit's call. I have been the pastor [at Wadsworth] now for over a year, and I can't imagine doing anything else."



Hilarion Chidi Ihezuoh, Los Angeles, California. Chidi is an ordained pastor serving with Mosaic Mennonite Conference. His mentor was **Anthonia Onye** of Los Angeles Faith Chapel (Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference).

"Jewel and the staff and instructors (Duane Beck, Roland Kuhl and Donna Mast) are amazing. A thrilling thing with my instructors is that they

have continued to provide support for me even after I finished the program. Journey is a key requirement for building your spiritual formation and direction as a pastor. It provides a platform in knowing the roots of the Anabaptists, teaches you a lot about the Bible and provides you with the right approach for pastoral care."



Jolene Miller, Roanoke, Illinois. Jolene applied for Journey in 2018, immediately after joining the pastoral team of Roanoke Mennonite Church in Eureka, Illinois, as Pastor of Worship and Community Life. She anticipates her ordination process with Illinois Mennonite Conference beginning soon. Her mentor was **Jane Roeschley** of the Mennonite Church of Normal (Illinois Mennonite Conference).

"I cannot overstate Journey's value in equipping me to grow the Kingdom in my little corner of the world. I was repeatedly amazed at how God worked through well timed lessons to equip me at just the right time for new tasks and responsibilities as they occurred. Journey was crucial in equipping me for ministry, as well as helping me develop and claim my pastoral identity."



Ellen M. Morey, Elkhart, Indiana. Ellen is an elder at Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart (Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference), and is exploring involvement with the Hermitage Community. She is also a production seamstress. Her mentors were **Dr. Sally Longley** and **Eleanor Kreider** of Prairie Street and **Nina Bartelt Lanctot**, a spiritual director.

"In Journey, I experienced the movement of G-d* in ways that surprised me and brought new life into my faith. Overall, coming out of the program, I have a greater awareness of the movement of the Spirit and greater compassion for myself as I strive towards the goal of integration with the larger body of Christ. [*G-d is a respectful way to refer to the Divine.]"

Not pictured: Raymond (Andrew) Arnold of Family Mennonite Church, Los Angeles, California (Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference); **Jeremy Clevenger** of Wooster (Ohio) Mennonite Church (Ohio Conference) •

(continued from p. 2)

Rochester that once thrived but was displaced. We hope to screen the film for the community.

Our work with Nekeisha was invaluable. She brought energy, passion and wisdom to our meetings. Her in-depth presentations were insightful and tailored to our specific needs. She created a safe, yet challenging space for honest reflection. We came away with both motivation and tools for continuing this essential work.

Nekeisha, on working with RMF: This group went from not having a clear sense of their mission at the start to being commissioned for their ministry by their congregation. So many people get interested in antiracism and then get stuck, or get fired up and then move on to the next thing. It's heartening to know that there is a committed group of people who have overcome that hump to enter into another phase of acting.

If you're stuck in your privilege, you're not going to be able to get out of it without help. It's like if I don't know how to bake. If I sit around in a circle with others who don't know how to bake a cake, how will we learn to bake a cake together? It's important to get support. I want people to see that every step forward is a win.

“The Bible and Christian Nationalism” presentation

Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) 2021 Fall Assembly Celebration

Faculty member: Drew Strait, PhD, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins

Brook Musselman, ACC Conference Coordinator, Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Atlantic Coast Conference is made up of 30 congregations from Boston to Baltimore, clustered mainly around Lancaster and Reading. The conference is made of and strengthened by congregations at all points of the theological spectrum that vary greatly in their practices and styles but find common ground in being centered in Christ. One of ACC's weaknesses is its lack of much racial diversity, being primarily White congregations.

An ACC pastor returned from Mennonite Church USA's 2021 convention recommending that we invite Drew — whose workshop on “The Bible and Christian Nationalism” was timely and well received — to share at our Fall Assembly. Christian nationalism is something that

quite a few ACC congregations are wrestling with in some way, and we felt the resourcing would be appreciated by pastors.

Our main goal was to resource pastors who are unsure how to address Christian nationalism in their congregations. We had an informal breakfast with Drew and ACC pastors so they could ask questions and interact with Drew on the topic. He then presented two sessions during the assembly gathering.

