

CANADIAN MENNONITE

October 31, 2022 Volume 26 Number 22

Flourishing with creation

pg. 17

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EDITORIAL

Parting thoughts

VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive Editor



My adventure with *Canadian Mennonite*

began in October 2013, when I stepped into the newly created role of web editor. In March 2017, I became executive editor, teaming up with Tobi Thiessen, who began as publisher.

Thinking back over the past nine years, I'm considering some lessons learned along the way. There were the basics: navigating the back end of a website, writing social media posts, understanding analytics of reader engagement. I've learned to survive in a lifestyle of deadlines every two weeks, not always liking it but committed to the discipline of that pattern. And the discovery that I'm more of an introvert than I thought—it hasn't always been easy to put my thoughts out there for all to read.

There was continuous learning about Mennonite Church Canada: its history, geography and people, the way the denomination functions and the issues it faced during my tenure here. A church that is alive is constantly being stretched, changing and re-inventing itself. In helping to tell the story of MC Canada, I've witnessed the challenges and conflict that come with growth, for individuals, congregations and organizations. And, of course, the blessings.

Many times, I've been reminded of the responsibility that comes with the enterprise such as a church publication. The aims are always for accuracy, fairness, balance. How does one tell the story well of a nationwide church and

the individuals that make up that body?

I am thankful for your affirmations and for the awards this magazine has won. Yet, sometimes our best efforts have failed. This publication's goal is to be a place where many voices are heard. But, in spite of *CM's* commitment to reflect the many and varied perspectives present in the wider church family, we have not told enough of its diverse stories. As MC Canada works to become more intercultural and inclusive, so must its communications. There are still many more stories and opinions to share.

One surprise for me along the way: People have different definitions of what "Mennonite" means. For some it is enough to have ancestors with a last name that is considered Mennonite. For some, being Mennonite means sharing a certain background and culture. For others, being Mennonite involves a choice for a way of believing and living out one's faith, regardless of one's culture or last name. Some fight to leave Mennonite ways behind; others are attracted to them.

Over the past nine years, I've been inspired by the many dedicated volunteers who make up the nationwide church, each serving God in their own way. *CM* has told stories of people who contribute week after week to the ministry of their congregations, who serve on boards, sponsor refugees, raise funds, help in thrift stores, volunteer in their communities, and more. It has been an honour to bring your stories to light.

Behind the scenes, publishing is a

team effort. In my time here, I have witnessed the professionalism and dedication of the people who make up the *CM* team. Our anniversary issue highlighted some past team members, and you can see the names of the current staff on the masthead and on our "Contact us" webpage. The list is long of the skills and life experiences that each one brings to the magazine. I have greatly appreciated their instincts and their insights, shared on behalf of the effort that is *Canadian Mennonite*.

Through it all, my experience here has continued to confirm the value of a good story, to offer insight, to make connections between people, to inspire and to point to new ways of living as a child of God in the world.

The world is hungry for good news—not a sugarcoated reality, but the stories of people who share God's love in hard realities and who find purpose and meaning in spite of the difficulties that come their way. My hope is that *CM* will continue to share such stories.

As the editorial baton is passed on to Will Braun, the next editor, I cheer for the ongoing efforts of *Canadian Mennonite*. I offer prayers of thanksgiving and encouragement to the nationwide family that is MC Canada. May you live—and tell—many more stories of God's presence among us.

Corrections

The surnames of Rob Belanger and Scott Feick were misspelled in "Adding friends and funds," Oct. 3, page 22. *Canadian Mennonite* regrets the errors.

✎



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PHOTO BY YEABSRA AGONFER / MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP OF MONTREAL

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FEATURE

Five pastoral callings

By Emily Summach

Saskatchewan Correspondent

A quiet, years-long journey. A voice speaking in a mosh pit full of teenagers. A love for the church. An unexpected second career. These are just some of the ways that Mennonite Church Canada pastors from across the country entered into pastoral ministry. Pastors shared with Canadian Mennonite their stories of pastoral calling and what keeps them in ministry. There are stories of joy and heartache; doubt and faithfulness; and, ultimately, of God moving in the lives of individuals to serve the church:

- **For Martin So**, the pastor of Vancouver Peace Church located in the Chinatown area of Vancouver, British Columbia, the desire to serve God in ministry began with his own conversion and baptism in 1979 while living in Vietnam.

“After I became Christian, I trained to teach Sunday School,” he says. “God gave me a chance to share with the congregation, to share the Bible, and a chance to preach in different churches. I felt that I wanted to serve God more [in pastoral ministry]. This was something in my heart, a burden. I knew it would be uncomfortable if I didn’t serve in ministry.”

That friction of both a longing and burden followed him from the year he spent in a refugee camp in Malaysia to when he came to Canada in 1989. For the next 25 years, So continued to work and save money, serving in his church as a lay leader, all while keeping this longing for ministry in his heart.

In 2014, the pastor of Vancouver Peace Church retired. The deacons of the church encouraged So to take on the pastoral ministry and, in 2015, he joined the pastoral staff.

Now, at age 65, the same patient faithfulness that brought him into pastoring anchors him there still.

“I have to be faithful and patient to help the congregation and reach out to seniors,” he says. “We have a senior program every week, and 2 to 30 seniors come every Thursday. Not all of them are Christian. I preach to them and help them to know Jesus and how to live in Jesus. Many of them are over 80 years old.

“One reason I’m in ministry is that God is calling me, so I need to be faithful and patient in this ministry. Before I retire, I want a younger person to come and carry the ministry forward. I am wanting to see this through,” he says.



Martin So, pastor of Vancouver Peace Church

altered the path of their livelihood and their young family.

The couple were serving as part of a robust team of lay leaders at Hanley Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan. When the then-pastor, Henry Peters, announced that he planned to retire in a few years, the church decided to call a new pastor from within. Several names were put



Margaret Ewen Peters and Gary Peters, pastors of Fiske and Herschel Ebenfeld Mennonite churches, Sask.

- **Gary Peters and Margaret Ewen Peters’** joint call into ministry came from within their home congregation and

forward, and the candidates spent the next six months serving, preaching and discerning together.

By the end of the six months, the Peters became lay pastors. When the couple expressed a desire for more theological training, the congregation supported them in various ways to attend what was then Canadian Mennonite Bible College, including running their cattle and grain farm for eight months each year.

“There’s pluses and minuses [to being called from within]. It’s really hard for your friends and for you to make that move to become ‘the pastor,’” says Margaret. “It’s hard on both sides—to take that authority and hard to give that authority.”

• **“I had a voice-from-God kind of moment in this mosh pit full of sweaty teenagers, saying ‘Go into ministry!’”** says Annika Krause, who has pastored for two years at the Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal (MMF) in Quebec. “It was this clear moment. I think God knew I wasn’t paying close enough attention to hear it any other way.”

Krause didn’t have ambitions for ministry, but found herself prioritizing her church volunteer work around her undergraduate classes. With discernment and encouragement from people

Gary adds: “Being called from within you know the congregation well. You know the families and the relationships. At the same time, it can colour how one responds to things. A lot of grace was extended to us.”

For the Peters, pastoral ministry remains the place of calling.

“We haven’t received any other call, any other voice saying, ‘Do this,’” says Margaret. “The other thing that has enabled us to be in ministry for so many years is working together. Gary brings presence and stability. I’m like: ‘What new things can we do!’” she says with a chuckle.

“We help each other grow and challenge one another,” adds Gary.

in her life, she pursued graduate studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind.

“What I loved about AMBS was that students there could argue until they were blue in the face, and then have potluck meals together,” she says. “There were lots of perspectives and places to debate while in community.”

Her experience at AMBS, along with her own journey through church conflict, equipped her for her role at MMF.

“I think that at MMF a significant portion of people have been hurt by the

church,” Krause says. “We’re a diverse group, and a group who has agreed to disagree well. They listen well. A lot of people coming to the church have previous church trauma. God has used conflicts that I’ve experienced in my call. It’s helped me to relate to people who are shy about church or are leery or anxious.”

And it is those same people who keep her in ministry through all the challenges of moving across the country and learning a second language.

“The people hold me here. I love this community,” she says. “It has nothing to do with me, everything to do with them. Wonderful open-minded people who are not afraid of new things, a community that welcomes creativity.

“It’s harder than I thought it would be, and amazing in ways that I would not have predicted. The trust that people put in me is such a blessing—it’s amazing how much trust I’m afforded in this role. I often pray, ‘God make me worthy of their trust,’” she says.

• **For Justin Majeau**, pastor of Morden Mennonite Church in Manitoba, the work of ministry is secondary to the work of all followers of Jesus.

“The question of how I was ‘called’ into ministry is one that I don’t really like answering,” he says. “I don’t want to take the Lord’s name in vain. What I’m most fearful of is attributing stuff to God that he didn’t do.

“Was I called? Am I called? A question like that hasn’t taken up much of my mental space. I know I’m called to love Christ and to love others; secondary is the ministry,” he says.

Majeau has been in youth and pastoral ministry for the past 15 years, and wrestles with the tension of enjoying his work and the stigma that comes with pastoring.

“Sometimes, I am embarrassed to be a pastor. It makes everything odd,” he says. “I am the black sheep in my family. I don’t even get introduced at dinner parties; I carry that embarrassment.”

“As church and society shift, paid,

(Continued on page 6)



Annika Krause, pastor of the Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal



Justin Majeau, pastor of Morden Mennonite Church, Man.

(Continued from page 5)

full-time vocational ministry might not be the wave of the future. I do find it disheartening that people feel that they don't have a 'real church' unless they have a paid pastor. But I'm a pastor because each day is new. I love waking up, learning something, meeting with someone. I love the Scriptures. Each new morning that I get is what keeps me in ministry," he says.

• "Churches should provide opportunities for people to serve in significant ways," says Bill Christieson, pastor of Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary," and give people the opportunities to lead. I'm talking about leaders versus volunteers. It's good to invite a diversity of voices from the pulpit. When people discover a passion, and the church comes around to equip them, that grows leaders."



Bill Christieson, pastor of Foothills Mennonite Church, Calgary, Alta.

It was leadership opportunities like the ones he now champions that led him into ministry. After becoming a Christian, Christieson soon began serving on the leadership team in his home congregation. His entry into pastoral ministry was, in his words, "a natural progression over the years."

midst of that, it's the right place for us to be.

"When I see that churches are being those who embody reconciliation, that's fundamental. How do we live into those things, and be that essential part of our communities? By giving life and hope in our neighbourhoods." ❧

✚ For discussion

1. Have you ever felt a sense of calling from God? How certain did you feel about it? Did you test this call with others? How important is a sense of call for pastors? Can you think of examples where you think a pastor may have misinterpreted the call from God? If a pastor is chosen by lot, does that make the call stronger or weaker?
2. What gifts or character traits are important for pastoral ministry? How important is education and pastoral training? How important is a sense of being called by God compared to having the proper credentials?
3. Gary and Margaret Ewen Peters were called to pastoral leadership from within a congregation. What are some of the advantages and some of the challenges for a pastor to serve from within their own congregation? Why do you think Mennonites have tended to move away from this model over the last 100 years?
4. "As church and society shift, paid, full-time vocational ministry might not be the wave of the future," says Justin Majeau. What do you see as the pastoral ministry of the future? Do you agree with Christieson that the church has an important role to play in providing hope to our neighbourhoods?

