

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

May 5, 2023 Volume 27 Number 9

## Dispatches from the front lines

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# In-house acknowledgment

WILL BRAUN

editor@canadianmennonite.org



**W**ith this issue of *Canadian Mennonite*,

Ross W. Muir completes

his time with the magazine. As managing editor for almost 18 years, he has undertaken a central piece of the work required to put the magazine together every two weeks.

Muir has worked diligently and consistently behind the scenes, attending to the finer points of writing style, as well as the larger points of making sure something appears on each page of the magazine, and many other responsibilities in between. He has always been attentive to the smallest details and interested in the biggest ideas. In this he has been of great service to the magazine and to Mennonite Church Canada.

Muir won five first-place awards for photography, design and writing from the Canadian Christian Communicators Association, along with numerous other awards individually and as part of collaborations. In our records, he is listed as writer or photographer for 165 pieces, including 18 covers that feature his photography or design work.

Former editor Virginia Hostetler, who worked with Muir from 2013 until last fall, said the following about her former colleague: “As a work colleague, I witnessed how Ross’s professional skills and his commitment have contributed greatly to the work of the *CM* team. He brought a sense of continuity and integrity to the magazine in its mission of informing and inspiring readers across the country.”

Tobi Thiessen, who has served as publisher since 2017, also pays tribute to Muir: “Ross has been conscientious and faithful in his work as managing editor. Hired in 2005, Ross came from another church tradition. He immediately started attending a local Mennonite church so he could be more informed about the denomination and get to know some of its people. Ross is also a talented photographer and regularly offered his photos to *CM* if they helped illustrate a story.

“One of Ross’s strengths is to safeguard the principles of free speech. As managing editor, he wanted the Readers Write section to be a lively and open space that reflects the broad range of views held by Mennonites across Canada. He was very reluctant to deny anyone the right to express an opinion through a letter.”

For Muir’s final issue of the magazine, we asked him to reflect on his time with *Canadian Mennonite* and the rest of his career in journalism. In that piece—which starts on page 4 and covers territory ranging from Manitoulin Island to Uganda, and the Hell’s Angels to the Winnipeg Jets—he speaks of the necessity of honesty, even when it might rattle.

Journalism is like that. It involves tension: reporting multiple sides, occasionally saying things that are unpopular, asking questions, trusting the value of free speech, hoping that readers will understand the value of these difficult disciplines.

Journalism is not like etching the 10 commandments in stone. The goal is

not to pin down truth once and for all, but to trust a collective process of seeking truth and wisdom and love. There is no final word in journalism. The conversation can always continue in the form of letters or subsequent articles.

A managing editor of a magazine is a sort of keeper of this process, facilitating the orderly and clear presentation of a range of views, which cannot always be entirely orderly and clear. Decorum and propriety are not the ultimate goal in journalism, nor are they the ultimate goal in faith. Thus, the sensibilities of church journalists and magazine staff, as Muir’s feature illustrates, are distinct from those of a pastor or church leader. They are not altogether different, but not altogether the same.

We seek to embody the journalistic sensibilities Muir illustrates in his article. And, on behalf of *CM* readers past and present, we offer him gratitude and best wishes.

We also say farewell and thank you to interns Emma Siemens and Jesse White, both students at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). Siemens wrote numerous articles and conducted editorial research. White conducted market research into how faith-based magazines generate advertising revenue today and made recommendations for *CM*. She also created a survey for CMU students. We thank them both for their energy and insight, and we wish them well in their next steps. ☿



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Students look out from holes in the bamboo walls of their school at the Unyama Internally Displaced Persons Camp in northern Uganda, in 2004.

PHOTO: ROSS W. MUIR

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## FEATURE

# Dispatches from the front lines

By Ross W. Muir  
Managing Editor



PHOTO BY MICHAEL ORUNI

*Ross W. Muir, with camera bag in tow, among a Grade 1 class at the Unyama IDP Camp in northern Uganda, 2004.*

I'm basing the form of this final missive on the last book I read, *Dispatches*—a harrowing and sometimes hilarious memoir by Michael Herr, who covered the insanity of the Vietnam War for *Esquire* magazine during two years in the late 1960s. (How insane is it that *Esquire* thought it needed a war correspondent in the first place?)

Most journalists, correspondents and editors I have worked with—at community newspapers in Ontario for

13 years, an international NGO, and, for the last 18 years, at *Canadian Mennonite*—have, at one time or another, talked of “working in the trenches.”

But what's it like when the trenches are real?

### Quoting Michael Herr: A war story

Bob Stokes of *Newsweek* told me this: In the big Marine hospital in Danang they have what is called the ‘White Lie Ward,’ where they bring in some of the worst cases,

the ones who can be saved but will never be the same again. A young Marine was carried in, still unconscious and full of morphine, and his legs were gone. As he was being carried into the ward, he came out of it briefly and saw a Catholic chaplain standing over him.

“Father,” he said, “am I all right?”

The chaplain didn’t know what to say. “You’ll have to talk about that with the doctors, son.”

“Father, are my legs okay?”

“Yes,” the chaplain said. “Sure.”

By the next afternoon the shock had worn off and the boy knew all about it. He was lying on his cot when the chaplain came by.

“Father,” the Marine said, “I’d like to ask you for something.”