A major takeaway for many participants was a clear connection between religious and political idolatry. Drew's action points for interrupting this connection when we see it were very appreciated. He helped participants move towards being comfortable with truth-telling without being hypercritical. Hearing from someone who is an expert on the subject matter was helpful for many who have felt discomfort with what they've been experiencing in their communities but didn't have the tools to respond.

At this point ACC is not planning any next steps, but our hope is that this learning is being shared and presented in congregations and that individuals will use the tools in their contexts. The recordings of Drew's sessions have been shared through ACC communications channels.

Drew, on working with ACC: The proliferation of White Christian nationalism around the U.S. has presented pastors and congregations with new challenges for bearing witness to the gospel of peace. The divisive nature of our political moment has divided families and even congregations. While much has been written about what Christian nationalism *is*, finding safe spaces for pastors to talk about what to *do* are lacking. My time with ACC pastors deepened this conviction as we shared our corporate wisdom with one another

and reflected theologically on how — *biblically speaking* — Christian nationalism distorts the gospel of Christ and is a form of political idolatry. •

Drew helped participants move towards being comfortable with truth-telling without being hypercritical.



Above: Drew Strait; Nekeisha Alayna Alexis

Credit: Peter Ringenberg

Political Idolatry: Countering Christian Nationalism webinar

Watch for information to come on this May 2022 webinar with Drew Strait.

2021 Alumni Ministry and Service Recognition Fred Speckeen and Leonard Wiebe



(l. to r.): Fred Speckeen and Leonard Wiebe

Frederick J. Speckeen, PhD, of Prince George, British Columbia, Canada, and Leonard Wiebe, MST, of Goshen, Indiana, are the 2021 recipients of AMBS's Alumni Ministry and Service Recognition. Both of them earned Bachelor of Divinity

degrees from the seminaries that later joined to become AMBS — Speckeen from Goshen Biblical Seminary in 1956 and Wiebe from Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 1960.

"We were impressed by the rich service that Fred and Leonard have given over their lifetimes — Fred in administrative leadership and Leonard as a pastor and church planter," said Alumni

Director **Janeen Bertsche Johnson** (MDiv 1989). "We hope their stories inspire others to see seminary education as a vital gift for whatever professional path they may take."

Speckeen said the dedication of the GBS faculty and staff to its students, the Mennonite Church and the community impressed him: "Their Christ-centeredness and servant leadership were inspiring and motivated me as I later took on responsibilities in the church and community — locally and internationally."

Wiebe reflected, "I always felt that the seminary encouraged us and was very close to whatever we were doing in church planting. ... There was a real caring for each person and a strong sense of prayer in the school that helped us and gave us the support we needed."

Read more, view the reception recordings and/or nominate a graduate for the 2022 award: ambs.ca/alumni • — *Annette Brill Bergstresser*

Featuring faculty scholarship on pressing issues for the church

At the **Institute of Mennonite Studies** (IMS), the research and publishing wing of AMBS, we collaborate with Anabaptist scholars from across North America and around the world through our publishing partnerships.

We publish *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* in partnership with Canadian Mennonite University; the mission journal *Anabaptist Witness* in partnership with Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Mission Network; and the book series *Studies in Anabaptist Theology and Ethics* in partnership with T&T Clark/Bloomsbury; to name a few.

A recent collaboration featured Anabaptist scholars close to home. Through a special arrangement with *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* (MQR) — a joint publication of Goshen (Indiana) College, the Mennonite Historical Society and AMBS — IMS co-edited the January 2022 issue of MQR, which features the cutting-edge scholarship of several AMBS faculty members.

Rachel Miller Jacobs, DMin, Associate Professor of Congregational Formation, opens the issue by reflecting

on ordinary harm and how to atone for it. **Jamie Pitts**, PhD, Associate Professor of Anabaptist Studies and IMS Director, then explores the relationship between the Holy Spirit and institutions. **Drew Strait**, PhD, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins, deconstructs the ideology of White Christian nationalism and calls the church to resist political idolatry. **Janna Hunter-Bowman**, PhD, Associate Professor of Peace Studies and Christian Social Ethics, likewise proposes ways Christians can engage the state in peace-building without idolizing the state.