—By Barb Draper

See related Pastoral Vocation resources at www.commonword.ca/go/3120

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VIEWPOINT

Finding and calling a pastoral leader

Marilyn Rudy-Froese and Al Rempel

Times have changed. Few argue the accuracy of that statement as it relates to congregations seeking and calling individuals for pastoral leadership. Congregations rarely receive multiple candidates to fill an opening for a pastoral leader. Congregations need to anticipate that it could take 12 months for a search process to conclude.

This can feel discouraging. However, it can also be an opportunity for congregations to dig into the important question of what it means to call a pastor.

We have the privilege of accompanying congregations on this sacred journey. This involves sharing about the process and getting items like a job

actively seeking pastoral calls and placement. There are fewer full-time roles. The costs of moving to a new community can be prohibitive. Ministry is rewarding and it is challenging work for which not everyone is suited or gifted.

To this sample of reasons why fewer people are entering ministry, we would add the hopeful note that it can be one of the best vocations available. Those who excel in this role usually have two common attributes in our experience:

- **They have a sense of call**—a motivation—that draws them into a space of hard work, caring presence and careful leadership.
- **They were part** of a community that

is the best fit for the mission the congregation wishes to be involved in.

When the number of those available for a pastoral role becomes slim, there is more pressure on these pastoral search committees to give into the temptation to not be as selective. A focus on discernment can be a helpful relief. It encourages the search committee to invite the congregation as a whole to be engaged in prayer and inviting people to consider ministry. The stress is also shifted to the expectation that, in God's time, an individual will come forward who is called for this role. So, while times have changed, God continues to be at work in our midst, empowering congregations in calling gifted people to ministry. %

It has always been our encouragement that congregations not simply choose the best of those available for ministry, but that they identify the individual who is the best fit for the mission the congregation wishes to be involved in.

description and congregational profile together. It also provides the opportunity to talk about discernment.

While this word is often interchanged with decision-making, we stress that discernment starts with a few different assumptions. For example, God is not neutral or indifferent about our mission or our choices. It is our belief that God is self-disclosing, revealing to a congregation the way in which God is at work. Discernment is not an abandonment of good decision-making skills, but an addition of prayerful reflection and engagement of the community along the way.

There are a host of reasons why there is not a lengthy list of people who are

knows them and their gifts, and that has encouraged them to step up and into the ministry God has for them.

Working with congregations, encouraging pastoral candidates and resourcing pastors along the way are ministry tasks we are fully engaged in as regional church staff people. We do this best in partnership with congregations that know the people in their midst and can speak in to people's lives about how God is calling them to take their next steps of faith.

It has always been our encouragement that congregations not simply choose the best of those available for ministry, but that they identify the individual who



Marilyn Rudy-Froese is the leadership minister for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. She works closely with pastors and leaders, and supports them in

their calling, formation and placement as ministers and chaplains. She oversees the protocols of the regional church for credentialed leaders in ways that maximize strengths and skills for effective missional leadership.



Al Rempel, who serves as regional minister for MC Eastern Canada, walks alongside congregations, helping with pastoral searches, reviews and visioning.

He works closely with pastors and congregations at strengthening the pastor-congregation relationship.

VIEWPOINT

What is the future of Mennonite church leadership?

Michael Pahl

Like Amos, I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. Yet it is apparent to most people involved in church ministry that, to quote another non-prophet prophet, Bob Dylan: “The times, they are a-changin’.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed fragility and fault lines in our ways of being and doing church. It has accelerated changes that were happening slowly before COVID-19 came along. Congregations are left trying to figure out who they are, both literally (Who is still part of us?) and philosophically (Who is God calling us to be in this time?). Many pastors are now re-assessing their calling, or at least the way they engage in ministry.

I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. I am, however, a regional church executive minister who has spent 30 years in church ministry in a variety of settings. What do I see for the Mennonite church of the future?

- **I see mostly** smaller congregations that have grieved well the loss of their “glory days” and are committed to being the church “more with less.” I see these smaller congregations tied less to a specific building, either having sold off their large buildings or sharing their facilities with other churches, other organizations or other ministries.

- **I see these** congregations being more focused on their local community, more integrated into their neighbourhoods. I see them being more intercultural, more diverse, matching more closely the communities in which they gather and the neighborhoods they serve.

- **I see more** ecumenical engagement in our future, not just in dialogue out of a desire to increase understanding, but working together out of necessity. The future of the church will involve more

partnerships across denominations, sharing our gifts with each other, being the church together.

- **I see Mennonite** congregations and the Mennonite church finding our sustaining unity in a renewed emphasis on learning and following the way of Jesus. I see this expressed primarily through God-centred worship and Jesus-focused discipleship, sharing everyday life together, grappling honestly with difficult questions of faith and practice, and serving our surrounding communities together in practical ways.

What might all this mean for church leadership and, in particular, pastoral leadership?

- **We will see** fewer professional pastors needed for our smaller congregations. We will see churches that once hired three full-time pastors now hiring two, or hiring three part-time pastors focused on specific ministry areas. We will see a single pastor serving two or more small Mennonite churches in the same area, or perhaps a team of two or three serving a cluster of churches. Some congregations will move away from professional pastors toward lay ministry models.

- **We will see** diverse kinds of leadership that are context-specific. An elderly congregation next to a personal-care home will want a part-time pastor focused on seniors. An inner-city congregation will want a part-time lay minister who can work with community organizations to respond to homelessness. There will always be a need for the “general practitioner” pastor in many settings, but even these could see their roles shift and re-focus

as congregational and community profiles change.

All this means we will need to support leaders in diverse ministry settings, meeting context-specific needs. This means we cannot give leaders all the knowledge and skills they need up front. Rather, we need to prepare leaders—both lay people and pastors—who have the theological and practical tools to learn new skills along the way, and to adapt to new settings.

We will also need to provide greater support for non-traditional pastoral roles: Bi-vocational pastors. Second-career pastors. Interim pastors. Lay ministers.

The conventional path of a young person sensing a call to ministry from within a supportive home church, going off to university and seminary, and spending their career as a full-time pastor—that path, while still important, will be only one of many.

These are challenging times to be the church. They are challenging times to be a pastor. But in these challenges there are also opportunities for new paths of faithfulness. As we seek to follow Jesus together, may we know his promises, the promises of a true prophet: “*I will build my church,*” and “*I am with you always.*” ❧



Michael Pahl is executive minister of Mennonite Church Manitoba. He is committed to developing meaningful and sustainable ways of being the church as Mennonites in the 21st century.

/// Readers write

✉ Protest organizers accused of 'revisionist history'

Re: "The sweet solace of polarization: Part 2," Oct. 17, page 20.

While the protest organizers may have believed they did a "good job of respecting the rights of others," and that "honking was controlled," I'm afraid that's revisionist history. The protest included honking at all hours and protesters setting off fireworks at night for about a week-and-a-half, until a large counter-protest was organized where local residents expressed their experience of feeling unsafe in their own neighbourhood.

People live close to the protest site, including folks who had just moved into subsidized housing in a new building that I worked on. It's only after that protest, and the escalating confrontations with locals, that the honking was restricted.

I don't know what the path forward is here, but pretending this was all done in a polite, civil and thoughtful way probably isn't it. Moving forward to "love" without apologies denies the very real work of repair that's required—and incomplete.

MATTHEW FROESE (ONLINE COMMENT)

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Toporchak—Eliza Rose (b. Sept. 27, 2022), to Kyle and Vicky Toporchak, North Star Mennonite, Drake, Sask.

Baptisms

Alexiane Friesen, Alexander Maynard, Benjamin Maynard, Thomas Maynard, Austin Schlorff, Reann Thiessen—Arnaud Mennonite, Man., May 29, 2022

Weddings

Eastwood/Poetker—Whitney Eastwood and Lucas Poetker, Breslau Mennonite, Ont., Sept. 2, 2022.

Deaths

Baerg—Alice (Riediger), 96 (b. Dec. 2, 1925; d. Sept. 24, 2022), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Bock—Henry, 91 (b. Feb. 19, 1931; d. Sept. 20, 2022), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Bullock—John, 68 (b. Sept. 20, 1954; d. Oct. 1, 2022), Breslau Mennonite, Ont.

Enns—Beverly (Honey), 84 (b. May 30, 1938; d. Sept. 10, 2022), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Enns—Erna (Fast), 92 (b. July 18, 1930; d. Oct. 6, 2022), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Gerber—Donald, 92 (b. June 7, 1930; d. Sept. 7, 2022), Poole Mennonite, Ont.

Martens—Kornelius Julius, 93 (b. Nov. 26, 1928; d. Aug. 13, 2022), Fiske Mennonite, Sask.

Schmidt—Albert, 85 (b. Aug. 14, 1937; d. Sept. 28, 2022), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Schroeder—Louise Anne, 82 (b. Sept. 3, 1940; d. Sept. 27, 2022) Avon Mennonite, Stratford, Ont.

/// Paid obituary

Carl James Rudy



Carl James Rudy, 94, of Manheim, Pennsylvania, passed away at home, on Tuesday, October 4, 2022. Born in Breslau, Ontario, Canada, he was the son of the late Abner and Edith Snyder Rudy. He was the loving husband of Ruth Mohler Rudy and they celebrated their 67th wedding anniversary this past July. He graduated from Eastern Mennonite College, Goshen Biblical Seminary and William S. Hall Psychiatric Institute. A retired pastor, Carl served at a church in Ontario, Canada, South Bend, Ind., Ft. Wayne, Ind., and Smithville, Ohio. He then served as chaplain at the former Mennonite Hospital in La Junta, CO. Carl was a member of Blossom Hill Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pa, American Protestant Chaplain's Association, moderator for Rocky Mountain Mennonite Conference, secretary of the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference and a member of the Lancaster County Woodworkers Association. He enjoyed woodworking and making furniture. Carl donated his furniture to relief sales, Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp and made kitchen cabinets for Navajo Mennonite Church, Farmington, N.M. Carl was a «seagoing cowboy» tending donkeys on a boat sent to repopulate animals in Europe after WWII. He was also instrumental in starting the hospice program in the Arkansas Valley in eastern Colorado. Surviving in addition to his wife is a daughter, Evelyn J., wife of Tracy Edgers of Kirkland, Wash.; two sons, Jonathan E., husband of Carolyn Peachey Rudy of Manheim, Dr. Paul D. Rudy of Perry, Kan.; four grandchildren, Solomon and David Rudy, Spencer and Axel Edgers; two great grandchildren, Sylvie Rose Rudy and Micah Jonathan Rudy; and seven siblings, Doreen Good, Karen Bergey, Barbara Stager, John, Willis, Elvin and Harold Rudy, all of Ontario, Canada. He was preceded in death by two siblings, Betty Buschert and Glen Rudy. Funeral Services will be announced at a later date. In lieu of flowers, those desiring may send contributions in Carl's memory to Hospice & Community Care, P.O. Box 4125, Lancaster, PA 17604-4125. To send the family online condolences, please visit: www.BuchFuneral.com.

