

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

December 12, 2022 Volume 26 Number 25



# O Little Town of Bethlehem

## INSIDE

Challenging Holy Land stereotypes 4

Meet Geraldine Balzer 16

Rockets, rosebushes and relief 20

## EDITORIAL

# 2,000 years later in Bethlehem . . .

BY WILL BRAUN

editor@canadianmennonite.org

**B**ethlehem Bible College sits within walking distance of the birthplace of Jesus and about 200 metres from the eight-metre-high concrete wall that hems in Palestinians such as those who lead and attend the college.

Bethlehem is no less troubled today than it was for Mary and Joseph, who, despite the “Silent Night,” had to flee by dark, according to Matthew, before Herod eventually killed “*all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or younger.*”

The region is again home to violence and tension. Palestinians face arbitrary detention (including detention of minors), outright displacement from their homes and lands, and military violence. They have virtually no recourse.

I acknowledge that Palestinian extremists occasionally kill Israelis and create fear in Israel, as we see on the news. Without justifying this, I note that Israel, as an occupying power with billions of dollars in American support, carries out far more violence.

The only Bible college in Bethlehem, and all of Palestine, is shaped by these circumstances as it also seeks to shape them. In addition to peacebuilding activities at home, the college seeks to shift attitudes abroad, especially among fellow evangelicals, as Byron Rempel-Burkholder explains in his feature (page 4). Canadian Mennonites are pitching in (see page 17).

Ironically, Christians in the Holy Land are often neglected. The majority of

Palestinians are Muslim, but the Holy Land is also home to Palestinian Christians, some of whom trace their lineage back hundreds of years. Yousef Alkhouri, an instructor at Bethlehem Bible College, is one of them. Alkhouri, along with college president Jack Sara, visited Canada this past fall, at the invitation of Mennonite Church Canada.

I spoke with them after an adult education session and sermon at Morden (Man.) Mennonite Church.

Alkhouri had shared how he can only travel to see his family in Gaza, 60 kilometres away, around Christmas and Easter as those are the only times Israeli authorities will grant permission to travel. He showed pictures of an apartment building reduced to rubble by Israeli air strikes. It had been home to his sister and her family. They were given 10 minutes notice. Alkhouri clarified that his sister is a Sunday School teacher not a terrorist.

I asked Alkhouri and Sara about the Song of Mary which talks about God lifting up the lowly and bringing down the mighty. For Sara, the passage means God came to the poor, not to Herod’s palace.

“Even if we don’t see hope,” Sara said, “there is a gift in us. . . . God is on the side of the poor and marginalized and lowly. . . . [T]he oppressive structures will not last forever.”

Alkhouri added: “We suffer oppression like Mary. . . . We are longing for

God’s intervention.”

Unpacking the Arabic word *sumud*, he talked about how Palestinians stretch their roots deep to create a space to thrive.

Then I asked about enemies. Surrounded by overt antagonism and constant military presence, what does Sara teach his children about loving their enemies. His kids go to school with Israelis. He wants them to see Israelis as humans not devils. Humans can be “transformed by my humanity” he said.

Alkhouri added that for them, loving their neighbour and their enemy are often the same thing. “We are called to be peacemakers,” he said, and that “requires sacrifice.”

Much has changed since the first Christmas; much has not. To understand Emmanuel, our notions of a serene manger must combine with current realities of people like Jack Sara and Yousef Alkhouri. For in Bethlehem is born—and reborn—a tender, humble mystery amidst trouble and tumult.

## Announcement

Thanks to **Jessica Evans** who served as Alberta Correspondent since spring 2022. We acknowledge the good work she did for *CM* and wish her well in her new position with MCC Alberta.

## Digital Issue

Finally, we have a digital-only issue coming out on Dec. 26 (to sign up contact [office@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:office@canadianmennonite.org)). The next print issue will be mailed on Jan. 9. ☸



# CONTENTS

DECEMBER 12, 2022 / VOL. 26, NO. 25

## ABOUT THE COVER:

Today, in the town where the Prince of Peace was born, a concrete wall hems in local residents.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BETHLEHEM BIBLE COLLEGE.

## Mennonites address domestic violence 18

**Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe** reports on MCC's ongoing work to combat domestic violence.

## 'A Creative God' 22

A new group of resources on visual arts in worship is available from Together in Worship, an online collection of worship resources from Anabaptist sources.

## Volunteers respond to Hurricane Fiona 23

After cleaning up fallen trees in Glace Bay, N.S., Mennonite Disaster Service volunteers transition to roof repairs.

## A business built by accident 27

**Chris Steingart** of Kitchener, Ont., fell into work that evolved into a successful enterprise.

## Challenging Holy Land stereotypes 4

The only Bible college in Bethlehem stands at the crossroads of faith, geopolitics and the birthplace of Christ as

**Byron Rempel-Burkholder** explains.



## Regular features:

For discussion 7 Readers write 8 Milestones 10  
A moment from yesterday 11 Calendar 31  
Classifieds 31

**Jesus doesn't stop where we think he should** 11  
Ryan Dueck

**'Stella makes a difference'** Ed Olfert 12

**Christmas delight?** Randolph Haluza-Delay 13

**Soil lover** Joshua Penfold 14

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

490 Dutton Drive, Unit C5,  
Waterloo, ON, N2L 6H7

Phone: 519-884-3810 | Toll-free: 1-800-378-2524

Facebook.com/Canadian.Mennonite @CanMenno @canadianmennonite

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

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

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

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

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

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40063104 REGISTRATION NO. 09613

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

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

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

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

### Canadian Mennonite Staff

**Publisher:** Tobi Thiessen, [publisher@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:publisher@canadianmennonite.org)

**Editor:** Will Braun, [editor@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:editor@canadianmennonite.org)

**Managing Editor:** Ross W. Muir, [managinged@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:managinged@canadianmennonite.org)

**Graphic Designer:** Betty Avery, [designer@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:designer@canadianmennonite.org)

**Online Media Manager:** Aaron Epp, [onlinemgr@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:onlinemgr@canadianmennonite.org)

**Editorial Assistant:** Barb Draper, [edassist@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:edassist@canadianmennonite.org)

**Circulation:** Lorna Aberdein, [office@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:office@canadianmennonite.org)

**Advertising:** [advert@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:advert@canadianmennonite.org)

**B.C. Correspondent:** Amy Rinner Waddell, [bc@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:bc@canadianmennonite.org)

**Alberta Correspondent:** [ab@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:ab@canadianmennonite.org)

**Saskatchewan Correspondent:** Emily Summach, [sk@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:sk@canadianmennonite.org)

**Manitoba Correspondent:** Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe, [mb@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:mb@canadianmennonite.org)

**Eastern Canada Correspondent:** [ec@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:ec@canadianmennonite.org)

### One-Year Subscription Rates

Canada: \$48 + tax (depends on province where subscriber lives)

U.S.: \$70 International (outside U.S.): \$93.10

### Subscriptions/address changes

[office@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:office@canadianmennonite.org)

1-800-378-2524 ext. 1

## FEATURE

# Challenging Holy Land stereotypes

Bethlehem Bible College stands boldly at the crossroads of faith, geopolitics and the birthplace of Christ

By Byron Rempel-Burkholder

**M**unther Isaac recently published a book that confronts a longstanding problem in Christian attitudes toward the Holy Land—ignorance, indifference and even hostility to the Palestinian church. Isaac is an Oxford-educated, Palestinian Lutheran pastor who serves as academic dean of Bethlehem Bible College.

“When it comes to western Christian attitudes towards Israel,” Munther writes in his book, *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope*, “one of the most troubling is the attitude toward Palestinians and Palestinian Christians. [Those attitudes] range from ignoring Palestinians completely, to discrediting our experience and existence, to crushing and dehumanizing us.”

The fact that Munther’s book was published by the evangelical InterVarsity Press indicates an openness among Christians outside the region to listen to Palestinian perspectives. A new generation of Palestinian scholars and leaders like Isaac are reaching international audiences with their challenging biblical vision about land and justice.

To learn from Christian brothers and sisters in the occupied territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza often means shedding media-driven stereotypes of Palestinians (contrary to stereotype, most Palestinians do not support terrorism), and church-driven idealization of Israelis as the covenant people of God (in truth, the State of Israel is secular and is often accused of human-rights abuses).

Mennonite connections in the region date back 73 years. And Mennonite Church Canada established a

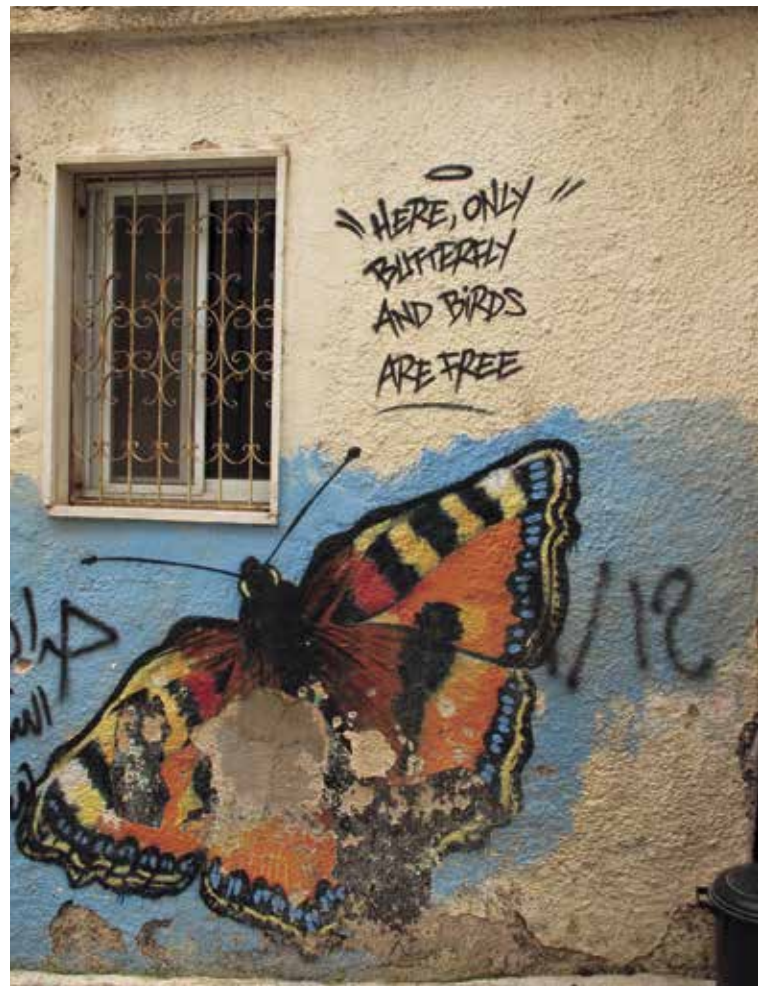


PHOTO BY BYRON AND MELITA REMPEL-BURKHOLDER

Artwork in a narrow alley of the Aida Camp in Bethlehem.

formal relationship with the college in 2020.

### Change of heart

When Beverley Timgren of Toronto first started her missionary career in the 1980s, she was steeped in a common view of Israel's 1948 military conquest of the region as a miracle, proof that God was on Israel's side—a heralding of the imminent Second Coming of Christ.

That perspective became increasingly problematic as her assignments took her from dentistry work in southern Lebanon and northern Israel to the West Bank, where she has worked several stints as an English teacher at Bethlehem Bible College.

“Through living there and getting to know Palestinian Christians, I ended up seeing through very different eyes,” she says.

What Timgren saw was people who showed “amazing hospitality” and who

aimed “to live at peace and in equal dignity with their Israeli neighbours.” Their faith and resilience are remarkable, she says, given the challenges they experience under the decades-long military occupation by Israel—confiscation of more and more West Bank land for Jewish Israeli settlements, tight restrictions on movement through a network of barriers and checkpoints, and the thwarting of their dreams of self-determination.

Today, Timgren serves on the board of Hope Outreach of Canada, a ministry partner of the college.

### Holy Land remnant

Bethlehem Bible College was established in 1979 by Bishara Awad, who had been principal of a school supported by Mennonite Central Committee in nearby Beit Jala. His vision was to train Arabic-speaking leaders for ministry in their own land—and to help stem the flow of

emigration to the West. The shrinking of the Christian population, due largely to the harsh realities of the occupation, was—and continues to be—a major worry of the churches in the region.

Christians of all stripes number less than two percent of the population in both Israel and Palestine, down from about eight percent at the formation of Israel in 1948.

While relatively few Christians now live in the Holy Land, many visit. The college is one of the essential stops for any Christian who wants to get behind the news headlines and meet “the living stones” of the land. The college is within walking distance of the West Bank's most famous landmark, the Church of the Nativity, and is just 500 metres inside the massive concrete wall that isolates the occupied West Bank from Israel proper.