You can read these articles and more by purchasing a print or digital copy at goshen.edu/mqr. To learn more about IMS's other publishing partnerships, see ambs.ca/ims. • — *David Cramer, PhD, IMS Managing Editor*



Credit: Peter Ringerberg

David Cramer, PhD,
IMS Managing Editor

AMBS welcomes Wyse-Rhodes to Teaching Faculty

The AMBS Board of Directors has appointed **Jackie Wyse-Rhodes**, PhD, of Bluffton, Ohio, as Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible, beginning in July 2022. She currently is Associate Professor of Religion at Bluffton University, where she has served since 2015, teaching courses on the Old and New Testaments, biblical interpretation, exegetical studies, and Greek and Hebrew, among other topics. She also served as Interim Campus Pastor (2020–21).

Beverly Lapp, EdD, Vice President and Academic Dean and search committee chair, said she sees Wyse-Rhodes' experience in an ecumenically diverse Mennonite liberal arts university as "an enormous asset for our learning community."

"During Jackie's campus interview, students and faculty members observed how she created a spacious and interactive learning environment that makes room for others to engage, learn and lead," she noted. "I'm thrilled that with her Bible faculty colleagues, Jackie will be part of continuing AMBS's incredible legacy of dynamic biblical scholarship and teaching."

A 2002 AMBS graduate, Wyse-Rhodes earned a PhD in Hebrew Bible in 2018 from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Her dissertation was titled, "Reading the Cosmos in Second Temple Jewish Literature: Nature as Model, Sign,

Punishment, Witness, and Mystery." She also earned a Master of Research in Hebrew Bible from Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, in 2007, while serving as a community worker in the Netherlands with Mennonite Mission Network (2002–07). Her Master of Divinity at AMBS included a concentration in Biblical Studies, and she also earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from Hiram (Ohio) College in 1997.

An active scholar, presenter and speaker, Wyse-Rhodes is currently writing *Numbers* for the Believers Church Bible Commentary series (Herald Press) and "Isaiah and the Environment" for the Bible Odyssey website (Society of Biblical Literature). "Land," her contribution to *The Bible and Science Fiction* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2022), is forthcoming.

Wyse-Rhodes is excited to rejoin the AMBS community: "During my candidating visit, I was drawn to the joyful curiosity that faculty and students bring to study and worship, and I was impressed by the ease with which the seminary builds community among students on campus and at a distance. I'm eager to join in the wonderful work AMBS is doing to pursue God's vision of healing and hope for all creation." •

— *Annette Brill Bergstresser*



Jackie Wyse-Rhodes, PhD

Photo provided

McOwen concludes nearly 20 years of service

Dee McOwen, Administrative Assistant to the Registrar and Education Database Manager, retired Dec. 31, 2021, concluding nearly 20 years of service to AMBS. Since she began in July 2002, McOwen has played a crucial role behind the scenes, working steadfastly to ensure the accuracy of the seminary's student records. **Scott Janzen**, MDiv, Assistant Dean and Registrar and Director of Retention, described her as a "cornerstone — solidly preserving the integrity of the Registrar's Office."

He noted that McOwen spearheaded the transitions in software used by the Registrar's Office not once but twice — managing the monumental changes from paper- and DOS-based student record systems to a Windows system in 2005 and to cloud-based software in 2016. He also praised McOwen's and volunteer **Dot Smucker's** "tireless efforts to carefully audit student records from decades past and bring them up to par."

"Those are really big jobs that go on mostly behind the scenes, but which are really important," he said.

What has struck Janzen most about McOwen, though, is that more than anything else, she strives to serve students well.

"She has connected with students closely throughout the years and helped them both on campus and off," he said. "She is a great listener, and someone students appreciate speaking with. And when they would sometimes apologize for interrupting her work, she would say, 'It's no problem at all; we're here to serve students, and you come first.' For me, that is the anthem of her legacy at AMBS." • — *Annette Brill Bergstresser*



Credit: Rachel A. Fonseca

Dee McOwen and Scott Janzen during a campus break in honor of her retirement.