FROM OUR LEADERS

Eco-theology: On Earth as it is in Heaven

Wendy Janzen

Our shared home, planet Earth, is a miracle. I've known this intuitively since I was a child growing up under the expansive skies of the Saskatchewan prairies. Stunning sunsets, stars, aurora borealis, long winter nights and long summer days with brilliantly clear skies, thunderstorms rolling in from a distance. All of this was a source of awe and a confirmation of the Psalmist's words: *"The heavens are telling the glory of God"* (Psalm 19:1).

Similarly, the soil was alive and fertile, providing us with both garden produce and field crops. The broad North and South Saskatchewan rivers defined the landscape and were a place of retreat for canoeing, fishing, swimming and wading. Campfires sparked our imaginations as stories and s'mores were shared in their warmth and light.

All the elements—air, earth, water and fire—nourished and shaped me and my life. I experienced these basic building blocks of life as miracles, as windows into God's immanent presence and provision, and often reminders that I'm not in control! As an adult, my love for, and connection with, creation has deepened, and it has taught me many

lessons about faith, life, and God's immanent presence and activity in the world.

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada has a new Identity Statement that grew out of our Creative Imagination process. It names three common purposes, the third of which is to "Embody God's reconciling ministry for all creation." For long enough now, we have read Scripture as if God only cared about us as humans. It is time to consider how God's shalom extends to all creation, and to seek God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

We live in a time of multiple environmental crises. As North Americans, many of us have extracted, exploited, consumed and discarded without much real thought about the consequences to the land, water and air, let alone our plant and animal neighbours in the community of creation. We are being called as people of faith to listen to the cries of the Earth and to respond accordingly.

Eco-theology, eco-ministry, eco-mission—these are all terms that are relatively new, although threads can be traced throughout Christian history. The "eco" prefix comes from the Greek

work *oikos*, meaning household, and reflects an ecological sense that we are all interconnected, we all share the same home. They are all ways people of faith are responding to the brokenness and injustices in our world. They are a commitment to shalom for all creation, not only for humans.

I am encouraged by examples of eco-ministry already happening across MC Eastern Canada: exploring outdoor worship, learning to know about their watershed and the fish in their rivers, studying together about the climate crisis, planting pollinator gardens, writing letters, installing solar panels or other eco-friendly retrofits, and more. Churches are feeling compelled by the love of Christ, firstborn of all creation, to respond to the multiple ecological crises of our day with love in action. ❧



Wendy Janzen is MC Eastern Canada's eco-minister and pastor of Burning Bush Forest Church in Kitchener, Ont. Originally published in the Fall 2022 issue of Sprout.

A moment from yesterday



David K. Jantzi came from an Old Order Amish family. He felt obligated to become a conscientious objector during the Second World War because "the church required it." In his second year of alternative service, his personal attitude changed, as he realized that "non-resistance is much deeper than not going to war." A cabinet maker by vocation, he became an ordained Amish Mennonite minister in Ontario in 1958. Jantzi connected his work as a pastor to his service experience, regretting that "the church didn't give us, as young people, a deeper, spiritual understanding of why we were doing this, and I hope as a minister that I'm able to be true" to the gospel of peace.

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing
Photo: Conrad Grebel University College/
Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

VOICES AND STORIES

'There's enough for all'

Anneli Loepp Thiessen

“Jesus had a lot to say about money, but the songs we sing in worship rarely do.” These words from the album description of Bryan Moyer Suderman’s 2007 album, *My Money Talks*, provide a snapshot into the goal of the album: to intentionally provide songs for churches that help them talk about money. The songs on the album are written in a textually and musically accessible manner, providing musically accessible material with concepts that are stimulating for both children and adults.

Voices Together (VT) features one of the songs from *My Money Talks*: “There’s Enough For All.” The lyrics sing: “There’s enough for all, if we would learn to share it. There’s enough for all if we would learn to see. There’s enough for all. Let’s bring our loaves and fishes, and offer them to Jesus. There’s more than enough for you and me.”

The song is found in the “Giving” section of *VT*, along with 14 other songs. “There’s Enough For All” is a short song, written in unison over four lines. It can easily be repeated several times, making it a perfect fit to sing as the offering is being collected or brought forward during a church service. The Accompaniment Edition of

VT also features a complimentary accompaniment, written by Charlene Gingerich.

Moyer Suderman currently works as an outreach worker at the Working Centre in Kitchener, Ont., a job he took on after spending almost two decades working and touring as a singer/songwriter and Bible teacher. On his compositional process for “There’s Enough For All,” he says: “This is a song I wrote while walking, if I remember correctly. It’s got a walking sort of lilt or gait to it, so it’s easy to sing and learn with some movement, with hand-clapping and/or percussion, and can be taught in a call-and-response ‘repeat after me’ phrase-by-phrase way.”

The accessible language and tune mean that this song could effectively be taught to congregations without even opening the hymnal. Song leaders can line out the melody and lyrics several times, and the congregation should be able to join in easily.

Moyer Suderman recalls two different sources of inspiration for writing the piece. First, it was written to address the theme of “Enough for All” chosen for Mennonite Church Canada’s gathering in Winkler, Man., in 2004. The scripture for the event was John 6, the story of the

feeding of the 5,000. Moyer Suderman rose to the task of writing an accessible song that could speak to that story and be used at the event.

He also recalls an article by Walter Brueggemann as being particularly inspirational for the song. The article, called “The truth of abundance: Relearning *dayenu*,” offers a way of challenging the “myth of scarcity” with a “lyric of abundance” that believes that there is enough for everyone. Moyer Suderman’s song clearly captures this celebration of abundance.

On his goals for the song, Moyer Suderman says: “I hope this song can continue to help congregations articulate and practise the countercultural concept of ‘enough,’ to continue to be encouraged to practise generosity, and to make ourselves available for God’s purposes in the world.”

As many Mennonite communities face a season of tight budgets and even closed churches, the message of “enough” continues to be potent. “There’s enough for all, if we would learn to see.” ❧



Anneli Loepp Thiessen is a PhD candidate in interdisciplinary music research at the University of Ottawa. She is co-director of the Anabaptist Worship Network and was a committee member for Voices Together.

Et cetera

Scholarships offered for faith-based peacebuilding program

Eastern Mennonite Seminary (EMS) and the African American Mennonite Association (AAMA) have teamed up to provide scholarships for Black ministry leaders interested in completing EMS’s graduate certificate in faith-based peacebuilding, which launched this fall. This certification program is designed for faith community leaders pursuing effective and faith-informed social engagement in the complex justice issues of their communities. The EMS-AAMA scholarship aims to facilitate inclusive leadership in Mennonite Church U.S.A.’s ministry and peacebuilding, and covers up to 100 percent of the program’s tuition costs.

Source: Mennonite Church U.S.A.



LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

The end is probably nigh, but I'm optimistic

Troy Watson

This summer, I met a wildlife conservationist named Leo. His life passion began in California as a young adult, when he joined the California Condor Recovery Program. In 1987, there were only 27 California condors left in the world. Today, thanks to the efforts of people like Leo, there are more than 500 California condors. It's not exactly a stunning victory, I suppose, but things are moving in the right direction.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature estimates there are more than 41,000 species under threat of extinction today. The word "estimate" is key. You might be surprised to hear scientists have no idea how many species currently exist on Earth. Estimates range from 2 million to 100 million. Scientists also estimate we are losing between 200 to 50,000 species every year. These numbers are based on mathematical calculations, though, not actual observation. A little over 900 species have actually been identified as going extinct over the past 500 years.

Extinction is by no means a modern phenomenon. Earth has seen five major extinction episodes in its history. Many scientists believe we are now in a sixth mass extinction, and human beings are partially to blame. It is estimated humans are responsible for making the current extinction rates 1,000 to 10,000 times higher than the "natural" extinction rate. As far as stewardship of creation is concerned, we are failing miserably. It's far beyond negligence at this point.

Yet extinction is part of reality on Planet Earth, with or without humanity's destructive impact. It is estimated that between 4 billion and 30 billion

species of organisms have existed since life began on Earth, and 99.9 percent of them are now extinct. That is a staggering statistic to contemplate. It means extinction is an inherent part of the evolutionary process. Extinction is the inevitable future of virtually all species, including homo sapiens.

It's a strange feeling to contemplate human beings as an endangered or extinct species. Yet there are many days I struggle to understand how we haven't blown ourselves into oblivion already. It really seems like it's only a matter of time.

Are you feeling optimistic yet?

I am, and here's why.

Throughout history, certain human beings have consistently risen to the occasion, when faced with cataclysmic crises, usually at great cost to themselves, just as Jesus modelled and taught us.

For example, on Sept. 26, 1983, a communist Russian officer named Stanislav Petrov was on duty, operating the Soviet Union's missile-attack warning system, which began displaying, in bold red letters, the word "Launch." The computer screen in front of him indicated an American inter-continental missile was headed towards the Soviet Union. At first, it was just one missile, but over the next few minutes, the number increased. There were now five American missiles and counting headed towards Russia, his homeland.

Petrov was forced to make a quick decision. Would he report the incoming American strike, or not? If he did, the Soviet nuclear doctrine was clear: full nuclear retaliation. There would be no pause to double-check the warning system. The response would be swift

and comprehensive.

Reporting this was not only his duty, it would have made sense, considering this was at the height of the Cold War. The Reagan administration, in power in the United States at the time, had a more antagonistic posture toward the Soviets than all the presidential administrations before it.

But Stanislav Petrov said he had a funny feeling in his gut. He made a bold decision. He did not report the incoming strike. He concluded it was a false alarm, and he turned out to be right. The system mistook the sun's reflection off the clouds for a missile. As a result, he prevented a nuclear war between the United States and Russia, and the deaths of more than two billion people (including deaths caused by radiation and starvation).

Petrov was reprimanded for disobeying orders and was, in his words, "made a scapegoat." He later suffered a mental breakdown. The cost for saving the world is often high.

Reflecting on his story, I can't help but wonder, what cost am I willing to pay to help save the world? I'm also thankful there are many people like Petrov and Leo in the world. Far more than we think. And I'm grateful for the mysterious ways the Spirit moves in our world, to protect us from ourselves. ❧



*Troy Watson
(troy@avonchurch.ca) is
paradoxically cynical and
optimistic.*

PERSONAL REFLECTION

An on-ramp to welcome

Bonita Sawatzky

In a recent issue of *Canadian Mennonite*, there was a story about a small community church that had built a ramp, thereby “breaking down barriers” for people with disabilities related to mobility.

This reminded me of when I had just finished my PhD in 1998, when I was heading to the Glenrose Hospital for a month-long post-doctoral research position. My dad drove out with me to Alberta, and we decided to go to church on the Sunday before he flew home. He suggested a Mennonite church, and so we went.

Initially, we were greeted outside by excited people. They immediately saw that I was a wheelchair user, using their newly installed wheelchair ramp! Once inside, a greeter formally welcomed me. I was ushered to the very back of the church where I could sit, away from the pews and congregation.

My dad, well known in Mennonite circles, was surrounded by people who welcomed him, but no one came to speak to me. I tried to make eye contact, but no one would even look at me. I felt invisible.

I was left wondering, what did the installation of the wheelchair ramp actually mean to this church? Sure, now wheelchair users could come inside the building, but what then?