On the other side of the wall, about 10 kilometres to the north, is Jerusalem's Old City.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BETHLEHEM BIBLE COLLEGE.

*A woman runs past graffiti on the wall that divides Bethlehem from Israel.*

Over time, the college has developed a faculty of Palestinian church leaders and teachers whose core focus is biblical studies. Local enrolment is about 60 students. Even before the pandemic, however, the college had added online courses to its regular offerings in biblical studies and leadership, raising the total enrolment to more than a hundred.

### Building peace

Bethlehem Bible College has also helped spawn other ministries of witness and compassion that allow visitors and volunteers from around the world—including several from MC Canada—to engage believers in the region:

- **In spring**, many students travel to Jordan to share their faith and humanitarian assistance with refugees from other Middle Eastern countries.
- **The college's Shepherd Society** offers social assistance to community members experiencing health crises and poverty. The school also offers job training for media workers and tour guides.
- **Every Christmas**, the college puts on an outreach banquet for the community.
- **The college's latest** innovation is the Bethlehem Institute of Peace and Justice, an English-language program that helps Palestinian and international students consider biblical perspectives on peace and justice from within the context of the Holy Land. Through an arrangement with St. Stephen's University, based in New Brunswick, the program's courses can be taken for university credit recognized in North America.

In many ways, these initiatives reflect best practices for mission work—international Christians partnering with local believers to extend their witness. It's the spectrum of theological and political views around Israel, however, that make the relationship between Palestinian believers and their foreign counterparts delicate.

### Christ at the Checkpoint

Jack Sara, Bethlehem Bible College's president, and a Christian and



PHOTO COURTESY OF BETHLEHEM BIBLE COLLEGE.

### *An Israeli soldier and Palestinian girls in Bethlehem.*

Missionary Alliance pastor, walks a fine line between upholding Christian witness and confronting opposition. The opposition is not primarily from Muslims in the region, but from fellow Christians abroad—whether evangelical or historic mainline groups—who uncritically support the State of Israel.

When Sara attends mission conferences in North America, he expects to be targeted. “I am pushed hard, because of the [college's] name, and because I don't go with the Christian Zionism track,” he says. He has colleagues who have been uninvited from conferences that decided Palestinian speakers might be controversial.

Since 2010, the college has hosted the biennial Christ at the Checkpoint conference, which has brought together hundreds of participants and speakers from around the world to take a biblical look at issues such as terrorism and religious radicalism. Even though it features a stimulating spectrum of voices, including Messianic Jews, the

gathering attracts criticism from the Israeli government and Christian organizations that support it.

The first conference was held a year after a significant statement was released by Kairos Palestine, a consortium of Christian leaders in the region. “A Moment of Truth: A Cry of Hope from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering” calls Christians to advocate for a just peace in the land. Rooted in Scripture, it endorses nonviolent resistance to the occupation, using a “logic of love” for Israeli Jews, Palestinian Muslims and Christians alike.

### Mennonite engagement

The statement was a key impetus for a 2016 resolution on Palestine and Israel passed by MC Canada. Rooted in decades of Mennonite partnerships with Palestinians and Israelis in humanitarian and peace work, the resolution called for prayer, education and political advocacy in partnership with Palestinian and Jewish Canadians.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL HOSTETLER.

*Bethlehem on the right, the state of Israel on the left.*

“We don’t see the New Testament as devotional reading only,” says Jeanette Hanson, director of International Witness for MC Canada, which stewards the partnership with the college. “It profoundly engages culture and politics.”

With the blessing of the denomination, the Palestine-Israel Network (PIN) came together in the months following the 2016 resolution, drawing together individuals and working groups across Canada.

With the resolution as their mandate, PIN members have led workshops, organized webinars, written to politicians, met with MPs, and disseminated prayer requests for church bulletins.

The MC Canada partnership with Bethlehem Bible College (BBC) envisions educational exchanges and deepening relationships between Palestinian Christians and Canadian Mennonites.

To fulfil that mandate, Hanson is working with regional church PIN groups, church leaders and schools to mount a series of four speaking tours featuring college faculty in Manitoba,

Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia. The first of these took place in Manitoba this past fall.

The BBC-MC Canada partnership also envisions MC Canada volunteers doing short-term service stints at the college.

In this work, MC Canada is joining a growing number of Christians worldwide, who are taking up the challenge of Munther Isaac and other Palestinian Christians. That challenge is to listen carefully to the stories of suffering and hope coming from the Holy Land today, and to come alongside brothers and sisters in Christ who are working for peace that is married to justice and mercy. ☸

*Byron Rempel-Burkholder is chair of the MC Canada Palestine-Israel Network. He lives in Winnipeg. A version of this article first appeared in Faith Today. Reprinted with permission.*

For more, visit [bethbc.edu](http://bethbc.edu) and [mennonitechurch.ca/pin](http://mennonitechurch.ca/pin).



### ☸ For discussion

1. When you think of Bethlehem, what is the image that comes to mind? If you visited the Church of the Nativity, how do you think you would respond to this landmark that is believed to be the spot where Jesus was born?
2. The article says Christian attitudes toward the Palestinian church include “ignorance, indifference and even hostility;” what have you been taught about Palestinian Christians? Why have many western Christians been reluctant to embrace the Palestinian church?
3. The purpose of Bethlehem Bible College is to train Arabic-speaking leaders for ministry, hoping to reduce the rate of Christian emigration. Why has the Christian population in Palestine declined so drastically? In what ways is Bethlehem Bible College a sign of hope for the Palestinian church?
4. Do you think Mennonite churches see God as being on Israel’s side?
5. How does Bethlehem Bible College represent hope for the Christian church?

—By Barb Draper

See related Palestine-Israel resources at [www.commonword.ca/go/465](http://www.commonword.ca/go/465)

**CommonWord**  
Bookstore and Resource Centre

## OPINION

### /// Readers write

#### ✉ Two views on 'sweet solace'

Re: "The sweet solace of polarization" series, Oct. 3; Oct. 17; and Oct. 31.

At the heart of the gospel message is the admonition of Jesus to "love your neighbour as yourself." It is impossible for me to understand how refusing potentially life-saving precautions, such as vaccines and masks, to protect myself and my neighbours from a potentially deadly infection could be showing them love.

I am a nearly retired pediatrician, and there is no doubt that vaccines are the single most important advance in my career. Sorry, but vaccine hesitancy or vaccine refusal is a very tender point if you work in the trenches of preventable infectious diseases.

PAUL THIESSEN, VANCOUVER

**Thank you, Will Braun, for your three-part series on polarization. I have watched, with unease, the us/them, right/wrong, black/white trend south of our border, and found it most troubling to recognize it in Canadian society.**

I looked forward to your instalments and eagerly read them. I identified with your anger and with your need to move beyond it.

It was enlightening to learn of the reasons for peoples' decisions. I found it especially helpful to be reminded that asking questions or offering different points of view is a good thing. I realized that I need to let go of my tendency, when faced with a differing viewpoint, toward judgment, and lean into embracing curiosity.

I do not see an easy way to bring us back together. Your series is a helpful and important start.

LORI WEILER-THIESSEN, SASKATOON

#### ✉ Former CM chair congratulates new editor

**I just completed reading the Oct. 31 issue of *Canadian Mennonite* and feel lifted up by it, as usual. But there are two things that I need to say at this time:**

- **Congratulations to Will Braun** for taking the "humble plunge" of listening to the "other side" in his "The sweet solace of polarization" series. It is something we Mennonites too often fail to do.
- **Congratulations to CM** for engaging Will to become the new editor. I hope and pray that his work will continue to reflect humility and the quest for deeper spirituality and authenticity.

As a former *CM* board member and chair of that board, I believe we have every reason to be optimistic for the future of our publication.

BERNIE WIEBE, WINNIPEG

#### ✉ Reader declines to fund 'worldly' church organization

Re: *Canadian Mennonite's* Nov. 24 "Equip to connect" fundraising appeal letter.

As I read your fundraising letter, I think that a prediction I heard from a Mennonite elder has come to pass. His observation was that the further the church entered into issues of the world, the more worldly it will become, losing its way among the players vying for its attention. At that point, the Gospel becomes secondary to issues and a diversion from the Word.

I believe you are now seeing the results of these actions, as churches are dividing and funds are dwindling. I also believe that the gate is closing behind you, and there is no way up the slippery slope the Mennonite church is on.

I cannot in good conscience contribute to what I see is a departure from the church I used to know and love.

LARRY KRAUSE, CHRISTOPHER LAKE, SASK.

*The writer is a member of Eigenheim Mennonite Church, Rosthern, Sask.*

#### ✉ My walker is not a conversation starter

Re: "An on-ramp to welcome," Oct. 31, page 13.

I appreciated Bonita Sawatzky's personal reflection. In recent years, my physical limitations have required me to use a walker. What an eye opener this has been.

Having worked with seniors most of my adult life, I thought I knew what it is like to navigate life with a walker or wheelchair. How wrong I was! Navigating life with a walker is a challenge every time I go out.

I want to add to what Sawatzky said by issuing a caution to people about their conversations with people who use walkers and wheelchairs. Please do not expect people like me to give a detailed account of my limitations and problems.

People have said to me, "I am wondering why you are using a walker. You don't look like you need one," or "You don't look sick." How am I to respond?

My plea is to be treated like everyone else. Talk about the same sorts of things you would with anyone else. I get tired of talking about my health issues and limitations. I am more than that, and I



long to have “normal” conversations.

RUTH A. MARTIN, DUTTON, ONTARIO

✉ **Mennonites hampered by ‘a tradition of insularity and self-protection’**

Re: “Queer theology pushes beyond inclusion,” Nov. 28, page 15.

Surely a part of our hesitation about being hospitable to different people can be attributed to centuries of over-sensitivity or misinterpretation of what it means to be “not of this world.”

Keeping our “not-of-this-world” enclaves “pure” has resulted not only in the hardening of boundaries, but in an inordinate fear that change threatens. The examples are many, one being the imagined connection between left-handedness and the occult that made us willing to practise a forced form of reorientation therapy—often with the strap—on a percentage of the population. Rubber tires, new hairstyles and mode of dress have, in their times, raised alarm bells and often unbelievably destructive reactions.

This is not to say that these examples are equivalent to sexual and gender queerness. I only mean that we are hampered in our ability to approach queer differences humanely by a tradition of insularity.

A lifetime being lived by someone whose gender or sexual preference doesn’t match the traditional, safe pattern of the “not-of-this-world” community is threatening. Related, I’d say, is our history of banning or not banning persons deemed threatening to the traditional order, this reflected in our age in the ambivalence about membership boundaries.

A time may come, I hope, when being queer is responded to like being left-handed. Which hand you write with is of no significance; what you write is both significant and interesting, however, as it is for all of us.

GEORGE EPP (ONLINE COMMENT)

**Be in Touch**

- Send letters to [letters@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:letters@canadianmennonite.org). Our mailing address is on page 3.
- Please keep it concise and respectful. Any substantial edits to letters will be done in consultation with the writer.
- If you have feedback not intended for publication, please contact [editor@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:editor@canadianmennonite.org) or at 1-800-378-2524 ext 5.



Offering private investment and wealth management services to individuals, business owners, multi-generational families and charities for over 30 years.

Investment Management | Financial Planning | Insurance Solutions | Estate Planning | Business Strategy

519-725-2006 | [www.ebyfinancial.com](http://www.ebyfinancial.com)



**Student residence Montreal**

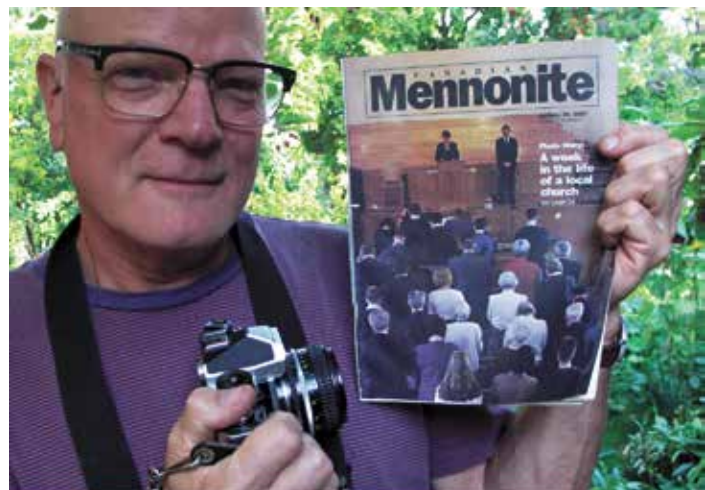
Summer guest rooms available May-August

[maisondelamitie.ca](http://maisondelamitie.ca)  
[experience@maisondelamitie.ca](mailto:experience@maisondelamitie.ca)



**News about Mennonites in Canada and beyond**

SIGN UP FREE  
[canadianmennonite.org/subscribe/cmnow](http://canadianmennonite.org/subscribe/cmnow)

**Equip us to serve**

Your gift today opens new relationships, moves us forward, and creates the space for, as editor Will Braun calls them, “beautiful stories of faith within our pews and around the world.”