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Carmen Gomez, Master of Divinity Connect student from the Bronx, New York

UPCOMING OFFERINGS

!Explore:

A Theological Program for High School Youth

Participants in 2022 will attend Mennonite World Conference in Indonesia with Indonesian youth, explore theological questions and lived faith together, and visit parts of beautiful Java Island. This program for students in grades 10–12 includes a congregational internship. Generous financial support helps with MWC expenses, and participants receive a \$1,000 stipend. Tap a shoulder! ambs.ca/explore

Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication

April 20 – May 31: Explore the possibilities and pitfalls of courageously engaging differences within congregational life in this six-week online Anabaptist Short Course with Betty Pries, PhD. Register by March 16 to save \$50! ambs.ca/shortcourses

Journey:

A Missional Leadership Development Program

Nurture your leadership abilities, deepen your spiritual formation and explore what ministry looks like in your life through this two-and-a-half-year distance-friendly nondegree program. ambs.ca/journey

Free journals online

- *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 22.2 (Fall 2021): “Reading the Bible as if our lives depend on it” ambs.ca/lms/vision
- *Anabaptist Witness* 8.2 (October 2021): “Mission and Protest” anabaptistwitness.org

Anabaptists & Philosophy Roundtable

This new webinar series features scholars discussing Anabaptist life and thought in relation to philosophical themes, topics and methods. ambs.ca/anabaptists-and-philosophy-roundtable

Intensive Term courses

Hybrid courses

(Online work: May 9 – July 22; Hybrid Week on campus: June 6–11)

- Christian Leadership in the 21st Century
- History of Christian Spirituality

Campus courses (Open to auditors)

- Biblical Storytelling: May 9–20
- Practicing and Embodying Nonviolence: May 9–26
- Praxis of Forgiveness and Reconciliation: June 13–24

Nonadmitted students get 50% off their first three credit hours!

ambs.ca/upcoming-courses

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ambs.ca/costs-and-affordability

Calendar

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.

Ontario

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 19: Conrad Grebel University College and UWaterloo host a virtual open house for future students, at 9 a.m. For more information, or to register, visit <https://bit.ly/3sf133K>.

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.

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



Classifieds

Announcement

German-English-German translations facilitated within three days by the only licensed translator of Plautdietsch in North & South America and Europe. Email Jack Thiessen at jandat@zoho-mail.com or call (204) 388-6099. Box 135 New Bothwell MB, R0A 1C0.



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Faith and public life: Back to basics

On the blog, pastor Anthony G. Siegrist reflects on the 'Freedom Convoy' protests that have taken place across the country. canadianmennonite.org/blog/basics



Watch: MWC looks back on 2021

A short video from Mennonite World Conference explores the ways the global Mennonite-Anabaptist family strengthened relationships last year. canadianmennonite.org/mwc2021



How do churches practise creation care?

A Mennonite World Conference survey shows that Mennonite-Anabaptist congregations around the world are being impacted by climate change in diverse ways. canadianmennonite.org/mwcsurvey



Mennonites, Catholics reunite Ontario family

A family separated by illness is being reunited through the joint efforts of Mennonite Disaster Service and the Roman Catholic Knights of Columbus. canadianmennonite.org/jobinfamily

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The power of music

Manitoba camp staff continue writing songs for extensive library

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent



MENNONITE CHURCH MANITOBA PHOTO

Camps with Meaning staff sing together in worship at Camp Assiniboia.

Singing is an integral part of life at Camps with Meaning (CwM), Mennonite Church Manitoba's camping ministry. This is the case at many summer camps, but unique to CwM is this: their staff have been writing their own music for more than 20 years.

"The real goal of this was to connect the songs with the Bible lessons of the summer really directly," says Darryl Neustaedter Barg, director of communications at MC Manitoba and an instigator of the camp's songwriting tradition who continues to guide staff through the process. "There's a million great songs out there . . . but they don't do precisely what we can do when we write them for that summer."

He and other camp-connected people

started dabbling in songwriting in the mid-1990s and began discussing how this could be a regular practice of camp staff. But it took several years before it became official and the first songwriting retreat took place.

"Lord, You've Searched Me" was created at that first workshop in 2000. It's now featured in the new Mennonite worship and song collection, *Voices Together*, along with "Be a Sower," penned by camp staff in 2013 (nos. 609 and 789 in the new hymnal, respectively).

At annual songwriting sessions that have continued since then, current staff collaborate on lyrics and tunes based on the Scripture verses, themes and images of the approaching summer's

Bible curriculum.

"We've all seen the power of music to put words in people's mouths and hearts in a unique way," Neustaedter Barg says. "[We] realized we could really help embed these good things in people's hearts with music."

The COVID-19 pandemic has prevented staff from writing new songs for two years, but they are hoping to resume this spring. ❧

CwM staff have written more than 50 songs over the years, many of which can be found at campswithmeaning.org/summer/music.