Instead of treating me like any other visitor, they seemed to focus only on my chair, and not know how to interact with me as a fellow Christ-follower. Even though in our society people of all shapes and sizes, colours and genders are all around us, once they enter into the church space it can become quite different. Why is this?

Maybe it is because we think of it as “our” space and “our” church family. Why do we get uncomfortable when someone who seems different from us enters our space? For many of us it is



PHOTO COURTESY OF BONITA SAWATZKY

Bonita Sawatzky is an associate professor of biomechanics with the University of British Columbia's Department of Orthopaedics; and the department's director for equity, diversity and inclusion. She is an active member of Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond, B.C.

because we have our own assumptions about a person before we even get to know the person. Our feeling of safety seems threatened somehow.

Will this person fit into our way of doing things? Are we going to be expected to accommodate this person's needs, whatever they are? Will this person's presence change us and the way we like to do things?

Imagine being invited to a space for worship with others, but allotted to only be in a specific space within the sanctuary, or only allowed to participate in a certain manner. Usually, the church has pews and either you sit on the end in the aisle or at the back, making you feel less welcomed.

Or the congregational space may be accessible, but there are stairs up to a raised part at the front, where leaders speak, limiting the ability for leadership of the service. The physical barriers can

make difficult mental barriers too.

Or perhaps you have a cognitive disability. Maybe you have a funny laugh or a tick, or you sing super loud, making others uncomfortable. You may be encouraged to sit in the nursery or in the back.

What if you have strong body odour because you are homeless, so a shower is challenging. Will anyone want to shake hands with you?

What if you come with a same-sex partner? Will you be greeted as openly as my dad, or will people also avoid looking you in the eye?

This unwillingness to get to know those who seem different can build barriers higher than any set of stairs and longer than any ramp. Being constantly sidelined is emotionally

draining, leading people to leave the church.

My church accepts me, and I'm blessed to be there, yet it could be better and be more welcoming to more different kinds of people.

How do we reach out to those who can't conform to our notions of what our brothers and sisters should be like? Why is conformity even a thing?

Christ calls us to transform. This means transforming how we see, think and feel about the world that God has made. We are the ones to transform, renewing our minds to the likeness of Christ. Christ sought out those who were marginalized, unloved, cast out from our society. Therefore, our church spaces should be spaces where people from all walks of life can not only enter, whether by stairs or by a ramp, but also feel loved, accepted and embraced. ☯

PERSONAL REFLECTION

The power of resilience

Andi O. Santoso

“The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him” (Jeremiah 18:4).

This theme has been discussed a lot recently, especially since the pandemic, while some of us may be struggling with health concerns, loss of hope, and so on. What exactly is resilience?

During my training with Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute in 2018, I met a Palestinian Christian woman who shared about her life within a war zone. My biggest question is how can they have such a resilient, strong character and endurance in the midst of their chaotic and horrific place to live? How has she and her family managed to live her entire existence in the middle of persecution, hostility and even bomb explosions? She revealed that one of her closest friends was killed in a bombing. I’m not sure how she manages to survive in such a setting.

“Resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity, adapt, move on and, in certain cases, even flourish,” writes Eilene Zimmerman in her 2020 *New York Times*’ article, “What makes some people more resilient than others?” Genetics, personal history, environment and situational context all play a role in an individual’s resilience.

I believe that resilience may be built into individuals and societies via crisis, challenges, calamities, tragedies, hardships and suffering, where they can make peace with the situation and adjust to uncertainty. This is the strength of internal resilience.

Viktor E. Frankl, in his legendary 1959 book about his time in a concentration camp, *Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, writes, “[O]ne could make a victory of those experiences, turning life into an inner triumph, or one could ignore the challenge and simply vegetate, as did a majority of the prisoners.” This is a

powerful thought borne out by real experience about the ability to achieve resilience amid adversity.

During my psychosocial and trauma healing class at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., I learned about the art of *kintsugi*, a wonderful skill of restoring shattered objects by lacquering the cracks and meticulously dusting them with gold powder. The golden flaws, according to Japanese tradition, make the pieces even more precious.

It’s lovely to think of this technique as a metaphor for our life, to imagine our damaged, challenging, broken or painful aspects radiating light, gold and beauty.

Kintsugi teaches us that broken parts of our bodies make us stronger and better than we were before. When we think we’re broken, we can pick up the pieces, put them back together and learn to appreciate the cracks, writes Candice Kumai in her online article, “Honor your imperfections with the Japanese art of ‘Kintsugi.’”

In the Old Testament, God the Jehovah—also known as the potter’s hand—makes Israel into a new vessel (Jeremiah 18:4). I like the word “reworked” here. I believe this is a process of becoming a new creation, a new person, that only God and us can make happen.

It is a journey of our encounter with God and, at the same time, our practice of self-awareness, self-discovery, self-healing or self-transformation, to be a new vessel in the hand of the Creator for God’s purpose and glory.



MOTOKI TONN PHOTO / UNSPLASH

Kintsugi is a wonderful skill of restoring shattered objects by lacquering the cracks and meticulously dusting them with gold powder.

On Peace Sunday, as we remembered many hardships, wounds, traumas, challenges, suffering or pain in whatever season we are in, with God’s help and loving hands, we can be reworked as a new person and a new community of God.

Are we willing to embrace our brokenness, vulnerability and scars to be transformed into a more resilient community of God so that we might empower those around us?

This is the power of resilience: working with God to co-create a newness in ourselves; to be more prolific, alive; to be a new human being; and to be a new people of God in this changing world. Let’s make peace with our broken pieces! ☸

Andi O. Santoso is a member of Mennonite World Conference’s Mission Commission. He is an ordained minister in the GKMI Mennonite Church in Indonesia, currently studying at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.

MY 10 YEARS AS SENIOR WRITER

One decade, two deaths and a wealth of affirmation

Will Braun
Senior Writer

On my first day as senior writer for *Canadian Mennonite*, one of the two most important elders in my life died. Gene Herr, along with his wife Mary, created the Hermitage, a spiritual retreat centre in Michigan, which served as a spiritual home for myself and many others. Gene died on Jan. 1, 2012.

Then, this past summer, a day before the memorial service for Menno Wiebe, the other key elder in my life, I was offered *CM's* executive-editor position, leading to the end of my time as senior writer. (Wiebe died in 2021, but the post-COVID-19 memorial was held on Aug. 27, 2022.)

Thus my decade as senior writer, which ends with this and another article in this issue, was bookended by moments of loss as well as gratitude for two remarkable lives. Such are the cycles and rhythms. Such is the gift.

Allow me to share vignettes of these elders.

First, I acknowledge Mary Herr and Lydia Wiebe, their surviving wives. While I had more interaction with Gene and Menno, their wives are inseparable from them, and certainly no less gifted or wonderful.

A shepherd of shepherds

Gene Herr was a true pastor, a shepherd after God's heart. He guided and accompanied others, holding various ministerial roles and eventually creating the Hermitage—a barn remodelled into a guest house on 25 largely wooded hectares—where he and Mary welcomed people into silence, prayer, rest, healing and surrender to God.

Gene had a holy restlessness and that drew him ultimately to the ancient



tradition of contemplative spirituality. "I had tried like crazy to be a good Mennonite pastor in the current model of Anabaptist ministry of the day—I took every class, read every book," he wrote in 2010. "But the enduring hunger for a more contemplative ministry" continued to beckon.

He spent much time in silence and prayer. He steeped himself in Scripture and the writings of mystics past and present.

At his funeral, Father Eric Haarer, a Catholic monk who was raised Mennonite, spoke of the John 15 passage Gene had chosen: "*Abide in me as I abide in you.*" Haarer spoke about "the search for the place of belonging, for home."

Gene had often talked about "struggle with call"—the long, twisted, often difficult journey of finding one's place.

And then, once you arrive, a deeper journey awaits. Near the end of Gene's life, Haarer suggested that Gene's life had prepared him for his "final homecoming." Gene said: "I think I'm ready."

He was ready, Haarer said, because: "Gene made his home in Christ, and Christ made his home in him. We learn to love the things of heaven by loving the things of earth. And Gene was a lover."

Incisive prophet

Menno Wiebe's journey was different and similar. As the long-time director of Indigenous programming with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Menno thought intensely about the mission, character and trajectory of the church. In 1996, he presented a paper to a gathering of provincial MCC directors in Calgary. His presentation was thorough, clear



and direct: "Always religion is in danger of becoming an ideological device for blessing the status quo. Because if divine assent for oppressing the poor is obtained, what greater assent is needed? . . .

"God's people are not to be cocooned in their own sustenance. . . .

"If we can accept the history of Mennonite migration to this country as God-willed, then our coming also presents the opportunity to treat our neighbours with justice. Otherwise, the church would only be a mechanism used to give quasi-divine assent for the national mistreatment of its First Peoples. . . .

"Do Mennonites have what it takes to hear and respond to the plight of the unjustly treated?"

Intimate faith

The Gospel reading at Menno's funeral—like Gene's—was from John 15, although with an emphasis on Jesus' tender declaration: "*I have called you friends.*"

Along with the same concluding Gospel reading, Gene and Menno shared key traits. They were both uncommonly present to others, with little to prove themselves. They were both highly entertaining characters. They both overflowed with affirmation for others. And they both lived out of the depths of an intimate faith.

Having found a place of belonging, of transcendent friendship, of holy home, they could then accompany others on their own journeys toward new journeys. Such are the cycles and rhythms. Such is the gift.

At transitional points in life, the enduring call and undying affirmation of saints who have gone ahead is a particular grace.

Thanks be to God. ❧

CM online event asks ‘Why are you a Mennonite?’

Canadian Mennonite

“Why are you a Mennonite?” That question is the basis of *Canadian Mennonite’s* next online event.

Hosted by Aaron Epp, *CM’s* online media manager, the event will take place on Zoom on Nov. 16 at 8 p.m. EST. Register to attend at canadianmennonite.org/events.

Justin Sun, Moses Falco and Kim Penner will join Epp on Nov. 16. We asked them to introduce themselves and pose a question they want to explore during the discussion.

Justin Sun

How I connect with Mennonites can be framed three ways: personally, communally and vocationally. I grew up unfamiliar with the tradition, but I encountered Mennonites in college, where I lived among and learned from Mennonite professors, pastors and friends. I began to think through, wonder about, and adopt the Anabaptist story and theology as my own, as I was educated and brought into the fold of the historic tradition.

From there, I began to dive into Mennonite networks and stepped into roles at local churches. I committed myself to learning and serving in them, meeting great folks along the way—the communal aspect. I learned that connecting with Mennonites is as much about grounding myself with a local expression of its community as it is about history and theology.

Vocationally, I serve as a pastor in two Mennonite Church B.C. congregations, where I am figuring out what it means to be a minister within the institutional Mennonite church.

Being a Mennonite is important to me because I believe it is a faithful, relevant and powerful expression of Christianity grounded in the person and work of Jesus. It grounds me in a historic



tradition that continues to speak today and carries with it principles that can cross denominations and traditions.

My question is: **“In a time where ‘Mennonite’ is a word that can be defined and claimed broadly, what unites us, what divides us, and why?”**

Moses Falco

I am one of the pastors of Sterling Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg. I am so grateful to the Mennonite church for inviting me to find meaningful community on the journey of discipleship. I am proud that my family can call the Mennonite church its spiritual home. But it has not always been this way.