You can equip us to serve the church and we value your partnership.

**Donate today**  
[canadianmennonite.org](http://canadianmennonite.org)

**CANADIAN MENNONITE**

## /// Milestones

### Births/Adoptions

**Cressman**—Hope Marie (b. Nov. 13, 2022), to Mark and Shannon Cressmen, Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

**Wickstrom**—Claire Lilian (b. Nov. 14, 2022), to Eric and Susie Wickstrom, First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

### Weddings

**Loewen/Stephure**—Rob Loewen (Bergthal Mennonite, Didsbury, Alta.) and Anne-Marie Stephure, at Pasu Farms, Cremona, Alta., Oct. 29, 2022.

### Deaths

**Bobyk**—Karen, 80 (b. June 4, 1942; d. Oct. 23, 2022), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

**Dorsch**—Victor Albert, 94 (b. Nov. 12, 1927; d. Oct. 25, 2022), Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

**Cressman**—Pauline, 82 (b. Aug. 25, 1940; d. Oct. 16, 2022), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

**Derksen**—Ruth (Wiebe), 95 (b. Feb. 6, 1927; d. Oct. 14, 2022), Zion Mennonite, Swift Current, Sask.

**Harder**—Irma (nee Epp), 91 (b. Nov. 3, 1930; d. Oct. 25, 2022), Charleswood Mennonite, Winnipeg.

**Horst**—Eileen, 96 (b. Feb. 14, 1926; d. Oct. 29, 2022), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

**Kornelsen**—Leila (nee Schellenberg), 85 (b. Feb. 26, 1937; d. Oct. 27, 2022), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

**Pauls**—John, 106 (b. April 27, 1916; d. Nov. 7, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

## /// Paid obituary

### George Groening

March 23, 1918 to September 15, 2022

After a lifetime of devotion to his wife of 78 years, Nettie, and their four daughters; many rewarding years of service as an ordained minister to the Mennonite Church and General Conference of Mennonites on both the local and national level; and many happy years of retirement, when he was able to enjoy gardening, drawing and endless hours of reading, as well as spending meaningful time with his children and grandchildren, at the tender age of 104, our beloved Dad succumbed to his proud battle with the indignities of aging and four-and-a-half years in long-term care (LTC), with his loving Nettie by his side. The last two-and-a-half years in LTC was made all the worse by the impact of COVID on the elderly and the heartbreaking isolation and loneliness caused by COVID restrictions that were imposed on the elderly in LTC, and which continue today! Left to grieve our Dad are his wife, Nettie, three daughters and three sons-in-law, Peter Engbrecht, Joanna Buhr (John), Marlee Groening (Peter Gibson), Gwen Groening, as well as five grandchildren and seven great grandchildren: Tim (Esther) Engbrecht (Shael and Ivy), Crista Buhr (Hanna, Adison and Julia), Jonathan Engbrecht (Catherine MacDonald), Shauna Buhr (Colton and Ryder) and Miranda Groening Gibson. George was predeceased by his eldest daughter, Grace Engbrecht (2019), Carla (1964), 11 siblings and parents. A memorial service was held on Sept. 22, 2022, at Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Man., with interment prior to the service at the Rose Farm Cemetery near Lowe Farm, Man. A second memorial service took place on Nov. 26, 2022, at Eden Mennonite Church in Chilliwack, B.C. As a family, we want to acknowledge and thank the special staff of West 1 at the Menno Home in Abbotsford, B.C., who provided care with tenderness and compassion to our beloved Dad! In lieu of flowers, we invite you to donate to the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) or the Alzheimer Society of B.C.



**2021 IMPACT:**

3,393	74	114	343	5
VOLUNTEERS	NEW HOMES	REPAIRS	CLEANUPS	NEW BRIDGES

You can be the hands and feet of Jesus for disaster survivors by volunteering or donating to MDS!

[www.mds.org](http://www.mds.org) | 866-261-1274

## FROM OUR LEADERS

# Jesus doesn't stop where we think he should

Ryan Dueck

I've probably preached half a dozen sermons on "Doubting Thomas" over the last decade or so. Thomas shows up faithfully in the lectionary readings each year after Easter Sunday. Thomas, the recalcitrant empiricist.

There are many of us, I suspect, who silently nod along with Thomas each year. Thomas is our guy; he thinks for himself. Sermons on Thomas in our context tend to fall into some well-worn grooves. Thomas's story is in our Bibles to show that doubt is a part of the life of faith, that it's not a sign of failure or weakness, or that Jesus meets us in our doubt. All of this is gloriously true, so far as it goes.

But it doesn't go far enough. Jesus has this tendency to rarely stop where we think he should. He says more than "Peace be with you," to Thomas, after all. He also says, "Do not doubt, but believe."

This pattern shows up all over the gospels. To the woman caught in adultery Jesus says, "Where are your accusers?" and, "Neither do I condemn

you." And we cheer him on while he puts those insufferable religious men in their place. But Jesus doesn't stop there. He follows it up with, "Go and leave your life of sin." Doesn't Jesus understand gender and power dynamics?

Jesus lovingly invites the paralytic by the pool of Bethesda to take up his mat and walk. But a few verses later, he adds, "Do not sin any more so that nothing worse happens to you." Come on, Jesus, give the dude a break. He's been dragging his broken body down to a pool for four decades. How much opportunity for sin has he had?

Similar themes show up in Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well, Nicodemus and others. The pattern doesn't fit every situation or interaction,

**If Christianity ever ceases to be about belief... the church will become an 'object of pity.'**

but it does point to a trend. Jesus so often refuses to stop where we think he should.

So, this year, I decided not to stop before Jesus does in the story of Thomas. I told my congregation, and myself, to stop doubting and believe.

I'm all for the ethics and example of Jesus. I'm all for the Jesus who was for the poor and the downtrodden. I'm all for the Jesus who heals and meets us in our weakness and faithlessness, offering tenderness, compassion, kindness and love.

But I'm also all for a robust conviction that the crucified and risen Christ anchors all the above. If Christianity ever ceases to be about belief in the hope and the life that radiated out of the discovery of that empty tomb, then I think the church will become, as Paul said, an "object of pity."

There is no shortage of political and social agendas out there. What cannot be found elsewhere is forgiveness, mercy and enduring hope. We need to hear the truth about who we are and who God is. We need to believe. We need to remember that it's unwise to stop before Jesus does. ☿



Ryan Dueck serves as pastor of Lethbridge (Alta.) Mennonite Church. He writes at [ryandueck.com](http://ryandueck.com).

## A moment from yesterday



Vern Ratzlaff, centre, worked much of his life within Mennonite institutions in western Canada and internationally, serving as a church pastor, Bible school teacher and radio preacher. From 1982 to 1987, Vern and his wife Helen served as Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) country representatives in Egypt. Bishop Athanasios of the Beni Suef diocese, second from left, told MCC workers that "the time had come to go beyond working together to doing more serious exploring of mutual faith." As a result, in February 1987, Vern participated with other MCC workers and Coptic Orthodox Church members for three days exploring the Book of Ephesians.



## IN THE IMAGE

# 'Stella makes a difference'

Ed Olfert

I have a friend named Stella (a pseudonym), who will soon be 89 years old. She recently informed me that she had just taken delivery of a new car.

I quizzed her about the new car.

"There's no gear shift, just a thing you turn!" she said. "And there's a button to start it! I couldn't get the cruise to work, but I don't think I was doing it right. I asked a friend to help me figure out all the switches, and suddenly the steering wheel was warm!"

Stella is awed by all the new things to learn. Awed, yes, but certainly not overwhelmed. These are challenges that she will confront and master, just like the other challenges that are part of being on the doorstep of her 10th decade.

She has lived an important and full life. She is also a fine storyteller and, as I listen to her recounting the chapters that are good and the chapters that are so very hard, the tears come easily and naturally. So does the laughter, the sense of delight, the sense of wonder at the many things yet to learn, at the wonder of the opportunities set before her.

Until this past year, Stella lived alone in her own house. It's been some years since her partner died, and she finally

decided that it was too much. Now she is in a suite in a condominium, and she chuckles a little sheepishly at the ruckus caused when she left a pot heating on her stove while she went out.

"I asked the caretaker if I would be evicted," she said.

When Stella touches on her stories of loss and grieving, she observes that, while you are in the middle of those hard stories, there is a sense of, "How will I ever survive this?" And yet, from the perspective of great age, her reflection is in the line of, "I guess those things too will pass."

Stella and I rub shoulders frequently when we volunteer at the local food bank. She lifts, carries, heaves, encourages and laughs. When children appear, she is on the scene with treats. When clients show up whom she remembers from decades past, I occasionally see her dancing with them joyfully as they recognize each other.

The food bank is only one avenue where she offers her energy and encouragement. She has a gift, a passion, for encouraging those on the margins. In her paid working life, she was ahead of her time in offering that gift of affirmation and delight to folks on the edge.

There are stories in the Bible—Jeremiah

and Isaiah come to mind—where God's chosen people, even though they find themselves in difficult straits, are encouraged to plant vineyards, to build houses, to live hopeful lives, even when the future seems bleak. The challenge I sense is one of living hopefully into a new reality.

That's the lesson that Stella and the new car represent to me. Stella has important places to go and important things to do, and this new car represents her determination that nothing will stand in her way of getting to those events. Stella makes a difference.

First Nations spirituality and culture remind us of the importance of holding up our elders, recognizing the important lessons gleaned through many decades and many stories, of recognizing the wisdom that is offered out of those rich lives, and then honouring those lives and those folks as having a spiritual blessing to offer.

I have been blessed to have a number of elders in my life, at whose feet I choose to sit in my determination to live well, to live as God challenges me to live.

Thank you, God. Thank you, Stella. ✎



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

## Et cetera

### 1,800 Christians go to West Bank

In the past 20 years, 1,800 Christians from 25 countries have served three-month terms accompanying Palestinians around the West Bank as part of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical Accompaniment Program. Organizers say the need is greater than ever.

Source: World Council of Churches

*Ioan Sauca, WCC's acting general secretary, addresses a recent celebration of the program in Jerusalem.*

WCC PHOTO BY ALBIN HILLERT



## MIND AND SOUL

# Christmas delight?

By Randy Haluza-DeLay

Christmas is a difficult season for many people, myself included. As a Christian, I “should” be celebrating the birth of Jesus. The angels sing of “great joy” as the lowly and the mighty come to bend the knee at the crude bedside of the baby. The Incarnation is what makes Christianity profoundly different from all other religions. We exclaim it as a specific historical event—“The” Incarnation—but also as something that transcends time and cultures.

All this I acknowledge, but I still don’t like Christmas very much.

This column should say something profound. Maybe about the Advent season in Palestine, occupied in 1st and 21st centuries. Or the baby and parents who became refugees. Or reframe Joseph and Mary as José and Maria and tell the story anew (for an evocative image, do an online search for “Everett Patterson, José, Maria”). Instead, I crave a glimpse of “delight.”

Northern Saskatchewan started out mighty cold my first Christmas in Canada. Then the temperature dropped into the -30° range. I headed for the Christmas Eve service at the church up the hill, taking the long way. On went the cross-country skis. I shuffled along

the snowy, nearly empty streets of town, then into the ski trail system. After passing bigger houses lit by the kaleidoscopic brilliance of long strings of glorious colour, I entered the forest under a full moon.

The trail crossed a frozen inlet, then joined a snowmobile track and headed back toward town. The moonlight was diamonds scattered across the crystalline snow, but glistened better than diamonds. As I rounded the corner of the rocky point of land, ahead stood the Anglican Church prominent on the shore. I skied past it, across the road, and up the hill to the Catholic church. I laid the skis and poles at the manger outside and went on in.

All of it was mystical. It felt like being one of the early visitors to see the Christ child. Coming across the desert/lake ice, with celestial light, though bringing only myself as a gift—the Gospel does say we are each a gift of inestimable worth.

Such a contrast too. The diamond snow and the crowded midnight mass full of cheery people and tired children, versus the unpeopled streets with the garish lights on big houses and whatever might be going on inside in private.

I spent Christmas Day opening all the holiday cards sent to me by friends and family back home. I was surrounded by real people incarnated as envelopes filled with love.

There are other memories on this theme of delight. For years I worked at a ski resort in Utah. Once a year, I hit the slopes dressed as Santa. “Daddy, Mommy, loooooo!” said kids, the word drawn out in wonder. “Santa is skiing with us!” I explained that Santa was a bit too full of cookies this Christmas Day and had no hope of falling asleep. What fun for all of us.