When I first married Jessica, I left my Baptist upbringing to join the Mennonite church, where she grew up. This was right around the time Mennonite Church Canada was going through the Being a Faithful Church process. My first year in the Mennonite world was filled with confusion and frustration.

I didn’t understand why we were wasting so much time talking when our leaders could just tell us what to believe. The graciousness of the Mennonite church allowed me to discover what community discernment was really about. It was in the Mennonite church that the centrality of Jesus and the importance of peace came alive. I eventually resonated so much with Mennonite theology that I decided to become a member.

I am part of the Mennonite church because I want to be, and because this is the community where I want to live out my faith. However, as a “non-heritage” Mennonite living in Canada, I still feel like we have a long way to go in order to break the bonds of Mennonite cultural identity.

My questions are: **“How can we move forward in a way that celebrates the diverse landscape of Mennonite identity?”** and **“How can we share the**



news that ‘Mennonite’ is not something you are born as, but something you become?”

Kim Penner

I grew up entrenched in the joys and challenges of congregational life. My dad was a Mennonite pastor, as were my maternal grandparents. I claimed and celebrated my faith and roots in a peace church.

Even so, I saw deep fractures in the church—evidence of unequal relationships of power, individual and systemic—that went unacknowledged. I studied some of these dynamics in my PhD thesis on “Erotic peacemaking” to articulate a life-giving ethics of sexuality and embodiment.

Today, I connect to the Mennonite church as a full-time pastor of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont., and as an academic writing and teaching on power and sexuality. More than the church, God the Creator—the fullness of love and belonging, the liberator from oppression, the God of justice and peace in all relationships—is important to me. Wherever that God is reflected, ideally in the Mennonite church, but not exclusively, I find hope and offer thanksgiving.

When I teach ethics, I tell students that we will look at a variety of moral and theological arguments, but we will never debate a person’s humanity. Yet, in MC Canada we have left the humanity of LGBTQ+ persons as something we are open to letting each church decide for themselves. We are not an affirming nationwide church.

My question is: **“If being ‘Mennonite’ does not include a shared interpretation of the Gospel as Good News for all peoples, including liberation from all relationships of unequal power, like white supremacist capitalist cis-hetero-patriarchy, then I wonder, ‘What’s in a name?’”** ✎



COVER STORY

Flourishing with creation

By Annika Krause

Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal
MONTREAL

Earlier this fall, members of the Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal had the chance to escape the bustle of the city and submerge ourselves in nature. For the first time in three years, we were able to do an in-person retreat, and we were blessed to have as our speaker Wendy Janzen, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's eco-minister.

When I initially asked her in January if she would be a guest speaker on a Sunday morning, she told me that she had so many supportive churches inviting her to speak that her next availability was in September. So, with fingers crossed and silent prayers sent up, I thought I would ask her to be our retreat speaker instead. It worked.

Janzen spoke on reading the Bible with an ecological lens and thinking about our place in creation. It was evident, both through her words and the passion with which she spoke them, that she believes deeply in God's desire for the natural world to flourish.

She spoke to us about "the book of creation," the idea that nature reveals many things about God that we cannot see if we only worship indoors or if we have an anthropocentric (or egocentric) view of creation.

The natural world worships God with us, and points us towards the Creator, she said. Nature is holy. It is God's throne. It talks to us about symbiosis and shalom.

During times for reflection, she invited us to open our eyes, ears and hearts to what the land around Parkside Ranch in Magog, Que., had to reveal to us, and it wasn't silent.

In the two speaking sessions and the Sunday morning service, Janzen seamlessly wove together scholarly theology, poetry, personal stories and, of course, Scripture. She showed how the pursuit of faithful living involves being considerate of the natural world around us.

Turning to our understanding of Scripture, Janzen encouraged us to not just cherry-pick the "green passages" from the Bible when thinking about biblical environmentalism, but rather to be aware that "the meta-narrative of the Bible assumes that humans live in mutuality with the natural world."

Jesus frequently used the natural world in his parables. Biblical poetry is lush with greenery. We have many examples of how nature and faithful living intertwine. And, as people of the book, Janzen encouraged us to do what we can to help God's world flourish. ❧



PHOTO BY YEABSRA AGONFER

A group shot of Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal congregants at their fall retreat.

News brief

Saskatchewan churches gather for joint worship service outdoors

Five Mennonite Church Saskatchewan congregations — Warman Mennonite, Osler Mennonite, Langham Mennonite, Aberdeen Mennonite, and the Backyard Church in Saskatoon — joined



A men's choir, which was formed for the worship gathering, sings 'The Church in the Wildwood.'

together on Aug. 28 for a joint worship service outdoors. More than 75 people from the five congregations attended the gathering, which was followed by a roll kuchen and watermelon lunch. The planning committee hopes to make the service an annual summer event.

—STORY AND PHOTO BY EMILY SUMMACH

CM event explores concrete steps for reconciliation

Story and Screen Shot by Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

This September, Canada marked its second annual National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Throughout the month, people talked around dinner tables, in the media and at workplace meetings, about Indigenous-Settler relations and the country's history of residential schools.

Canadian Mennonite joined the conversation by hosting the second event in its new series of online panel discussions. On Oct. 5, *CM* online media manager Aaron Epp hosted the conversation on Zoom, which featured three guests sharing what concrete steps they are taking to further reconciliation.

Doyle Wiebe is a fourth-generation farmer in Langham, Sask., who shares his land with Indigenous Peoples through the Treaty Land Sharing Network. The network's website directory lists privately owned land in Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 that Indigenous Peoples are invited to access safely to practise their way of life—gathering plants and medicines, hunting, holding ceremonies and other uses. The sign on Wiebe's land says, "Treaty Land Sharing Network: Indigenous people welcome."

Allegra Friesen Epp recently completed an internship with Mennonite Church Canada's Indigenous-Settler Relations office and Community Peacemaker Teams' Turtle Island Solidarity Network, during which she accompanied Indigenous land defenders on Wet'suwet'en territory, where Coastal GasLink is laying a pipeline in British Columbia. She also co-chairs the Mennonite Coalition for Indigenous Solidarity and organizes events with Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition, a grassroots climate-justice and Indigenous-sovereignty group.

Niigaan Sinclair is a professor and head of the University of Manitoba's



Pictured clockwise from top right: host Aaron Epp and panellists Allegra Friesen Epp, Doyle Wiebe and Niigaan Sinclair.

Department of Indigenous Studies. He is an acclaimed Anishinaabe writer, editor and speaker, and is a columnist at the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Sinclair grew up in Selkirk, Man., which was an Indigenous community before the government forced his family off the land in 1907 at gunpoint. There is still no memorial in the city marking that history.

Panellists shared their experiences, challenges and advice, and fielded questions from the audience. Wiebe's first personal interaction with an Indigenous person was with his classmate in university. Since then, as his learning and connections have grown, he has witnessed countless instances of discrimination. There is so much that must be done for reconciliation going forward, Wiebe said, noting the sign on his property isn't at all the end of what he has to do.

Wiebe brought forward the questions: "How can we turn around the perception that non-Indigenous folks will lose something if we recognize what was stolen

from Indigenous folks?" and "How do we realize that we can all gain something by healing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers?"

Friesen Epp tied in her experience spending time with Indigenous land defenders in Wet'suwet'en territory. As drilling was taking place under their sacred river, they were defending the water, not only for their own safety, but also for the well-being of all the people living in that area and the generations to come. "I think we need to remember that our well-being is so entangled with one another," she said.

In the same way, everyone is entwined in the same system of harm—the colonial structure of Canada.

"Taking action means that it's not just enough to wear an orange shirt, but that it is within your own context to change the narrative of Canadian superiority and Indigenous inferiority, to bring it into a system of partnership," Sinclair said. The system still communicates that Indigenous people don't matter, he said—in street

‘How can we turn around the perception that non-Indigenous folks will lose something if we recognize what was stolen peoples and settlers?’ (Doyle Wiebe)

names, statues and erased maps, in the tax dollars Canadians spend every day.

“It’s not your fault, but it is your inheritance,” he said to the people gathered.

Christianity has never lived up to its own values of peace and love, Sinclair said, adding that events like this one show him that it still can. He sees an opportunity for Mennonites to take action and make change within their own people, saying, “You cannot stay idle, you cannot be paralyzed, you cannot be stuck.”

“I am a settler on Turtle Island and the work of reconciliation, decolonization and solidarity is my responsibility,” Friesen Epp said. “It is also my calling, as a Christian, to challenge systems of oppression and to actively work for peace.”

She said Mennonites have done a great job joining book studies and attending webinars, but they need to take more risks and act on the front lines. She encouraged people on the webinar to look up what is happening in their regions and join initiatives. As Indigenous-Settler relations work within the Mennonite church in Canada shifts from the nationwide level to the regional, it is more important than ever that people get involved, she said.

CM’s online discussion series explores current events that are impacting the church and wider world. It launched on May 25 with its first conversation, which examined how Mennonites in Canada can best respond to the climate crisis. ❧

The next dialogue is scheduled for Nov. 16 and will pose the question, “Why are you a Mennonite?” to panellists Justin Sun, Moses Falco and Kim Penner. See more on page 16.

News brief

Book explores 50 years of peace and reconciliation work

WINNIPEG—Edith and Neill von Gunten (pictured right) launched their new book, *Walking Together: Intercultural Stories of Love and Acceptance*, on Sept. 29. More than 50 people gathered at Canadian Mennonite University’s Marpeck Commons for the event, hosted by CommonWord Bookstore and Resource Centre, with many more joining the live-stream online. “[It] was a very humbling evening for us and made us realize again how grateful we are that Mennonite Church Canada and its predecessors took a real chance hiring such a young couple back in the late 1960s to spend time in Indigenous communities along Lake Winnipeg,” the von Guntens said. *Walking Together* is a collection of stories from almost 50 years of peace and reconciliation work the couple did in Chicago, Manitoba, and beyond. The book’s chapters are organized according to the seven Ojibwe “Way of Life” teachings: love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility and truth. “We want what we experienced and learned to help others on their own journey of peacemaking and reconciliation,” the couple said. “We know there can be no reconciliation without truth, so the questions in the study guide in the back of the book are meant to help readers reflect honestly on their journey and how to move forward in a good way.” The book launch also included a Q&A session and sharing from elders Stan McKay of Fisher River Cree Nation, and Norman Meade of Winnipeg and Manigotagan, Man.

— BY NICOLIE KLASSEN-WIEBE



News brief

AMBS reports growth in student numbers

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind., is reporting a growth in student numbers this fall, with total enrolment increasing from 145 students in 2021 to 157 this year. Of these 157 students, 16 are participants in the undergraduate level nondegree Journey Missional Leadership Development Program. The other 141 students constitute the largest graduate student body AMBS has enrolled in 12 years. Scott Janzen, AMBS’s assistant dean, registrar and director of retention, says students from outside the United States and Canada are driving AMBS’s enrolment growth. The number of international students attending the seminary increased from 54 students in 2021, to a record-breaking 74 in 2022, now accounting for 54 percent of the student body. “These are exciting times,” Janzen says. “Enrolment continues to climb as a result of our efforts to engage Anabaptists and other Christian groups globally in theological education. AMBS is being sought out as a reliable resource for educating leaders in places all around the world.”