Then there was the Christmas in another city and a recommendation to go to Christmas eve service at a nearby mega-church. That service turned out to be as splashy and overwhelming a production as any Las Vegas stage show. The interactive element of the service consisted of holding aloft our electronic wristbands at certain points as the computer signalled them to turn different colours. There was no delight.

Meaning comes in many ways, and often in the still, small, simple ways. The message I hope comes across here is that we can de-light Christmas and have more delight in Christmas. ❧



*Randy Haluza-DeLay lives in Toronto where the skiing, cold and snow do not bring enough delight.*

## Et cetera

### Seattle Mennonite to build 255 housing units

Seattle Mennonite Church is redeveloping its urban property, pictured at right, for affordable housing. In partnership with Community Roots Housing, the church is planning to build two eight-storey buildings that will accommodate approximately 255 affordable housing units, a worship space, offices, classrooms and a kitchen. The church aims to resist the gentrification and homelessness it has witnessed in its surrounding neighbourhood through these affordable housing units, and hopes to create a versatile space others can use and occupy in the rest of the development. The construction project will likely take about two years.

Source: *Anabaptist World*



SEATTLE MENNONITE CHURCH PHOTO

## TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

## Soil lover

Joshua Penfold

**A**s I read through the accounts of the kings in the Bible, Uzziah's story doesn't strike me as being overly unique. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, at least for a while. Eventually, his own power and pride did him in. He overstepped, and it cost him.

He entered the temple to burn incense, something only a Levitical priest is permitted to do, and was afflicted with leprosy the rest of his life. So Uzziah was good for a while, but power got the best of him.

But hidden in the middle of his account is a little line that caught my attention: *"He had people working his fields and vineyards in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil"* (II Chronicles 26:10).

In an otherwise routine and undistinguished kingly account, this line was different, causing me to stop. I don't remember encountering a statement like this anywhere else in scripture. Noah is said to be a man of the soil (Genesis 9:20), and there is plenty about good soil and planting in soil, but I couldn't find anything else about loving the soil.

What does it mean that King Uzziah "loved the soil"? There's a possibility that he loved the soil because, when his

people worked it for him, it produced wealth for him. But I'm not sure that would be loving the soil. That would be loving the wealth or loving what the soil produced.

Uzziah expanded the farmable land and increased the capacity for farming

**I am no king, nor am I a farmer, but I'm learning to love the soil more and more.**

and fertility. The way this is written appears to imply that Uzziah loved gardening. Could he have loved the mystery of growing things in the soil? The demands of Uzziah as king were great, I'm sure, but maybe he was a farmer at heart. At least that's one way to read it.

I am no king, nor am I a farmer, but I'm learning to love the soil more and more. My family have loved gardening over the years to different degrees, and now that we have our own property, a little plot to call our own, we are expanding our gardens. In the summer of 2021, we built and gardened a new

three-metre-square plot in our backyard and established new flower beds along the fence and deck.

This past summer we built a pollinator garden at the side of our house and added some more flowerbeds in the front yard. I love the soil, the life-giving bounty of it. The miracle of it. The mystery of it. It is the source of life. Both plants and creatures depend on it as their home. It is an image of God the Creator, the home and source of our being, our nutrient and dwelling place, the place from which we were made.

The metaphors are endless, and the soil has so much to teach us. The benefits of caring for, nurturing and loving the soil are bountiful. The need to care for the soil goes far beyond my own little backyard; we need to collectively care for all the soil of the Earth and I need to learn much more about that. But I'll start in my backyard. I look forward to getting back into the soil this coming spring to tend to and grow beautiful little miracles. ☼



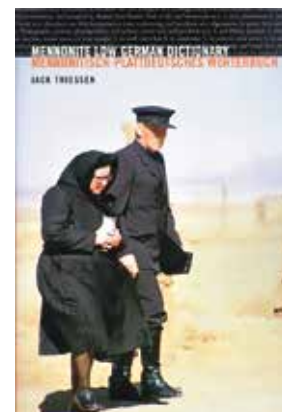
Joshua Penfold can be reached at [penfoldjoshua@gmail.com](mailto:penfoldjoshua@gmail.com).

## Et cetera

## Low German dictionary author dies

Low-German authority Jack Thiessen passed away on Oct. 9. He was born in Grunthal, Man. in 1931 and lived his last days in Grunthal. He has no fewer than 19 books to his name. Perhaps the most well-known is his Mennonite Low German Dictionary, which is the most extensive reference work to date on the vital language of thousands of Mennonites in places as far flung as Russia, Canada and Latin America. Aside from a concise history and grammar of the language, this dictionary contains more than 25,000 entries—from *Äajdatjs* (lizard) to *Zyreen* (siren)—taken from everyday speech, popular sayings and literature. If historian Gerhard Ens is right—that "Mennonites of the Low-German persuasion have no homeland, [but] Low German has become a home where people can move in and out of and express themselves"—Thiessen was a great leader.

Sources: Mennonite Heritage Archives /CommonWord.ca



## BOOK REVIEW

# Hymn reflections inspire and comfort

*These Songs We Sing: Reflections on the Hymns We Have Loved.*

Carla Klassen. Pandora Press, 2022, 214 pages.

Reviewed by Janice Schroeder

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

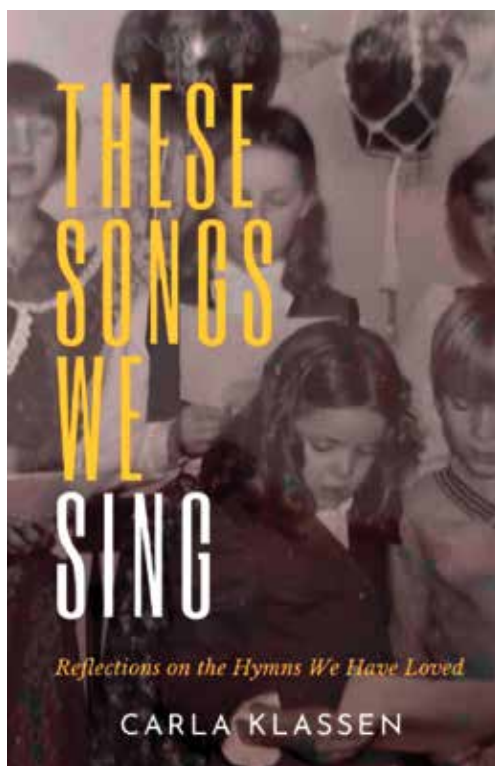
Inspired by J.S. Bach and his prolific contribution to church music, Carla Klassen's *These Songs We Sing* is a lovely collection of 52 short meditations and reflections on favourite hymns.

The book emerged from Klassen's music blog, *The Hymn Project*, for which she created and recorded piano arrangements for these beloved hymns, one every week for a year. Her new book develops some of the accompanying reflections included in the original blog posts, and provides a wonderful companion to the recordings, which are still available online at <https://thehymnproject.net>.

Klassen reflects on a diverse range of hymns, and the spiritual insights and comforts they offer. They range from classics like "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," children's songs such as "Jesus Loves Me," and African American Spirituals ("Were You There?"), to Advent and Christmas hymns, and the Mennonite standard, "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow." Her openness to the beauty and challenges of both music and text in such a wide selection of beloved hymns is one of the book's strengths.

A lifelong singer, piano teacher and church musician who was raised on hymn singing, Klassen could simply have chosen 52 of her own favourites for her blog and book. Instead, she collected suggestions of cherished hymns from family and friends.

*These Songs We Sing* laces together



Klassen's own memories and relationship to some of the hymns with the personal stories and recollections of others in her circle. For example, we learn that the arrangement of "Holy, Holy, Holy" was suggested by a friend who, as a child, requested it repeatedly in post-service hymn singing, a wish happily indulged by his congregation. In her reflection on this story, Klassen writes, "It's interesting to me how powerful our communities can be; how much they can carry us through our lives; how much they shape the way we interact with the world."

As her collection demonstrates, hymn singing is for many an integral link between individuals and their faith communities, the wider world and the divine.

Most of the entries in *These Songs We Sing* centre on a theme suggested by each hymn, such as peace, beauty, hope, faith or grace. The collection loosely follows the church year, and occasionally refers to contemporary events that might have influenced Klassen when she chose a particular hymn to arrange from her list of requests.

One of my favourite parts of the book were the notes Klassen shared about the history of many hymns, and their contexts and legacies. For example, we learn that the text of "Jesus Loves Me" comes from an 1860 poem meant to comfort a dying child; that Charles Wesley wrote something in the neighbourhood of 6,500 hymns in his lifetime; and that the tune of "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" has become the unofficial anthem of Welsh Rugby and was sung at Princess Diana's funeral.

It is fascinating to consider the kinds of experiences—many of them tragic—that inspired so many familiar hymns, whether we are aware or not. The ability of tune and verse to travel across centuries and between hearts, is amazing: God's Spirit at work.

Klassen's book is a treasure trove of lively writing, wise insight, personal stories, and loving celebration of the power of sacred music and singing together. No one will be able to read this without silently humming the tunes of the hymns. Best of all, you can read a chapter, then search Klassen's piano arrangement on her blog and listen to her beautiful music. I would suggest this book, read together with the recordings, as a weekly devotional to inspire and comfort you throughout the year. ❧

*Jan Schroeder is a member of Ottawa Mennonite Church and a professor of English at Carleton University in Ottawa.*

## NEWS

# Meet MC Canada's new moderator, Geraldine Balzer

By Emily Summach  
Saskatchewan Correspondent



**G**eraldine Balzer, a member of Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, was elected moderator of Mennonite Church Canada in July, replacing Calvin Quan, who served in the role for six years. We asked her to share about her life and vision. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**Emily Summach:** *Where did you grow up?*

**Geraldine Balzer:** On a farm outside Mayfair, Sask.

**ES:** *What do you remember about growing up?*

**GB:** I was a farm kid, so I remember lots of independent outdoor time. I also spent lots of time with books; I was a reader. I remember being annoyed when the work of gardening or farm tasks took time away from reading. I was sort of a nerd in a community where “nerding” wasn’t welcome.

I also have fond memories of the church—one of those spaces that was always there, always felt part of my life.

**ES:** *What authors have influenced you most?*

**GB:** Barbara Kingsolver. Ann Patchett. Recently, I’ve been reading Fredrik Backman. I like books that challenge me to rethink the way I see the world, books that are hard.

**ES:** *Which musicians or other artists have influenced you?*

**GB:** I grew up in the era of folk music, so I’m very attached to that ’70s folk-music genre. Carly Simon, Bob Dylan, Bruce Cockburn. I also like female indie artists, and Canadian artists. Songs that tell stories, sometimes fun, sometimes about hard things, songs about social change and social justice.

**ES:** *Is there a Bible verse that is particularly on your mind these days?*

**GB:** Micah 6:8: “. . . do justice, love mercy, walk humbly . . . .” If I ever was going to get a tattoo of a Bible verse, I would get that. It encapsulates the way I want to live in the world.

**ES:** *Do you have children? Grandchildren?*

**GB:** Two daughters. Two granddaughters.

**ES:** *Pets?*

**GB:** I have a standard poodle, Zephyr. Zephyr means “west wind,” so it felt appropriate for a prairie animal.

**ES:** *Hobbies?*

**GB:** Quilting. Needlework. I like walking, especially with my dog. Cooking.

**ES:** *Anything else you think readers might be interested in knowing about you?*

**GB:** I spent 14 years living in Canada’s Arctic, in small Inuit communities. Those 14 years shaped my understanding of Indigenous issues, my role as an instrument of colonialism, and my sense of the church. I worshipped in an Anglican church because that’s what was there. We worshipped in English and Inuinnaqtun. I worshipped with people who were understanding Christianity from a very different place than I had.

Those 14 years significantly shaped the work that I do now and, I hope, shaped the way I think about MC Canada and the way the church is situated in the world.

**ES:** *What excites you about the church?*

**GB:** I think we are coming through a really hard time. I think that hard times can make the future more exciting. COVID-19 interrupted life for everybody, which really gives us an opportunity to think about what church is like, going to be like, and what we hold as important. That’s exciting to me—thinking about what may be.

[I’m] excited about the way MC Canada is looking at the intercultural church, who the church body is, and the standard notion of who Mennonites are.

We’re grappling with social issues in different ways, too. Instead of only bringing our hands to the poor, we’re doing the mind work of asking, “Why are they poor? Why are they marginalized? How do we understand the place of Indigenous people in Canada and the world? How has what we’ve been taught perpetuated colonialism?” These are big questions to ask ourselves as a church. I doubt there will be clear answers, but the questions are important.

**ES:** *What do you see as the primary challenges facing MC Canada?*

**GB:** Growing leadership, as we see shifting dynamics in our churches and leaders. Where are our emerging leaders going to come from? What will that new leadership look like? Is it going to look like the structures we’ve had, or different? It’s not as easy as it once was to find pastoral leadership, so how do we nurture leadership?

I think we will continue to grapple with the world of witness and the history of colonialism. How can we be witnesses without perpetuating colonialism or other harms?

Also, how we work with Mennonite churches globally.

Finance is always tied into everything, so how to build a vision that people see and want to invest in. The Indigenous and settler relations piece too. . . . A lot has been done by way of exploring and understanding how we’ve been complicit in so many harms. Now, I think the question is how do we work on healing those relationships?

Climate change, too, which is both a national and global issue. So many questions that impact our daily lives in so many ways. Questions that are not theological, but also deeply theological. ❧



# Mennonites prod government on Palestinian concerns

By Emma Siemens  
CM Intern

Christian Palestinians have asked the global church to stand with them, and Mennonites in Canada have now asked their government to do the same.

In September, Mennonite Church Canada's Palestine-Israel Network (PIN) sent a letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mélanie Joly, the minister of foreign affairs, calling the government to consistency in its stance on Palestine and Israel.

"As people of faith, we know there is a new world coming, and we know that God wants peace and reconciliation," says Byron Rempel-Burkholder, PIN's chair, in an interview. "We keep trying to be a witness to that vision."

- **The letter** calls on Canada to support ongoing and future investigations into infractions of international law in Palestine and Israel, regarding the safety and freedom of journalists.

- **As Canada** has condemned Amnesty International's report identifying Israel as an apartheid state, the letter calls on Canada to support Israel in starting "renewed, good-faith negotiations" with Palestinians for "equal rights, dignity and self-determination."

- **The letter** urges the Canadian government to address reports of inhumane incarceration of children, by monitoring the treatment of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention.



PHOTO BY BYRON AND MELITA REMPEL-BURKHOLDER

*Present-day Old Bethlehem.*

The letter includes four calls to action:

- **As Canada's** policy names Israeli settlements as an "obstacle to peace," the letter calls the government to restructure the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement to prevent the importation of goods from the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

a nationwide leadership group and four regional church groups.

Mennonite ties to Palestine date back 73 years, and MC Canada has ongoing connections with Palestinian Christians.

Over the past six years, PIN has formed and strengthened connections with Christian Palestinian groups, Independent Jewish Voices and other secular parties

working for justice in Palestine-Israel.

Rempel-Burkholder, who lived in Bethlehem for three months in 2016, says that these connections, along with the 2016 resolution and Anabaptist values in general, are what inspire and guide the group's work, including the September letter.

"As a Christian community, we stand with each other in our suffering," he says. "The Palestinian church asks us to support them, and so we've responded to that call" For him, "that's where Anabaptist values of community come into it."

Referencing the "Kairos Document," a landmark 2009 communique from Palestinian Christians, Rempel-Burkholder emphasizes that Palestinian sisters and brothers are saying they "want to be grounded in the love of God, not only for Palestinians, but also for Israelis, and part of loving is to speak truth to power."

In that context, the good news is holistic. "We're trying to be agents of good news and transformation," he says. "But not a good news that is separated from peace and justice."

The Palestine-Israel Network was established as a working group within MC Canada after a resolution on the matter was passed at the 2016 delegate assembly. The resolution acknowledged the injustice suffered by Palestinians under Israel's military occupation and committed the nationwide church to work for justice in the region.

The working group is comprised of a

Advocating at the federal level is part of PIN's work. While the Canadian government hasn't responded to the network's letter, the group has connected with multiple members of parliament. Government officials also did not respond to *Canadian Mennonite's* request for comment.

"That's where we need more of a groundswell," says Rempel-Burkholder. Without broader help in contacting government, the justice PIN is seeking "isn't going to make its way into government policy."

He encourages Mennonites in Canada to write to politicians, learn more about Palestine-Israel, and participate in learning tours. He also encourages Mennonites to get involved socially, by getting to know Palestinians in their communities and attending public events and protests.

"We're hoping [that] with this persistent 'kicking at the darkness,' there'll be some light and some change," he says. "At times it seems futile, but we know we're on the right side of history, so we just keep working at it." ❧

Read the PIN letter at [mennonitechurch.ca/pin](http://mennonitechurch.ca/pin).



# Mennonites address domestic violence

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe  
Manitoba Correspondent

Research shows that rates of domestic abuse are just as prevalent in religious communities, and even higher in more conservative forms of religion, says Val Peters Hiebert, assistant coordinator of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Manitoba's Abuse Response and Prevention Program, which helps congregations navigate disclosures of abuse and cases of sexual misconduct by clergy.

Hiebert and Jaymie Friesen, the program's other coordinator, develop policies for churches to follow during these processes and offer preventative education workshops around Manitoba. They also offer victim-survivors support groups, a resource library

and referrals to other services.

Hiebert became interested in researching domestic violence while teaching at a Christian university. When she covered the topic in her courses, countless students disclosed to her their experiences of abuse.

"At that point I thought, is this just anecdotal, or what's going on here?" she says. "I started digging around the research and realized: 'Wow, this is a really significant issue that doesn't get a lot of coverage.'"

People often assume domestic violence isn't a problem in their context if they don't hear about it.

"That's just not the case," Friesen said in a 2020 interview with Mennonite Church

Canada. "If you're not hearing about the impacts of abuse on people's lives, what that actually says is the church isn't a safe place to talk about abuse."

The reality is, telling someone about domestic abuse is extremely difficult. These experiences stay hidden behind closed doors because survivors fear being doubted and ostracized, or because they are pressured to keep quiet.

People don't want to believe the accusations made against someone they know and love, like a parent or grandparent, Hiebert says, especially in religious contexts, where the institution of family is venerated. Others find justification in Scripture, pointing to

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LYNDA TOEWS

*This image—entitled "Before Grace"—and the one opposite—entitled "Endless Cycle"—tell of artist Lynda Toews' experience growing up in a violent home. They were part of the exhibit, 'Breaking the Silence on Domestic Abuse,' at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery a year ago.*



passages that say women should submit to their husbands, or in church structures, in which men occupy leadership roles.

This was the case for Gloria Froese, a victim of domestic abuse from the age of six until she was over 18. She was born to a Mennonite father and German mother, and grew up mostly in Steinbach, Man., attending the fundamentalist Church of God Restoration. Although the church is not formally affiliated with Mennonites, many adherents come from conservative Mennonite backgrounds.

“The next nine years were basically hell on earth,” Froese says of the routine abuse that intensified when her family joined the congregation. Any disobedience or distasteful behaviour was considered rebellion against God, and resulted in physical and verbal beatings, she says. No matter how hard she tried to be perfect, she says she couldn’t avoid the regular spankings, which created bruises sometimes stretching from her shoulders to her ankles. She now lives with chronic fatigue syndrome, which she attributes to the trauma of these years.

She remained silent because she was taught to fear the evil outside world and believe nowhere else would be as good.

“The insular nature of it is probably the most problematic, that’s shutting out the world of being different and perpetuating this silence,” she says.

The extreme, secluded context of Froese’s experiences may not be familiar to many people, but its themes are more common. In small communities, where everyone’s lives are closely intertwined, the unspoken social pressure to not cause turbulence is heavy.

“It’s difficult work because abuse in the home is so hidden,” Hiebert says. “And people inside those homes have lots of motivations to continue to hide it, because it’s shaming, it damages the reputation of the church or the family. But that silence actually perpetuates it. How do we find ways to carefully and gently but firmly address that these kinds of things are going on in homes and we really need to talk about that?”

It’s increasingly important that victim-survivors are offered safe environments, people and resources. Rates of domestic violence rose during the COVID-19 pandemic, as everyone was confined to their homes and isolated from each other.

MCC’s Abuse Response and Prevention Program launched an updated website in

2020 and, earlier this year, the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery hosted the exhibit, “Breaking the Silence on Domestic Violence,” which aimed to bring the issue of domestic abuse to the wider public.

The Mennonite church and broader Christian church need to talk more about domestic abuse so the topic is normalized, Froese says, adding that education is key.

Hiebert agrees, emphasizing pastors’ needs for training and access to external resources and assistance. “Most pastors of the Protestant evangelical tradition don’t receive any training in their seminary degrees about how to respond to domestic violence,” she says. “So pastors, who are typically overworked . . . often overtaxed and exhausted, then are dealing with situations for which they have no training.”

Friesen and Hiebert are co-teaching an intensive course at Canadian Mennonite University this coming spring, from May 8 to 12, entitled, “Power, Ethics, Abuse and Church Leadership,” which will explore healthy pastoral relationships, responsible stewardship of power, and healing-centred practices for responding to domestic violence experienced by congregants. ❧



# Rockets, rosebushes and relief

*Ukrainians receive MCC supplies*

By Jason Dueck

Mennonite Central Committee

**B**efore the fighting escalated in Ukraine this year, Nadiya O.\* and her husband lived near the city of Uman, Ukraine. Together, they grew a vegetable garden and kept bees, selling their honey to make extra cash. But shortly after the conflict worsened, her husband died from a heart attack.

Then Russian military bombing destroyed their home, burning most of the beehives they had tended together. The ones that remain still stand, empty and quiet. An unexploded rocket lies buried in what used to be their garden, among the rosebushes. In Ukrainian, the name Nadiya means “hope,” but her situation left little to be hopeful for.

But a measure of hope found its way to

Nadiya O. when a container of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) canned meat, comforters and other relief items were distributed through MCC partner Uman Help Centre.

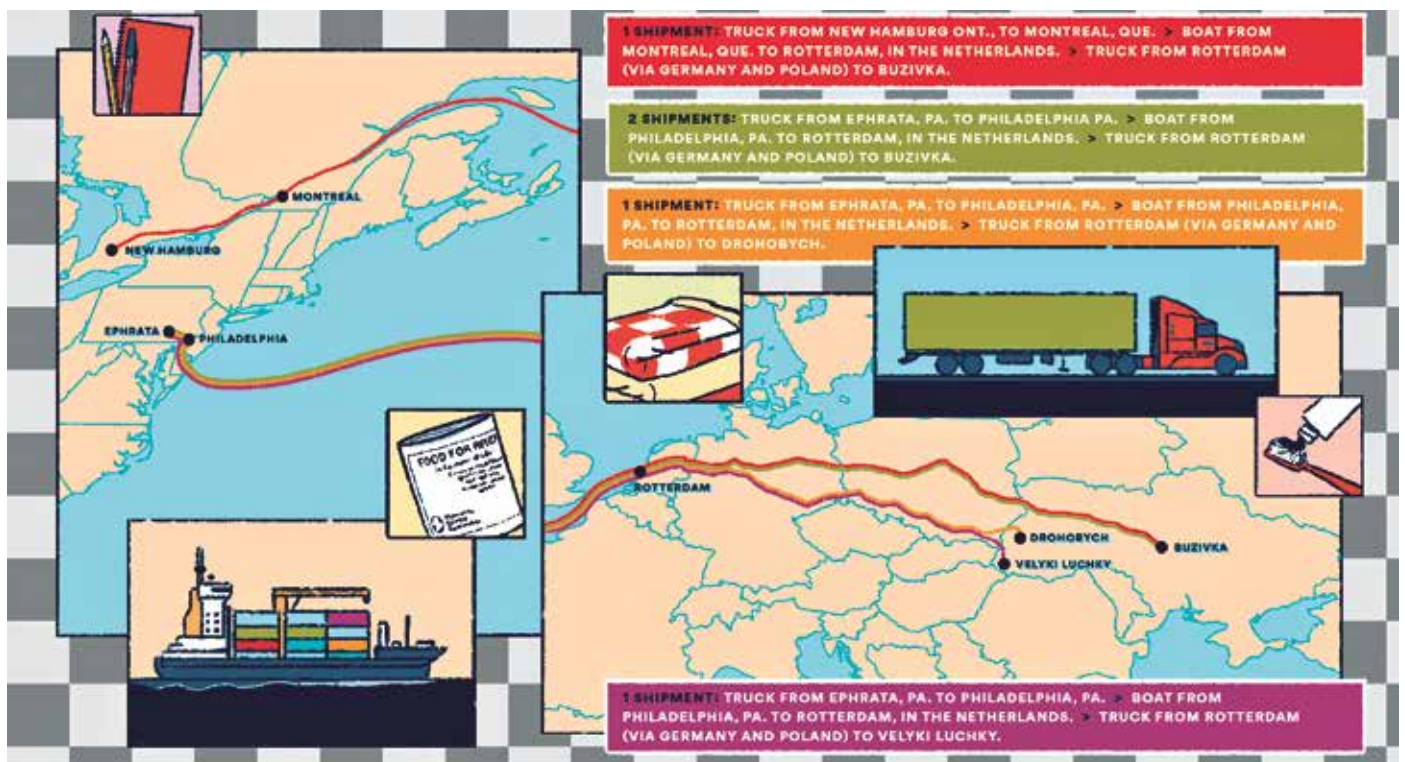
The container that arrived in Uman was one of five shipped to Ukraine by MCC, each loaded with items such as relief kits, hygiene kits, infant care kits, comforters and canned meat. Shipping routes into Ukraine have been majorly disrupted by the conflict. Before fighting escalated, MCC relief supplies could be sent by container ship to the Port of Odesa in southern Ukraine directly, but these containers had to make a much longer journey overland.