—ANABAPTIST MENNONITE BIBLICAL SEMINARY



PHOTO BY PETER RINGENBERG

New graduate students who participated in the campus version of AMBS’s orientation course in August.

'Alive in Christ'

B.C. women enjoy retreat after pandemic hiatus

By Janette Thiessen
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
HOPE, B.C.

Mennonite Church B.C. held its annual women's retreat from Oct. 14 to 16 after not holding one for the last two years due to the pandemic. Participants were happy to be back at Camp Squeah—or some experienced Squeah for the first time—and were blessed with what was probably the nicest weekend weatherwise ever for the retreat, with temperatures reaching 28 degrees C on Oct. 15.

The 60 women represented 16 congregations spanning from Black Creek on Vancouver Island to Kamloops and Kelowna. For 14 women, it was their first time at an MC B.C. women's retreat.

"Alive in Christ: Body, mind and soul" was the weekend's theme, with Laurel Hildebrandt, an author, speaker and counsellor, encouraging the women to stay grounded in Christ, who has already laid down his life for them; and to reflect on their thoughts. Negativity can result in anxiety, depression and affect relationships, whereas positivity will promote optimism, better relationships and healthy outlooks, she said.

Activities included a guided painting workshop led by Colleen Crottie, a card-making workshop led by Debbie Visser, an archery session led by Amber Johnson, and a hike up the mountain led by Kim Tiessen.

Living Hope Christian Fellowship musicians Cheryl Heinrichs, Elly Federau, Dorothy Friesen and Carla Hordyk led worship throughout the weekend.

The ladies supported MC B.C.'s Women's Ministry by participating in a silent auction, entering a raffle for four themed baskets, helping themselves to the "books by donation" table, and a loonie table.

"Thank you so much for organizing such a wonderful weekend," said participant Brenda Neufeld of Black Creek. "We all



PHOTOS BY KAY MOUA

A team from Living Hope Christian Fellowship leads worship at the MC B.C. women's retreat at Camp Squeah from Oct. 14 to 16. Pictured from left to right: Carla Hordyk, Cheryl Heinrichs, Dorothy Friesen and Elly Federau.

agreed that is was the best ever; especially so nice to have these new [to us] accommodations. The food was great, and, even

better, were the people we got to fellowship with. Thank you again!" ❧



Women play an outdoor mixer game at the MC B.C. women's retreat at Camp Squeah.

Kelowna church celebrates 75 years of faithfulness

By Fran Siemens

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
KELOWNA, B.C.

Members and friends gathered to mark the 75th anniversary of First Mennonite Church, Kelowna, in a celebration service on Sept. 11. The service was a time of reflection on the church's identity as an Anabaptist congregation, the individual and collective history of worship and service, and a renewal of the church's commitment to the vision and purpose of the church for the future.

As spiritual descendants of the 16th century Anabaptist movement, the congregation's identity is grounded on the authority of the Bible, with a particular focus on the teachings and life of Jesus. In our practice we emphasize adult believer's baptism, the priesthood of all believers, discipleship, peacemaking, recognizing Christ's presence in our individual lives and whenever we gather as a community of faith.

Members Albert and Peggy Hiebert led an antiphonal service of Scripture readings alternating with the congregational singing of hymns. Johann Funk reflected on the early years of the church to the present, and led the renewal of commitment based on II Corinthians 4:16-18 during the latter part of the service.

A PowerPoint presentation traced the history of the congregation from the five families coming together for worship in homes in the early 1940s and its formal organization on July 23, 1947, with 31 founding members. The pastoral leaders, from Aeltester Jacob J. Janzen to the present virtual pastor, Ken Dueck, were recognized, as well as the life of the church: baptisms, weddings, retreats, mission trips, refugee sponsorship, youth groups and quilting, among others.

The service was followed by a luncheon and pictorial display of people who were members in 1947 and the following years.

The celebration of the church's 75th anniversary was an opportunity for the



FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH, KELOWNA, ARCHIVAL PHOTO

The first families of First Mennonite Church, Kelowna, B.C., gathered for worship in homes.

members of First Mennonite Church to renew their commitment to the vision and purpose of the cloud of witnesses that worshipped in this sanctuary before us. To this, the guests were witnesses to their resolve.

Today, First Mennonite has a membership of 47; 22 are active, 10 inactive and 15 non-resident, some of whom still keep in touch with the congregation. The building provides space for two other congregations to hold services. We also provide a

location for various community activities, including a large choir and several Girl Guide groups. For many years, the women in our church have been making numerous quilts for Mennonite Central Committee.

So it was with gratefulness for 75 years of God's faithfulness and patience, as members through the decades wrestled with being true to the Anabaptist vision, that First Mennonite inherited and had come to celebrate. ☿



PHOTO BY JOHANN FUNK

On Sept. 10, First Mennonite Church in Kelowna, B.C., held a meeting to decide on the congregation's future directions.

What you see is what you get

By Jessica Evans
Alberta Correspondent

“When L’Arche comes, the lack of pretense, the joy, the enthusiasm, the simple faith and the light in Jesus, it was and is so refreshing,” says Ryan Dueck, pastor of Lethbridge Mennonite Church. He has thoroughly enjoyed the relationship between his congregation and L’Arche Lethbridge, which has been cherished for three decades.

“I slid into the grooves that had been worn in long before I arrived,” he says. “It has always been natural, organic.”

L’Arche Lethbridge provides an opportunity for people with and without developmental disabilities to share, live, work and learn together in community. Local people participate in the life of the community as friends and respite workers.

Many members of Lethbridge Mennonite have either worked or volunteered with L’Arche, creating a bond with those in the organization and allowing the relationship to grow. Each L’Arche house has four core members, who travel together to the church of their choice on a Sunday morning.

“The church is overwhelmingly positive and supportive,” says Dueck, “and I can’t think of a single person who wouldn’t say they didn’t love L’Arche’s connection and participation in our church’s life together.”

The group has joined Lethbridge Mennonite for church activities, potlucks, worship, Tuesday night prayer, and church picnics, reading Scripture and enthusiastically participating in the singing. And the church loves to have them.

“They are woven into the fabric of church life,” he says. “One Sunday, L’Arche led the entire worship service, and that was one of my favourite Sundays of my time here.”

Speaking from his own experiences with L’Arche, Dueck dives into how each person has inspired learning and faith.

“When people from L’Arche come, they aren’t trying to impress anybody; what you see is what you get. And I really admire that, and I think most of us can



PHOTO BY RYAN DUECK

Lethbridge Mennonite Church and L’Arche join for worship, pre-pandemic.

learn from that,” he says. “As followers of Jesus, we should always have our ears tuned to the people in our society and in our churches, whose voices wouldn’t naturally be amplified or wouldn’t be seen as wise.”

The origins of the connection stem from placements working through Mennonite Voluntary Service, an organization that connects people with service opportunities. From there, it grew depending on the connections between the two entities.

During the pandemic, L’Arche had to be very careful, as many individuals were immuno-compromised, and attendance at Lethbridge was low.

“The steps of reintegrating into more normal pre-pandemic patterns will be slow and cautious,” says Dueck. “It will take time, but we miss their presence.”

The dynamics of L’Arche Lethbridge may also be changing, with workers coming from a variety of faith backgrounds and perspectives. Dueck believes that some of the connections with Christian churches are not as strong as they once were.

“Our connection with L’Arche remains to be seen,” he says. “The makeup of the houses changing might affect how and when they want to reintegrate into churches. I want to intentionally welcome L’Arche back into our lives together once they feel comfortable with the health realities and their own dynamics.”

Dueck tells the heartfelt story of how the people at L’Arche came forward in

a time of grieving a former friend and service worker.

“Despite the fact that they weren’t comfortable with the pandemic, they were one of the more prominent groups to come to a vigil that we held for a former voluntary-service worker who took their own life in Germany,” says Dueck. “He was a L’Arche worker when he was here.”

Two favourite songs at Tuesday night prayer are “Jesus Loves Me” and “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands,” which were sung at the vigil.

“Whenever we sing ‘little ones to him belong,’” he says, “it rings differently in that context, and when you are grieving together and singing, this is a source of comfort and strength for us as a congregation, as we go through a hard time together. It was L’Arche that, in memory and in practice, helped me through that.”

“They came out to pray with us and share the burden together and, to me, it was a sad moment, but also a reminder that that doesn’t happen unless there are deep connections,” he says. “It would be very much my desire to welcome them back with open arms because I think they were an integral part of our church’s life and our character, and I would hate to see that go.”

As time moves on and the hope in reuniting is strong, Dueck seeks to reach out to those at Lethbridge Mennonite who have connections to L’Arche, and make plans for the future. ❧

Passing the conductor's baton

RJC High School bids farewell to long-time music educator, welcomes new one

By Emily Summach
Saskatchewan Correspondent
ROSTHERN, SASK.

“I remember so fondly the tours and travelling,” says Richard Janzen, the long-time music educator and choir director at RJC High School. “In 2002, we went on a tour along the Oregon coast of the United States. We stopped by the Oregon state legislature building, just to take a peek around. There was this massive common area with a huge dome and great acoustics. And the students just started singing ‘Shenandoah,’ this classic American folk song. Soon, all the activity in that building stopped. People came out of their offices, out of the governor’s office to listen. I remember people just standing and listening in the balcony. It was very surreal and beautiful.”

This is just one of the memorable stories shared by Janzen, who retired from RJC in June, after spending 30 years as the school’s music educator.

Janzen grew up in southern Ontario, later moving to Manitoba to study at Canadian Mennonite Bible College and then at the University of Manitoba, where he studied music and education. After his graduation, he heard about an opening at RJC.

“RJC was very well known for its choral music program, which was my true passion,” he says. “I had other job offers, and we could have stayed in Manitoba, but RJC just seemed to be the right fit. And it was. I spent my entire career there.”

In his tenure at RJC, he observed cultural shifts at the school and in the broader Mennonite culture.

In the early years in the 1990s, about two-thirds of RJC students were coming from Mennonite churches, and they grew up singing in four-part harmony, so those students anchored the choir,” he says. “You didn’t have to teach that kind of singing. In the last few years, only about a third of our students identified as Mennonite. There are a lot of kids with band experience,



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD JANZEN

Richard Janzen poses with the cast of *Anastasia* after RJC High School’s final performance in June. It was also Janzen’s final performance.

but not choir. So a lot of my students didn’t have the same internal experience of hearing four-part harmony. They were still keen and excited for that, but they didn’t grow up with it in the same way. What we identify as Mennonite is different from what it used to be.”

While Janzen enjoyed leading many tours, concerts and RJC’s beloved spring musicals, it is the students he will miss the most: “I will miss the contact with the students, watching them grow, seeing them develop both musically and personally.”

Stepping into Janzen’s shoes is Kayleigh Skomorowski, who began at RJC in September. She was the music teacher at St. Mary’s High School in Prince Albert, Sask., for the past 11 years, and recalls seeing Janzen and the RJC Singers perform.

She knew that if the position at RJC ever became available, she would apply. “I want to acknowledge that I’m reaping the benefits of Richard Janzen’s career,

which could be intimidating, but he’s been so supportive,” she says. “Richard isn’t a looming shadow. He’s a cheerleader and is really supportive of the work that I am doing. I’m grateful to be standing on the shoulders of a giant.”