Using contents from the five containers,

MCC partners in Uman, Kharkiv, Nikopol and a few other places distributed emergency supplies to more than 16,000 people.

Nadiya T.\*, program coordinator for MCC in Ukraine, says that a lot of attention is paid to who receives the supplies, to make sure they reach the people most in need. “The recipients of material resources are the most vulnerable groups, the people who are in the most critical need. People whose homes were destroyed. People who lost their jobs, the elderly people with small pension benefits and people living with disabilities.”

Donating material resources isn’t the only way MCC donors are responding to the needs in Ukraine. Donations to



MCC GRAPHIC

*A visual graphic depicting the journey that five containers full of MCC relief items made over land and water to arrive in Ukraine earlier this year.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF UMAN HELP CENTRE

**An unexploded rocket still lies in the garden of Nadiya O.'s destroyed home near Uman, Ukraine.**

MCC's Ukraine response totalled US\$9.7 million at the end of July. These generous gifts have provided survival essentials, fuel, comforters, child protection and counselling support to more than 22,000 people. Thousands more received food and emergency kits from the supply shipments.

But Nadiya T. says there's something more intangible that the support has provided—the same measure of hope that Nadiya O. felt.

"Ukraine is facing a humanitarian catastrophe," says Nadiya T. "So many people in Ukraine are still suffering, and they feel helpless in the face of circumstances they cannot control. The fighting has been going on for months, people get tired and discouraged. Ukrainians need to know that they're not alone in this, and that they're supported, that there are people around the world who are not indifferent to the suffering. Please keep praying for us. And please keep supporting Ukrainians in the ways you can. Every prayer and every bit of assistance is very meaningful and much appreciated." ❧

*\* The villages and last names of the people quoted are not provided for security reasons.*

*To hear more from Nadiya T. about the experiences of displaced people in Ukraine, listen to her episode of MCC's Relief, Development and Podcast at [mcccanada.ca/relief-development-podcast](http://mcccanada.ca/relief-development-podcast).*



## Award supports students from House of Friendship programs

Conrad Grebel University College  
WATERLOO, ONT.

**F**or two high school students who connect to House of Friendship (HoF) programs in Waterloo Region, a substantial grant from the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation will make the dream of a Grebel residence experience and a University of Waterloo degree a reality.

Youth from community centres and family resource programs run by HoF might not consider applying to UWaterloo if they can't afford it. Even if they are able to cover tuition, living in residence is often out of the question.

The House of Friendship Leadership Scholarship will cover four years of tuition and related fees, including co-op, books and supplies, and will enable students to live for two years at Grebel. It will also fund two work terms in a HoF program.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CONRAD GREBEL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

**For two high school students who connect to House of Friendship programs in Waterloo Region, a substantial grant from the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation will make the dream of a Grebel residence experience and a University of Waterloo degree a reality.**

"The idea is to promote the possibility of post-secondary education in families that may not consider it because of the related costs," says Fred Martin, Grebel's director of advancement. "We want to give youth something to shoot for and encourage them to volunteer to improve

their leadership experience so they can qualify for this generous award. Getting good grades is also part of the equation, as they need to be accepted to a UWaterloo program."

Grebel's new strategic plan includes a commitment to increase needs-based financial assistance.

"This new award is a great step towards this goal," says Marcus Shantz, Grebel's president, noting that the college currently distributes close to \$500,000 in student awards per year and regularly welcomes refugee students through World University Students Canada.

"This is a dream come true for youth in our communities," says Dauda Raji, HoF's community development manager. "We have so many young leaders in the

communities we serve who are brimming with potential, and this will help them overcome the financial challenges they face. We know that lives will be changed as a result of the House of Friendship Leadership Scholarship—and we can't wait to witness that."

"Our student services team is excited to see how this scholarship award will expand our community," says Beverley Fretz, Grebel's director of student services. "We believe this comprehensive award will attract people to Grebel who may not have otherwise been able to be a part of the community."

"We are really happy to partner with Grebel and the University of Waterloo to make an impact in the communities where House of Friendship is working," says Laura Manning of the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation. ❧

# 'A Creative God'

*Documentary and discussion guide consider symbols, bodies and belonging in sacred spaces*

Mennonite Church Canada

A new group of resources on visual arts in worship is available from Together in Worship, an online collection of worship resources from Anabaptist sources. The centrepiece is "A Creative God," a 45-minute video documentary about how seven intercultural Anabaptist congregations use visual art in worship.

"Mennonites have been starved, historically, of visual art in worship, and artists themselves have not often been given appreciable space within our circles," says Arlyn Friesen Epp, who is director of CommonWord and a member of the Together in Worship leadership team that shepherded the "A Creative God" resource.

"I'm grateful for this set of resources, which opens the conversation about visual art in worship from a variety of intercultural Anabaptist perspectives, and affirms art and the work of the artist as expressions of God's creativity. This will find resonance among many in our Mennonite Church Canada family," he says.

Students from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) and Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) conducted interviews with four congregations in Pennsylvania and three in Virginia. The film focuses on different ways visual art impacts worship, from creating space and healing to creating belonging without words. The resources also include an accompanying discussion guide to the documentary, a discussion-guide orientation and a nine-minute webinar presentation.

"We believed the selected congregations had insights to share with the broader church about creating worship spaces that welcome all who want to participate," says Rebecca Slough, professor emerita of

worship and arts at AMBS. Slough co-produced the film with Jerry Holsopple, professor of visual and communication arts at EMU.

"[These resources] are designed to inspire the imaginations of congregations who are ready to explore how the visual dimensions of worship might expand

opportunities to contribute to the worship life of the congregation.

- **Congregational practices** are enhanced, enriched and changed through the presence and use of familiar images and artifacts from cultures represented in the congregation.



YOUTUBE SCREEN SHOT

their relationship with God and with each other," the Together in Worship release reads.

In the discussion guide orientation, Slough and Holsopple outline six key lessons from the project:

- **The visual art** and visual elements of congregational life are tangible. They engage our bodies in some way and create a shared storied place.
- **Images, symbols** and colours that have cultural significance communicate respect and a feeling of belonging for people of that cultural identity.
- **People on the edges** of the church have

• **Congregational art** projects provide means for building relationships among congregational participants and create work that can be contemplated. These artworks help congregations see who they are and what they are becoming.

- **Visual arts** in congregational worship create pathways to God. ✎

*The resources are available at [togetherinworship.net](http://togetherinworship.net) and at [commonword.ca](http://commonword.ca).*



*With files from Together in Worship.*

# Volunteers respond to Hurricane Fiona

*More are needed as MDS transitions to roof repairs*

Story and Photo by John Longhurst

Mennonite Disaster Service  
GLACE BAY, NOVA SCOTIA

**A**s hurricanes go, Fiona wasn't as bad as some when it hit Atlantic Canada—just lots of trees blown down into yards, and shingles and siding blown off houses.

Unless it was your tree, your yard or your roof and siding. Then it was a very big deal. That's how Nick Hamm sees it.

"It's amazing how little structural damage there was," says Hamm, who is directing the Mennonite Disaster Services (MDS) early response in Glace Bay on Cape Breton Island. "But for those who can't afford to get rid of the fallen trees or fix their roofs, it's a big challenge."

Until the end of October, most of the work was tree removal. "I think we may have cut up and removed as many as 400 trees," he says.

The trees were knocked down by winds

of up to 140 kilometres an hour on Sept. 24, when the hurricane struck Nova Scotia. They lie scattered around the town. Hardly a block hasn't been affected.

Although that was over a month ago, it will take a long time for all the trees to be removed and roofs repaired.

"Many people feel forgotten," says Hamm, a member of the MDS Ontario Unit who came to Cape Breton to assist the Atlantic Canada Unit with the response. "They saw all the activity right after the storm, and now worry no one will help them remove their fallen trees or fix their roofs," he said.

Of special concern to MDS are seniors, people who are disabled or who have health issues, and those with limited resources.

"That's who MDS focuses on," says

Hamm. "We have a heart for those who, for whatever reason, can't help themselves."

This includes people like Johnny Parson, whose house was damaged in the storm.

Parson, a senior, suffered a heart attack last April. "I was playing hockey in a seniors league," he says. "I stepped on the ice and collapsed. Fortunately, there was a paramedic in the arena who saved my life."

A week later, Parson, a retired electrician and trucker, was in the hospital getting a triple bypass.

"Now I have to take it easy," he says while puttering around in his garage. "I'm frustrated I can't do anything."

Parson was able to hire a company to replace his roof, which was blown off in the storm.

"I had to pay for it myself," he says, noting it is impossible to buy insurance in his neighbourhood, called New Aberdeen, a collection of old, former mine-owned company houses.

"The insurance companies won't provide it in my area. They decided it's too risky."

While the roof is back on Parson's meticulously maintained two-storey house, there is still work that needs to be done on the fascia and siding.

That's where Frank Guenther, a member of an Old Colony Mennonite church near Aylmer, Ont., was at work high up on a ladder.

"People here appreciate what MDS is doing," says Parson as he watched Guenther doing repairs. "No, appreciate isn't the right word. We are grateful for what MDS is doing."

Across the street, volunteers George Enns and Frank Klassen, also from the Old Colony church near Aylmer, were working on Gerald Fukala's roof.

Before the hurricane, Fukala, a senior who has health issues, had three holes in his roof. "Now I have nine," he says. "Fiona added a few more."

For Hamm, who has been serving as a volunteer with MDS for 17 years, helping people like Parson and Fukala is the reason for his involvement.

"We're here because we feel called to be the hands and feet of Jesus," he says. "As Christians, we want to show love of Christ to our neighbours. That's what it's all about." ❧



MDS volunteer Frank Guenther works on Johnny Parson's house in Glace Bay, N.S.



PHOTO BY JESSICA EVANS

*This Thanksgiving, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Alberta hosted a bucket-packing event called 'Buckets of Thanks.' These 23-litre pails are filled with essential hygiene items, also known as a relief kit. The buckets are sent all around the world providing essential items to people and families in need. On Oct. 15, Alex Heidebrecht and daughter Aria joined the MCC Alberta office event that packed buckets heading to Jordan. Participants were encouraged to sign up to receive notifications to follow their buckets on their journey through pictures and updates.*

## News brief

### Top 10 ministries



PHOTO COURTESY OF MCC PARTNER KECEB

*Ukrainian volunteers help distribute relief supplies.*

Every year, Charity Intelligence Canada (CIC) assesses more than 800 Canadian charities based on transparency, quality of public reporting, effectiveness and other factors. This year, Mennonite Central Committee Canada and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank ranked in the "Top 100 Rated Charities" overall and the "Top 10 International Impact Charities." In addition, the Foodgrains Bank made the "Top 10 Impact Charities" (not limited to international work). According to the CIC website: "These Top 10 have the highest measurable demonstrated impact. Our calculations estimate this group... delivers average returns of almost seven dollars for every dollar donated, compared with overall average charity returns of only one to two dollars." CIC reports that its website "ranked fourth worldwide in charity analysis and evaluation."

### Top 10 International Impact Charities (in alphabetical order)

- Against Malaria Foundation
- Canadian Foodgrains Bank
- The Citizen's Foundation
- Doctors Without Borders
- Effect Hope
- Farm Radio International
- Lifewater Canada
- Mennonite Central Committee Canada
- Operation Eyesight Universal
- World Vision

—CANADIAN MENNONITE

NIH RESEARCH STUDY



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

*Join A Study!*

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

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



Department of Health & Human Services  
National Institutes of Health



National Institute of Mental Health  
[www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov) Protocol No. 80-M-0083



/// **Staff changes**

**Pastoral transitions in Manitoba**

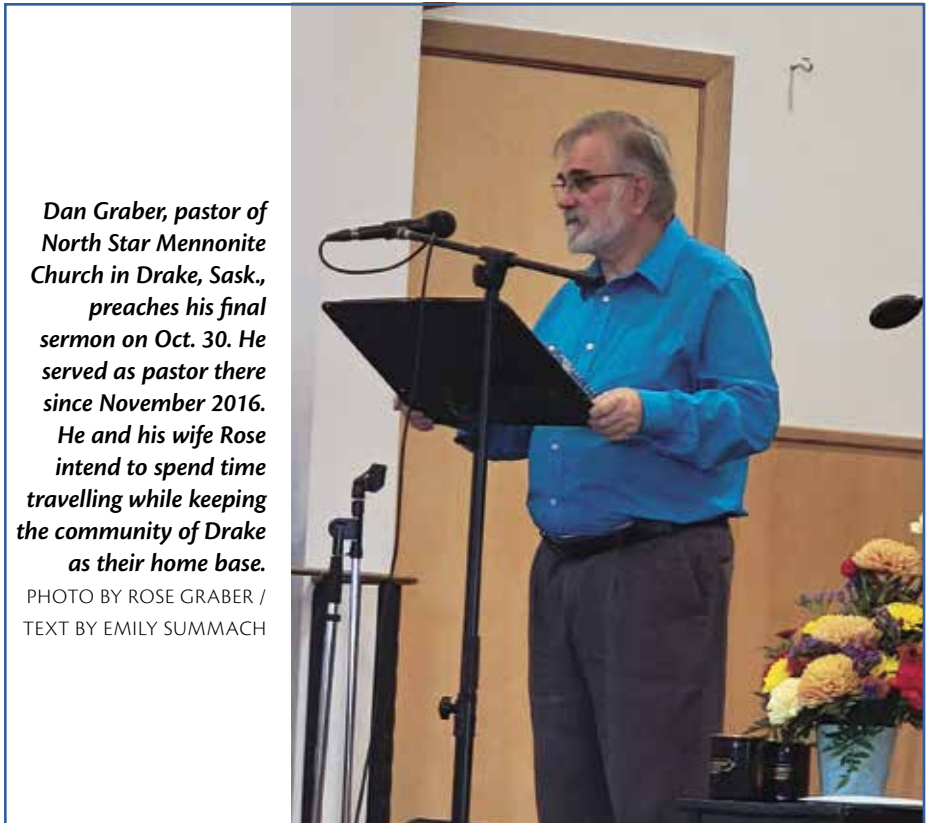


**Michelle Stoesz** became associate pastor of children, youth and young adult ministries at Steinbach Mennonite Church on Aug. 14. She previously volunteered extensively at church, and worked in a Christian daycare setting, where she walked with both children and parents on their faith journeys. She earned a bachelor of theology degree from Canadian Mennonite Bible College—now Canadian Mennonite University—and a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from the University of Manitoba, both in Winnipeg.



**Jonathan Neufeld** will begin as co-pastor of Charleswood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, on Jan. 3. He previously pastored at Southside Fellowship in Elkhart, Ind., and Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. Most recently, he served as pastor of just peace and community ministry at Seattle (Wash.) Mennonite Church for 14.5 years. He earned a master of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart. Neufeld fills the vacancy left by Jeff Friesen, who completed his 17-year ministry with Charleswood Mennonite on Aug. 21, and started as co-director of leadership ministries at Mennonite Church Manitoba shortly after.

—BY NICOLIE KLASSEN-WIEBE



*Dan Graber, pastor of North Star Mennonite Church in Drake, Sask., preaches his final sermon on Oct. 30. He served as pastor there since November 2016. He and his wife Rose intend to spend time travelling while keeping the community of Drake as their home base.*

PHOTO BY ROSE GRABER /  
TEXT BY EMILY SUMMACH



**Try a seminary course!**

**Distance-friendly options include:**

- Spiritual Practices: Water of Life
- The Epistle to the Romans
- Human Sexuality and Christian Ethics
- and more

**Register by Jan. 2.**

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

**Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary**

[ambs.ca/upcoming-courses](http://ambs.ca/upcoming-courses)

**C M** For additional content follow us on social media.

- [facebook.com/Canadian.Mennonite](https://facebook.com/Canadian.Mennonite)
- [twitter.com/CanMenno](https://twitter.com/CanMenno)
- [instagram.com/canadianmennonite](https://instagram.com/canadianmennonite)

# Building peace in Zambia and Malawi

*Issa Ebombolo receives Grebel's 2022 Distinguished Alumni Service Award*

By Zoe Beilby

Conrad Grebel University College  
WATERLOO, ONT.

To look back on Issa Ebombolo's career thus far is to look back on a journey of leadership, collaboration and great accomplishments. From developing a peace curriculum, helping develop programs and support for refugee camps, and now, in his current role, working with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) as peacebuilding coordinator for Zambia and Malawi, the 2017 graduate of Conrad Grebel University College's master of peace and conflict studies program has helped promote peace and restorative justice in all that he does.



MCC FILE PHOTO BY SILAS CREWS

*In 2011, Issa Ebombolo speaks with student Mercy Chungulo, a peace club participant in Zambia.*

For his work in these areas, he has been chosen as the 2022 recipient of Conrad Grebel University College's Distinguished Alumni Service Award. The master of peace and conflict studies (MPACS) website

states that "turbulent times like ours call for people who understand systems of violence and conflict, and are prepared to build peace with justice."

Ebombolo embodies this mindset and has spent his career developing systems and programs with communities, governments and MCC, to promote peace and build systems of restorative justice and peacebuilding.

One of many accomplishments that he looks back on proudly is the founding of Peace Clubs. Formed in 2006, the organization now has more than 650 different clubs in schools, communities, churches and refugee camps in 14 African countries. He formed community Peace Clubs to teach adults peacebuilding and conflict-transformation skills. They then spread out to schools, to teach abuse prevention, peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Now MCC partners in Central America and Haiti are starting Peace Clubs, as well as a Canadian collaboration with the Meeting House church.

Ebombolo's journey with MCC started in 2003, when he attended a two-week class in peace education. He then used an MCC scholarship to get a three-month certificate in peacebuilding and conflict transformation through the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe, Zambia. With his new credentials, he was hired by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

"I chose to take a leave from the workforce and to go back to school to do a master's degree in peace and conflict studies at Grebel in 2014, to increase my professional growth in the field of peacebuilding," he says.

He applied the knowledge and skills from the program when stepping into his role with MCC in 2017 as the peacebuilding coordinator for Zambia and Malawi.

"Since re-entering the professional sphere in my current role with MCC, I have had the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills I acquired at Grebel," he says.

Ebombolo has worked to implement peacebuilding initiatives and programs with governments and with 68 Zambian and 31 Malawian correctional facilities, to build a culture of peace among inmates and officers. He has also helped Zambia and Malawi correctional services establish a Restorative Justice and Peace Building Unit in their departments. He says he is "proud to have helped both the government of Zambia and Malawi to move away from a punitive system to a correctional system."

He has also worked closely with civil society to encourage the government of Zambia to implement the Correctional Act of 2021, promoting love, peace, restoration and responsibility, in place of the former Prison Act, which promoted violence that has existed since the colonial period.

"This work has taught me leadership, community programming, to be organized, and to remain focused," he says. "I have developed the desire to serve others with humility."

Michael Shum, Grebel's alumni committee chair, commends Ebombolo for his service: "Issa's work is a clear demonstration of how the PACS program at Grebel can lead to incredible outcomes for the wider community."

"Issa Ebombolo is inspirational!" adds Reina Neufeldt, chair of the PACS program. "His deep reflection and knowledge of peace and conflict dynamics, paired with his transformational experiences and courageous spirit, make him a leading voice in peacebuilding in Zambia and Southern Africa." ❧

*The author is a fourth-year peace and conflict studies student at Grebel.*

# A business built by accident

By Mike Strathdee

Mennonite Economic Development Associates

Chris Steingart's journey to owning a professional web-design business was unanticipated. In 2005, he was working as a youth pastor at Waterloo-Kitchener Mennonite Church in Waterloo, Ont., and he decided that the church needed a website.

When efforts to get volunteers for the project failed, he ended up doing it himself. "How difficult could it be to build a website?"

As his time at the church ended, he and his wife Jillian were just about to leave for a term teaching English as a second language in South Korea. To his surprise, three people approached him offering to pay him to develop websites for them. That led him to set up QT Web Designs.

I really didn't know what I was doing, and I really didn't know I was in a career until it hit me in the face," he said.

During his two years in Korea, he used his spare time to learn about HTML coding and Photoshop. After returning home, Steingart was eager to build his business but lacked customers. He approached several non-profits and offered to build them a website for free.

"My experience at churches and other community organizations was a perfect fit for understanding their needs and style of storytelling."

Soon his portfolio included paying clients from a variety of fields.

His company has developed websites for a wide range of Mennonite churches, schools, camps and other charitable institutions. He has also worked with niche grocery stores, plumbers, landscapers, veterinarians, gyms, financial advisors, insurance brokers, long-term-care homes, hospitals, hydro distributions firms and others.

In 2015, he was named as one of MEDA's 20 under-35 young professionals changing the world. He is a board member of Mennonite publisher MennoMedia.

"In my business, I have seen profound changes in how people work, where they



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRIS STEINGART

*Pastor-turned-web-designer Chris Steingart working from his home office.*



*Chris Steingart designed a website for MCC thrift stores.*

work and how they connect with their audience," he said. Working from a home office "before that was a thing," he resisted the urge to lease office space in an effort to look bigger than his business was. He also decided early on that he wasn't going to hire or fire anyone, preferring to take on contractors for specific projects as needed.

Feeling an undercurrent of his faith running through how he operated QT Web, Steingart recalled a discussion with Wally Regier, his childhood pastor and mentor.

Regier told him that there are many ways to make a difference in the church, "and it doesn't have to be from the pulpit."

"He told me that he saw a role for me in the future, and that the church would need my gifts in different ways than I could imagine at the time."

As his company grows, Steingart hopes to equip his clients to manage and update their own sites. "For me, it's far more advantageous to be building rather than managing."

He is in the process of changing his company name and brand to Big Creative. This will reflect several realities. At six-foot-four he is a big person.

Steingart is also looking to move beyond web and graphic design, into photos, videos and other services. ❧

*A longer version of this article originally appeared in the July 2022 issue of The Marketplace magazine (<https://bit.ly/3K5MeaP>).*

*Reproduced by permission of The Marketplace magazine.*






**Thinking about seminary?**

Join us for a **free webinar** and learn about AMBS and our degree programs!

**January 18 • 8 pm ET**

Learn more: [ambs.ca/preview](https://ambs.ca/preview)

 **Anabaptist Mennonite  
Biblical Seminary**

### /// Staff change

#### MC Eastern Canada appoints intentional interim executive team leader



**Ann L. Schultz** has been appointed as Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's intentional interim executive team leader. "I've lived a life of working for the church," she says. "I love people, I love building team and I am passionate about advancing the mission, vision and values of the organization in which I serve." Schultz studied theology and church music at Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg. Her ministry as a music educator, and then principal for nine years, at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ont., ended with her retirement nearly a year ago. In addition to her commitment to honour and advance Rockway's mission, it was important for her to incorporate respect, collaboration, spirituality and inclusion into her leadership practice. She officially begins her ministry with MC Eastern Canada in January, and her role will be part-time for the year, primarily focused on supporting the regional church's staff team. During this year of transition, the executive council will also support MC Eastern Canada staff to ensure that congregations and leaders will continue to be resourced and encouraged. Ann and her husband, Steve Pfisterer, are members of Waterloo North Mennonite Church in Waterloo, and have two adult children. Schultz can be reached at [aschultz@mceec.ca](mailto:aschultz@mceec.ca).

—MC EASTERN CANADA

**Explore Christian scholarship and contemporary issues.**



**MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES**

[uwaterloo.ca/theological-studies](https://uwaterloo.ca/theological-studies)

 **Conrad Grebel  
University College**

### /// Staff change

#### MC B.C. appoints interim executive minister



**Kevin Barkowsky** has been appointed interim executive minister of Mennonite Church B.C. by the regional church's leadership board. The appointment is effective on Jan. 1, the day after current executive minister Garry Janzen retires. Barkowsky is assuming the position until it is filled permanently through an ongoing search process. He is currently employed half-time as MC B.C.'s church engagement minister and serves as half-time pastor of Sherbrooke Mennonite Church in Vancouver. "It is an honour to be asked to serve Mennonite Church B.C. as interim executive minister," he says. "I am thankful to our MC B.C. staff and leadership board for their willingness to help fill in the gaps that will be left when Garry leaves. Garry Janzen has been an inspiration to us all, and we are grateful for his leadership, integrity, devotion to Christ, and love for Scripture and prayer." Barkowsky will continue half-time with Sherbrooke and half-time in the combined MC B.C. roles. "Combining Garry's full-time work, plus my half-time work into one half-time interim position will be a bit of a challenge, but we are thankful how everyone is stepping up to help out," he says. "Thank you to MC B.C., Pastor Jorge Hoajaca and Sherbrooke for their continued prayer and support as I serve both Sherbrooke and MC B.C. in this new capacity."