Skomorowski’s vision for the future of the program will keep beloved traditions alive while introducing new streams, including a band program.

“I grew up within a band program,” she says. “There are certain elements and gifts that both choral and instrumental music provide to students. Some of the band students have played instruments, and for other’s its totally new. It’s just another opportunity we can offer to the students—the experience of making music without words. We’ll definitely be continuing with the spring musical. I’m looking at other ways for students to get involved, for those who don’t want to be on stage. Every kid in that building has something to contribute to that show.”

She reports that of the almost 100 students enrolled at RJC, 96 are in the concert choir, 54 are in the RJC Singers, and 25 are participating in the band program.

Skomorowski has been enjoying her new role at RJC.

“It’s been really great, you know, the pieces that brought me here, the choir program and the opportunity and appetite to build that band stream,” she says, “And really, all the other pieces that come with working at a Mennonite school: the social-justice emphasis, outside learning, and the whole learning experience. The alternative-learning piece has been very refreshing, which I know is rooted in Mennonite traditions. RJC has the values that I’m looking for in my professional life and my vocation, and I’m enjoying immersing myself in that.”



Kayleigh Skomorowski

News brief

Fall Festival brings in \$94,074

John and Helen Neudorf have been donating beautiful items to the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) relief sales for many years. This year, they donated a unique framed quilt to hang on a wall. The frame was handcrafted from barnwood by John and the image was hand quilted by Helen. On Sept. 24, 350 people attended the MCC Alberta Fall Festival at Bergthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury. Attendees enjoyed a vareniki, sausage and pie meal while catching up with friends from all over Alberta. Through a live auction, silent auction and meal sales, supporters raised \$94,074 to support relief, development and peace initiatives in 45 countries around the world.

—STORY AND PHOTO BY JESSICA EVANS

John and Helen Neudorf stand with their donation to the MCC Alberta Fall Festival silent auction.



New faces at MWC

Mennonite World Conference

People are at the heart of the worldwide community of faith that is Mennonite World Conference (MWC).

“Our global community is itself the message,” declares MWC’s Reference Notebook: “As a church, our overall administrative approach is pastoral and people-centred instead of institution-centred.”

With the latest assembly now in the realm of memory, there are shifts in MWC staff:

- **Bruce Campbell-Janz** steps into the role of chief development officer. He leads a team of volunteer consultants: Bill Braun of the United States, Janet Plenert and David Martin, and J. Ron Byler as development executive.
- **Irma Sulistyorini** joined the MWC’s communications team full-time in August, having overseen MWC’s visual identity for several years. A member of Gereja Kristen



Pictured clockwise from top left: Bruce Campbell-Janz, Irma Sulistyorini, Ebenezer Mondez and Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle.

Muria Indonesia in Kudus, Indonesia, Sulistyorini is an experienced graphic designer who also served Mennonite Church Canada as an International Volunteer Exchange Program intern.

- **Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle** becomes the first woman from the Global South to serve as a commission secretary (Deacons), now that Henk Stenvers has taken on the role of MWC president. Gelagle is a youth leader and a member of Debut Meserete Kristos Church. She served as Africa representative on the MWC YABs Committee from 2011 to 2015, and as YABs mentor from 2015 to 2022.

- **Ebenezer Mondez** has been appointed YABs mentor, a staff role to advise and monitor the work of the YABs Committee. Trained in the field of communication and technology, Mondez is a member of Lumban Mennonite Church in the Philippines. ❧

Former Witness workers back to ministering in Tokyo

By Katie Doke Sawatzky
Mennonite Church Canada

Gerald and Rie Neufeld have been appointed by Mennonite Church Canada to act as “relationship catalysts,” fostering connections between the nationwide church and Mennonite congregations in Japan.

“We are looking forward to seeing how we can build supportive networks among the Tokyo churches, and across Japan, as well as with churches in North America and Mennonites in Asia,” the Neufelds write via e-mail.

Gerald and Rie, who served as Witness workers with the Tokyo Area Fellowship of Mennonite Churches (TAFMC) in the early 2000s, moved back to Tokyo in November 2021, to be closer to Rie’s family and to connect again with the fellowship.

“In our conversations with ministry partners, we are asked to foster relationships that are mutually transformative,” says Jeanette Hanson, director of MC Canada’s International Witness. “We need people, who know the language and culture, to build ways for us to relate and strengthen each other. I hope that we see more relationship-catalyst roles in the future.”

The Neufelds plan to stay at the Anabaptist Center in Sugunami-ku, Tokyo, which has been used as a guest house for North American missionaries and as a gathering

place for TAFMC churches in the past. The centre is currently undergoing renovations.

“TAFMC is hoping to bring the Center back to life and restore those connections,” writes Gerald Neufeld. “We’d like to see it function as a resource centre for the future.”

The Neufelds have been pastoring Mennonite Japanese Fellowship in Surrey, B.C., since September 2008. When the pandemic hit and they made their services available online, the possibility of still supporting that congregation while being in Japan opened up. They currently visit a different TAFMC church each Sunday, where Gerald preaches and Rie often plays piano. Then on Mondays, at 7 a.m., they join the Surrey congregation’s online

worship services.

The Neufelds say they are still in the stages of imagining the possibilities of their work as “relationship catalysts.”

“We are hoping to set up some exchange visits for people from other areas to have a Japanese Mennonite experience. And we could then set up visits for Japanese Mennonites to visit people in North America,” they write.

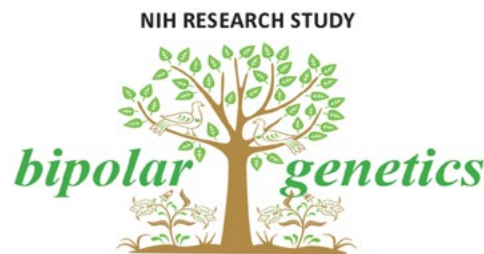
The term “relationship catalysts” is one the Neufelds heard from a speaker in Tokyo, who was offering an alternative vision of mission, one that prioritized “ministry in ‘slow, small, sustainable ways, with a smile.’”

“We are trying to redefine the traditional role of missionary,” they write. “In order to build a church-to-church relationship, we expect to see the work of God’s Spirit, which can be ignited through continued relationships.” ❧



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEUFELDS

Gerald, centre, and Rie Neufeld, right, visit a church in Misato, Japan.



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The sweet solace of polarization

Part 3: Failing the COVID litmus test

Story and Photo by Will Braun
Senior Writer

I'm nervous about presenting non-orthodox views about COVID. Some of my mandate-abiding friends will look askance. "Yes, but . . .," they will say, then demarcate limits of tolerance.

Rigidity was a spiritual variant of COVID. Questions became unwelcome. A singularity of narrative prevailed, spawning a minority reaction.

Friendships withered. Families ruptured. Churches bled members.

The pandemic changed the complexion of society. At this point, can we talk constructively across the lingering divide? Can we find middle ground? Do we even want to? And what of the humble Beatitudes?

Some mandate-resistant people I spoke with pointed me to a speech Don Plett delivered in the Senate on Feb. 23. Plett, who attended a Mennonite church most of his life, is leader of the Conservatives in the Upper Chamber. By reputation he is a partisan scrapper.

I was leery as I hit "play." But Plett celebrated Canada's high vaccination rate. He declared that he was triple vaxxed and encouraged "everyone else to do the same."

He said the views of some vaccine resisters "fall squarely in the camp of conspiracy theorists," and after the trucks had been in Ottawa a couple weeks, Plett was among those who said, "Hey, it's time to go home."

Ironically, these views contradict the people who suggested I listen to Plett.

He also said government measures "exact a huge toll." People endured isolation and died alone. And penalizing people for not getting vaccinated was, in his view, "extremely offensive."

He said that if we accept that Canada is not homogeneous, then we must "strive to protect people's rights to freedom of conscience, freedom of religion . . . freedom of vaccination status."

Trucker tolerance

He referenced a Sept. 17, 2021, French language interview in which Justin Trudeau said many of the strongly vaccine-resistant Canadians are "often misogynist" and "often racist." Trudeau then asked, "Do we tolerate these people?"

"Yes, there were idiots with racist views in this group," Plett said of the protesters, but if you paint them all with a single dismissive brush, "you miss the point."

The point, for Plett, was that these protesters represented millions of Canadians who were "tired of being controlled" and wanted "a way out."

"We have not done a good job of listening to the voices of those who have a different view than us on vaccination," Plett said.

I agree.

"The primary debate," he continued, "is not about whether these measures

are right or wrong. It is about whether someone can have a different view, for whatever reason, and not be censored."

In this age of inclusion and cancellation, peace churches need to grapple with this.

Plett was one of a few leaders to straddle the divide.

COVID orthodoxy

Another person who did not fit neatly into one camp was Dr. Sheila Singh, a pediatric neurosurgeon and Senior Canada Research Chair at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont. I heard her on CBC radio's *White Coat, Black Art*. She talked about harm caused by COVID restrictions; in her case, children coming in with dangerously advanced cancer because they had been too afraid to come to the hospital earlier.

I emailed her.

"I have been so frustrated by our



A bridge over Highway 6 near Twin Butte in southern Alberta, 2022.

apparently single-minded focus on a single viral illness throughout the pandemic,” she wrote back. “In my mind, public health is about the whole health of a society, and health is clearly multi-factorial, and should never be reduced to our response to a single disease. We are going to pay a steep price for all the collateral damage caused by COVID restrictions.”

Singh, who fully supported vaccination, said she was surprised at “how much moral weight” people attributed to things like wearing a mask, and how little people were “willing to welcome other viewpoints . . . acting with almost religious fervour to uphold current public-health measures even if they [were] debatable.”

She said, “There is no way we managed the pandemic perfectly, so there should be lots of room for criticism and accountability.”

Tellingly, it was rare to hear someone on CBC diverge even this much from what Singh called “pandemic orthodoxy.”

Hair salon theology

Some people were forced to cross the COVID divide. Andrea Moses Cooper chose to do so with a measure of grace. She is a hairstylist and friend. She was highly conscientious in terms of COVID precautions, but a quarter of her clients were the opposite. And they were not shy about it.

What she heard was religious people who were looking for an “opportunity for martyrdom,” a chance to take a risk for faith. They felt the church was unfairly targeted and some wore this “persecution” as a “badge of honour.”

One client sent her a link to a sermon by a conservative Mennonite pastor in Winkler, Man., who said Christians must not receive nor administer the COVID vaccine because it contained cells from an aborted fetus.

Moses Cooper was alarmed. So she called the pastor: “Why not just ask him why he said what he said instead of being angry about it?”

The pastor was happy to explain his views, she reported. He did not dismiss her.

Although the half-hour conversation was “draining,” Moses Cooper felt good that she had “gone to the source.” A rare approach.

Moses Cooper said of her clients: “I try

to listen, to hear, even if it’s exhausting. . . . I try to be kind. I try not to roll over them, even though I want to.”

Admitting she is “not a saint,” she talked about her “internal screaming” as she politely listened to clients: “I’m surprised no one can hear it.”

Conversion to compassion

For Jen Wiebe, the division hits even closer to home. Like me, she lives in the Rural Municipality of Stanley in southern Manitoba. Stanley had the lowest vaccination rate of any Canadian jurisdiction I could find.