—AMY RINNER WADELL

## /// News brief

### Gary Harder awarded by AMBS



**Gary Harder** of Waterloo, Ont., was one of three 2022 recipients of the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) Alumni Ministry and Service Recognition Award. The annual award honours alumni who have made outstanding contributions in congregational ministry, teaching, mission or peace work, spiritual direction or other ministries. Harder, who grew up in Rosemary, Alta., came to AMBS after studying music and Christian education at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, a founding college of Canadian Mennonite

University, in Winnipeg; pastoring for two years at Waters Mennonite Church near Sudbury, Ont.; and completing a bachelor of arts in music degree at Goshen (Ind.) College. Following his graduation, he was pastor of First Mennonite Church in Edmonton, from 1972 to 1987, and of Toronto United Mennonite Church from 1987 to 2007. After retiring from full-time ministry, he and his wife, Lydia Neufeld Harder, served as intentional interim pastors for two years each at Wideman Mennonite Church and Hagerman Mennonite Church, both in Markham, Ont.; and at the Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal. They currently attend St. Jacobs (Ont.) Mennonite Church. He also taught at the Mennonite seminary in Paraguay, from 1979 to 1980, and earned a doctor of ministry degree from St. Stephens College at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, in 1986. He has written two books: *Dancing Through Thistles in Bare Feet: A Pastoral Journey*, in 2008; and *The Pastor-Congregation Duet*, in 2018.

—AMBS

## /// Staff change

### Sandy Plett hired as climate action coordinator



Sandy Plett has been hired as the climate action coordinator for Mennonite Church Canada, a position that will coordinate efforts across the regional churches to build understanding and action around, and in response to, the climate crisis. Plett, who lives in Morden, Man., currently co-facilitates MC Manitoba's Climate Action Working Group, which serves to resource the regional church's congregations for engagement in climate justice. Together

for more than a year, the group recently held an event called "Hope and courage: Mennonites gathering for climate action," an afternoon of worship and workshops designed to help people take next steps in leading climate action in church and community settings. Most recently, Plett has facilitated Faithful Climate Conversations, an initiative started by For the Love of Creation, a national coalition of faith-based organizations across Canada working towards climate justice. Over the past two years, Plett has led conversations held by eight congregations in MC Manitoba, helping them discern next steps for their communities. The climate action coordinator position is a two-year-term position. Plett began working in her role on Nov. 28.

—MC CANADA

**Benedicta Boyuo is a Ghanaian farmer, trainer, sales agent, nursery owner and entrepreneur.**

*imagine*  
what she could do with access to business capital.

Give today at [giftsolutions.org/gift](https://giftsolutions.org/gift)

# Grebel prof contributes to global study of the Bible

Conrad Grebel University College  
WATERLOO, ONT.

**D**erek Suderman, a professor at Conrad Grebel University College, is passionate about connecting with global Anabaptist churches and contributing to cross-cultural teaching. This summer, he taught courses in Cuba and Thailand to resource the global Mennonite church.

Amid food shortages and electricity blackouts, he travelled to Palmira, Cuba, to teach a 26-hour course in Spanish, “The people of God in the Old Testament.” Participants included leaders in the “Hermanos en Cristo” (Brethren in Christ) denomination, a member church of Mennonite World Conference. The several dozen pastors, church leaders and Cuban missionaries appreciated the depth and new insights that emerged from a focus on the language, culture, history and geography of the Bible.

Suderman recounts how students resonated deeply with a long history of living under the shadow of foreign powers, while the implications of water scarcity in the Old Testament provided a sharp contrast with their lived reality. Seeing the Bible as a library, and exploring diversity

within it on the issue of how to interact with foreigners, generated significant discussion about the Bible itself and its contemporary implications.

“The denominational leadership in Cuba has a very strong commitment and desire for their churches to be Anabaptist, but many pastors come with little religious background or from other denominations,” he says. “So, developing this identity is a challenge. The economic situation in the country is also dire, and getting worse. The fact that organizers were able to find enough food for this large of a group to gather for a week, and were able to find transportation for all of them to come, seemed like a miracle.”

Suderman then travelled to Roi Et and then to Cha’am, Thailand, teaching two courses on “Why is the Old Testament important for followers of Jesus?” for the Friends of Grace, a network of house churches supported by Mennonite Church Canada Witness. Witness worker Tom Poovong provided essential support as both translator and cultural interpreter, along with local leader Pastor Khamphan.

“It was invigorating to engage with such passionate and resourceful leaders,” says Suderman. “For me, it was also eye-opening to witness these dedicated Christians sharing the good news of Christ and engaging constructively as a tiny minority in the broader culture, which is approximately 99 percent Buddhist. After talking about the gods of Egypt in Exodus, one leader commented that ‘in Thailand there are thousands.’ Interacting with these Thai leaders gave me a new perspective on a familiar story, and it’s clear I still have much to learn.”

“It is very exciting to see this developing partnership” between Grebel, MC Canada Witness, and the global church “to share gifts in this way,” says Jeanette Hanson, MC Canada’s director of International Witness. “Derek’s willingness, energy and ability to teach well cross-culturally is a gift that can be shared. He then brings what he has learned through interaction with training participants in various contexts back to Conrad Grebel and congregations in Canada. It is a beautiful example of God’s gifts to the global church being shared with each other.” ☞



*Near Roi Et, Thailand, classes finish early in the afternoon so that participants could plant rice in the traditional manner on church property, with the eventual harvest raising money for their ministry.*

## Calendar

### British Columbia

**Feb. 25, 2023:** MC B.C. annual general meeting, at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond.  
**April 21-23, 2023:** MC B.C. youth impact retreat, at Camp Squeah, Hope.  
**May 6, 2023:** MC B.C. women's day.  
**May 21, 2023:** MC B.C. arts fundraiser, at Heritage Hall, Vancouver.  
**Oct. 13-15, 2023:** MC B.C. women's retreat.

### Saskatchewan

**Jan. 27-29, 2023:** MC Saskatchewan youth retreat at the Shekinah Retreat Centre, near Waldheim. Volunteer kitchen staff still needed. To volunteer, call Zach Dueck at 306-880-6834.

## Classifieds

### Employment Opportunities

### Manitoba

**Jan. 20-23, Feb. 10-12:** Camp Assiniboia is hosting two retreats for youths in grades 7 to 12. Theme: "Living more with less." The retreats include: worship, learning and conversation circles, outdoor recreation and shared meals. For more information, email Kathy Giesbrecht at kgiesbrecht@mennochurch.mb.ca.  
**Feb. 3, 2023:** CMU campus visit day, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
**Feb. 4:** Menno Office at the University of Winnipeg is hosting a Valentine themed fundraising coffee house at Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship Church, Winnipeg, from 7 to 9 p.m. Highlights include musical groups and a charcuterie hosted by Doris Penner's catering services from Landmark Man.

**March 10, 2023:** CMU campus visit day, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

**July 14-15, 2023:** The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies and the University of Manitoba present "The Russlander Mennonites: War dislocation and new beginnings" centenary conference. The event will mark the centenary of the arrival Russlander from the Soviet Union to Canada.

### 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.

**Jan. 22, 2023:** MC Eastern Canada junior-youth gathering, at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener, from 1 to 5 p.m. Theatre of the Beat will lead an art of peace workshop featuring peer-led music, interactive drama, robotics and Dutch Blitz. More information to follow.

**Jan. 25, 2023:** MennoHomes' in-person annual general meeting, at 544 Bridgeport Road, Kitchener, at 2 p.m.

**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](http://www.mennosingers.com).

**May 5, 2023:** Menno Singers presents its "Spring Concert," at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit [www.mennosingers.com](http://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](http://canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar).




Employment Opportunity  
Pastoral Team Member

Inviting applications for a pastoral position with an FTE of up to 1.0.

First Mennonite Church is excited to complete our pastoral team with a dynamic candidate. Our pastoral team works along with our church community to help us grow as a community of grace, joy, and peace. We are a multi-generational, urban church of approximately 180, with Anabaptist theology and principles guiding us. God has called us to be an inclusive, affirming, Christian community. Congregants are actively involved in church ministries and programs. The new pastoral team member will share pastoral responsibilities in a manner that fits with their skills and gifts.

For information or to apply, please contact:  
**Ruth Friesen, Search Committee Chair**  
 (ruthdavisfriesen@gmail.com, 780-910-2573) or  
**Tim Wiebe-Neufeld, Mennonite Church Alberta**  
 Executive Minister (execmin@mcab.ca, 780 994-1021).

More information about  
 First Mennonite Church is available at:  
[edmontonfirst.mcab.ca/](http://edmontonfirst.mcab.ca/)


Employment opportunity

## Ministry Team Lead

Are you seeking an opportunity to lead a team ministry in a vibrant church community?

If you have 10-15 years of pastoral experience with an educational background that includes theological and religious studies combined with a commitment to Anabaptist-Mennonite values and beliefs, please contact the Leamington United Mennonite Church, a member of the MCEC Conference of Ontario.

Direct inquiries with resume to Search Committee Co-Ordinator at: [office@lumc.ca](mailto:office@lumc.ca)

**Become the lead member of a team ministry in the southernmost part of Canada!**

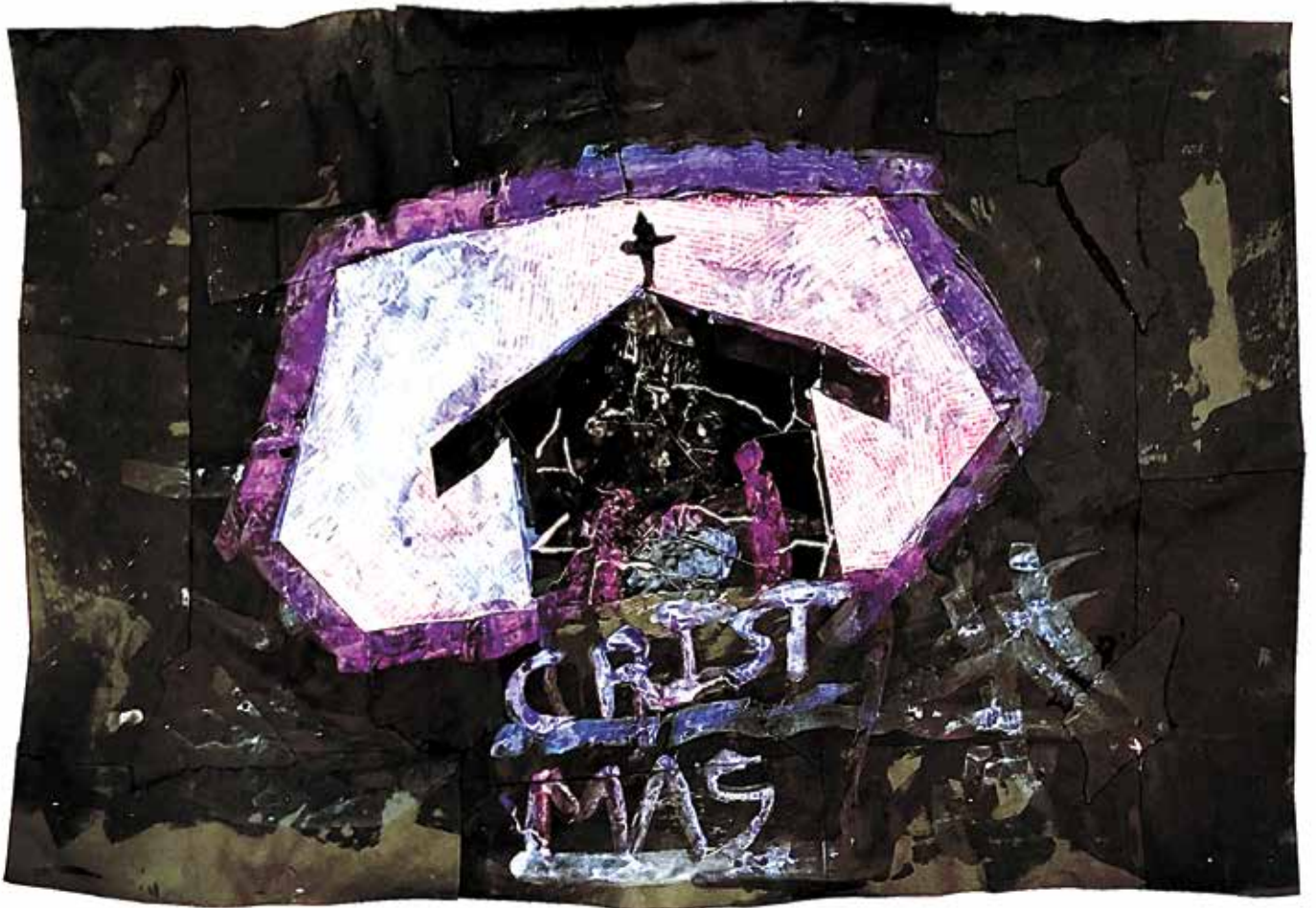


PHOTO COURTESY OF MENNO SIMONS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

*This paper collage of 'The story of Christmas' was created by Yael, a Grade 7 student at Menno Simons Christian School in Calgary.*