Wiebe—whose real name *Canadian Mennonite* has agreed not to use due to the sensitivity of the subject—is a stay-at-home mom in her 30s. She grew up strictly Christian and strictly “anti-vax.” In fact, the COVID vaccine was the first vaccination of her life. In her family and church, women were taught not to think for themselves. Conspiracy theories and fear were part of life.

In her 20s, Wiebe realized she needed to take responsibility for her own views. It was a gradual, difficult process. Now she is the person who is “furtherest left” in both her extended families. She has lost friendships over COVID disagreements.

Still, she has opted for grace over vilification. “I understand where people are coming from when they think differently,” she told me by phone.

“I try to ask questions. . . . I never outright dismiss [their views].”

Wiebe respects people’s decision to refuse vaccination. “Full stop.”

She said people on the left sometimes take a really strong stance. “That’s not the way to do it. . . . I’ve never changed my mind based on someone telling me what to think.”

Wiebe talked about a different kind of change. She said of any given conversation with a person of differing views: “If nothing else, it gives you a bit more compassion and empathy.”

Litmus test


In some settings, adherence to mandates became a litmus test of faith. Good Christians wear masks. Or don’t. Often the pursuit of truth and rightness eroded

compassion and empathy, arousing disturbingly virulent feelings. Middle ground was vacated. Many of us retreated to the comforting refuge of polarization, lulled by the echoing voices that we were right and others were pathetically wrong.

To the degree we can emerge from those false refuges, we may encounter divine grace and neighbourly love. And the only path out is that of listening.

Don Plett said, “We need to do better at listening.” And to listen is to adopt a humble posture. As Jen Wiebe so wisely said, “People have lost the art of humility.”


Ironically, it was Justin Trudeau—the main nemesis of mandate-resistant Canadians (and Plett)—who said something that has helped me listen to members of the maskless majority in the heavily Mennonite area I call home. On the night he was first elected prime minister, Trudeau said, “Conservatives are not our enemies, they’re our neighbours.” While he may betray his own words, they still describe my literal reality and my Christian hope. ✎




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Cultural markers and faith markers

Hyejung Jessie Yum of Toronto talks about her involvement with MennoMedia's Anabaptism at 500 project.

canadianmennonite.org/hjy



The Meeting Place joins MC Eastern Canada

Learn about the Meeting Place, an urban church plant in Hamilton, Ont., that joined MC Eastern Canada earlier this year.

canadianmennonite.org/meetingplace



The gift of sewing

Helga Bergen of the Niagara Region talks about her passion for sewing and how she sees her abilities as a gift from God.

canadianmennonite.org/gos



Watch: "Mennonites Put the Oba in Manitoba"

Watch a video by a band of Manitoba Mennos that has been viewed more than 156,000 times since it was uploaded to YouTube two years ago.

canadianmennonite.org/quonbros



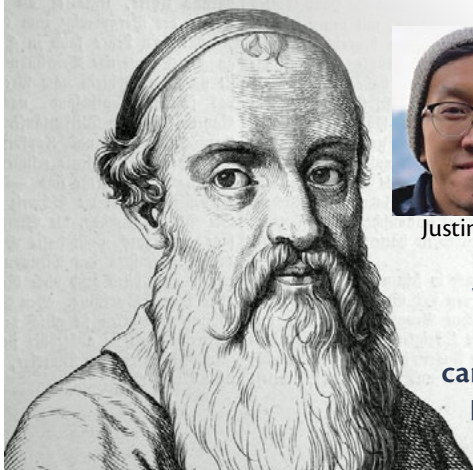
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November 16

Why I am a Mennonite



Join Online Media Manager **Aaron Epp** and guests to talk about current events in the church and the world.



Justin Sun



Moses Falco



Kim Penner

Watch *Canadian Mennonite* for details or go to canadianmennonite.org/events
Held on Zoom, 8:00 pm ET

Educating, inspiring, informing and fostering dialogue on issues facing Mennonites in Canada



Schools Directory featuring Conrad Grebel University College

The future looks green at Grebel

Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont.

“When our students think about the future, climate change is their single greatest concern,” says Conrad Grebel University College president Marcus Shantz. “Grebel must respond in ways that generate hope and inspiration for our students.”

“This is a critical time to decide how much we want to reduce the harm that is currently befalling our planet,” says Maya Morton Ninomiya, who is in her fourth-year health studies. “As a student, I am surrounded by people who have the ability to influence the next generation. Educating on climate change and instilling passion in students is an extremely potent and necessary opportunity that we must take advantage of.”

Grebel has a history of early adaptation for environmental changes, much of it spurred

by student activism and encouragement. “We are now obliged to act on a larger scale than we have in the past,” says Shantz.

With a goal of significantly reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, Grebel assembled a Green Team of faculty, staff and students, and conducted a third-party environmental audit. A list of projects emerged, ranging from major items like replacing windows, to modest ideas like planting native plants. Grebel’s first priorities are to replace a 50-year-old heating and cooling system, and install more electric vehicle chargers. A newly established Green Fund will support these projects.

“It is so inspiring to see the passion our students have to fight climate change as we work together to reduce our carbon footprint,” says Grebel’s director of operations, Paul Penner. “Our students, administration, board and alumni are committed to implementing the suggestions that come from our Green Team.”



PHOTO BY MARGARET GISSING
Grebel students enjoy the foliage around the school.

PROMOTIONAL SUPPLEMENT

MEI Schools in Abbotsford is Building Campus Improvement Plan

MEI's campus improvement plan includes significant updates to the secondary school building including a 20,000-square-foot addition, adding a 10,000-square-foot addition to the elementary school for its preschool, removing all portables, building an outdoor multi-sport court, adding a proper turf field with a rubber track, a proper bus loop, and a walking tunnel beneath Downes road connecting our two properties and allowing for improved traffic flow.

The campus, particularly the 40-year-old secondary school building, is in desperate need of updates. Together, this package of improvements will set MEI Schools up to

continue serving our families for the next 40+ years.

The total cost is projected to be \$30M (30 million dollars). During an initial Quiet Phase of fundraising, 16 donors have contributed just over \$7M to get us started. Wow!

Now it's our turn.

Please visit buildmei.com to learn more about this project. Please also consider how you will contribute financially and spread the word. Our family will do the same!

Thank you, and to God be all the glory!



Vijay Manuel, MEI Head of Schools



UpComing

Join the peace and reconciliation field experience

Mennonite Church Canada is offering a Philippines learning tour from Jan. 12-22, 2023. Participants will visit the Mindanao region of the Philippines to experience firsthand how to walk and talk the way of peace. They will gain a greater appreciation for God's wonderful work of reconciliation, hope and healing, while being challenged to see and share how God is moving in their own lives. Lakan Sumulong and Lakambini Mapayapa (Dann and Joji Pantoja), MC Canada International Witness workers, are engaged in active peace ministries in the Philippines that involve conversations with Muslims, Indigenous peoples and Christians. They, along with Norm Dyck, MC Eastern Canada's mission minister and MC Canada International Witness liaison, will lead this tour. "This tour will challenge and change how you understand mission and the work of God in the world," says Dyck. "As we listen, think creatively about witness and peace, and engage in cross-cultural conversation, we continue to grow in our desire to become a global church." The tour is limited to 10 registered participants. Full vaccination for COVID-19 is required for international travel. To learn more, visit <https://bit.ly/3CHV6A0>. To make a reservation, email ndyck@mcec.ca.



PBCI PHOTO

PeaceBuilders Community advisory board members build community and practise peacebuilding exercises.

—Mennonite Church Canada

of church music and worship at Grebel. Topic: "Music, liturgy and the making of medieval Scotland."

Nov. 25-26: Nairn Mennonite Church, Ailsa Craig, hosts its annual Christmas event featuring live music, crafts and a tea room. (25) from 6:30 to 9 p.m.; (26) 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Dec. 11: Menno Singers presents "Lessons and Carols" at Trillium Lutheran, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit www.mennosingers.com.

April 1, 2023: Menno Singers presents "Rachmaninov's Vespers,"

at Trillium Lutheran, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit www.mennosingers.com.

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



Classifieds Employment Opportunities

Come work with us!

Mennonite Church Canada invites applications for the following positions:

- Communications Coordinator (.33 FTE)
- Indigenous-Relations Coordinator (.5 FTE)
- Climate Action Coordinator (.5 FTE)
- Associate Executive Minister (.5 FTE)

Full job descriptions are available at mennonitechurch.ca/get-involved#careers.

Employment opportunity

MCEC Financial Manager

MCEC seeks an organized, detail-oriented person with experience in accounting and bookkeeping to serve as Financial Manager. Reporting to the Operations Director, you will oversee the finance responsibilities and ensure all accounting procedures, record-keeping, budget reporting and payroll functions are effectively managed adhering to best industry standards and charitable law.

Strong financial management undergirds all of MCEC ministry. You will play a key role in supporting MCEC's call to energize congregations, encourage leaders and embody God's reconciling ministry.

This is a .8FTE permanent position with potential to increase to full time. Visit www.mcec.ca/careers to see the full position description and to apply.



Calendar

Saskatchewan

Dec. 11: "A Very Shekinah Christmas" event, at Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim, at 2 p.m.

Manitoba

Until Nov. 12: MHC Gallery, Winnipeg, presents "In the world, but not of it," a photo exhibition of Hutterites by Tim Smith. Masks recommended.

Nov. 20: Mennonite Community Orchestra, in collaboration with goodwill partner Mennonite Disaster Service, presents a concert reflecting on the power of love; at Lutheran Church of the Cross, Winnipeg, at 3 p.m.

Nov. 25: CMU campus visit day, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Nov. 30: CMU hosts a virtual open house, at 6 p.m. For more information, visit www.cmu.ca/virtual-open-house.

Ontario

Until Dec. 16: The Grebel Gallery, Waterloo, presents "Unmasking, breathing, moving forward," an exhibit of 17 Indigenous, Black and racialized artists responding to their experiences of COVID-19. Gallery hours: Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Nov. 5: Conrad Grebel University College and University of Waterloo open house, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Nov. 24: 2022 Benjamin Eby lecture, at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m. Speaker: Kate Kennedy Steiner, assistant professor of music and director



PHOTOS BY SANDSPUN PHOTOGRAPHY

Into the future with confidence

By Edna Konrad
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

While the September kickoff is an annual event at Leamington (Ont.) United Mennonite Church, this year there was an extra-celebratory vibe. Along with starting a new Sunday school year, the congregation eagerly returned on Sept. 11 to more familiar ways of being together, ways that had been interrupted by the pandemic.

In his message, “Next door as it is in heaven,” Norm Dyck, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada’s mission minister, encouraged the congregation to expand its mission by getting to know its neighbours better and by developing relationships in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Following an energetic worship service and “non-potluck” lunch, all generations enjoyed an afternoon of outdoor activities: visiting and games, bouncy castle, a kiddie train (pictured above) and face painting.

Fun at the dunk tank represented taking the plunge into Leamington United Mennonite’s future, and moving ahead with courage. Among those taking the “plunge” were Pastor David Dyck; Mykayla Tiessen, the children and youth ministry coordinator; UMEI teacher Joel Warkentin; and the guest speaker, Norm Dyck. ✎