“What, son?”

“I’d like to have that cross.” And he pointed to the tiny silver insignia on the chaplain’s lapel.

“Of course,” the chaplain said. “But why?”

“Well, it was the first thing I saw when I came to yesterday, and I’d like to have it.”

The chaplain removed the cross and handed it to him. The Marine held it tightly in his fist and looked at the chaplain.

“You lied to me, Father,” he said. [expletive] “You lied to me.”

### My own war story

In 2004, I travelled to northern Uganda with a World Vision delegation whose goal was to help children there who were being abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in its war against the national government.

As the designated photojournalist, I found myself taking photos and interviewing former child soldiers and sex slaves a mere half-hour after landing in Gulu in northern Uganda, which was designated a war zone at that time. (In fact, one person—not from our delegation—was killed in the conflict a few kilometres away from our location, but we were never told about that until we returned to Canada.)

One incident still wakes me up at night. I interviewed a young girl, a

sponsored child who had been captured by the LRA. She made a pact with another girl to escape from the camp, but that girl never showed up at the rendezvous point. So she set off running on her own, falling asleep hours later in a rut in a rural road. Fortunately, a truck full of soldiers patrolling the area saw her lying there and took her to the war-child rehab centre in Gulu.

Knowing what would have happened to her if she had been recaptured by the LRA—death by a thousand cuts at the hands of other children her age—I asked her why she would take such a risk.

“I’d reached a point in my life that I was ready to die.” That’s all she said. And the interview continued along happier lines.

It wasn’t until I was transcribing my notes onto a dinky laptop in an air-conditioned hotel room back in Kampala (imagine the opening scene of *Apocalypse Now*) that the full force of her words got to me. I remember looking out the hotel window and the clock across the street said two o’clock. At five o’clock, a colleague knocked on my door

to tell me it was suppertime.

I woke up with a start, staring at the screen with those 13 words on it (the last words I had typed three hours ago). I was soaking with sweat, and, in the mirror, a whiter shade of pale reflection looked back at me. I took a shower and offered my apologies for being late to dinner.

That night, I called home and told my son to thank God that he was born in Canada. I didn’t tell him why.

To this day, I am still processing those three weeks. I have framed a number of my photos from that trip (including the one on the cover) and they still hang on my walls at work and at home. But not one of the girl who “was ready to die.”

### Is journalism next to godliness?

Early on in my journalism career—pre-*Canadian Mennonite*—I attended a Word Guild event in Guelph, Ont., where the topic of “What are the godly character traits of a journalist?” came up at the dinner table.

After “gentle Jesus meek and mild” suggestions were bandied about, I went



MEETINGHOUSE PHOTO

*Members of the Meetinghouse editors and publishers group pose for a photo at Morrow Gospel Church, Winnipeg, during their 2009 meeting. Pictured from left to right, back row: Wally Kroeker, MEDA Marketplace; Ross W. Muir, Canadian Mennonite; Dora Dueck, MB Herald interim; and Terry Smith, The Messenger; and front row: Paul Schrag, Mennonite Weekly Review, at the time; Gordon Houser, The Mennonite; Rebecca Roman, The Messenger; Lil Goertzen, The Recorder; and Karla Braun, MB Herald, at the time.*



out on a limb: “What if journalists, like God, were no respecters of persons?” (Romans 2:11, paraphrase). After all, the same Jesus who told Peter that the keys of heaven were his, then told him to “*get behind me Satan*”; he cured both rich and poor alike; and he managed to offend religious and political leaders, as well as the common people, to the point where they all wanted him dead.

The reaction I got at that event was the same as when I’d tell people that the motto of the first newspaper I ever worked for, the *Manitoulin Expositor*, was: “Who dares not offend, cannot be honest.”

Not surprising, that offends some people. Like a couple of fully patched members of the Hell’s Angels who read the logo on the back of my *Expositor* sweatshirt at a blues festival in 1988. They hauled me off the grass and told me I’d offended them.

I told them sincerely that that was not my intention. I don’t remember my exact words, but I said something to the effect that not respecting the status of a person or institution—or daring to offend them—is exactly what journalists need to do if that’s what it takes to get to the bottom of a news story.

“You mean like ‘sticking it to the man?’” one of them said.

“Yeah. When it’s necessary,” I answered, glad that they understood my intent.

After conferring with each other, they told me I was good to go. Relieved that the encounter was over, I went back to “grooving” to Savoy Brown with the rest of the crowd.

Rick McCutcheon, emeritus publisher of *The Expositor*, who gave me, and many others like me, the opportunity to learn the news business from the ground up, once told his editorial staff that one way to tell if you did a really good job on a contentious article, was if the people quoted in the story all came away a little uneasy. If one, or both, sides liked what was printed too much, he said they probably thought they had gotten away with something. We weren’t supposed to let them think that.

### Three CM stories that caused offence

- “Recipe for relief”

The first photo essay I did just a few months into my time at *Canadian Mennonite* started out benignly enough. The two-page spread, a pictorial of Mennonite Central Committee’s beef-canning operation at the University of Guelph, Ont., featured photos of sides of beef being sliced and diced, then cooked, canned and labelled.

What I didn’t know was that a *CM* staff member at the time was a vegetarian, who found the photos disturbing, to say the least. I think I apologized (I hope

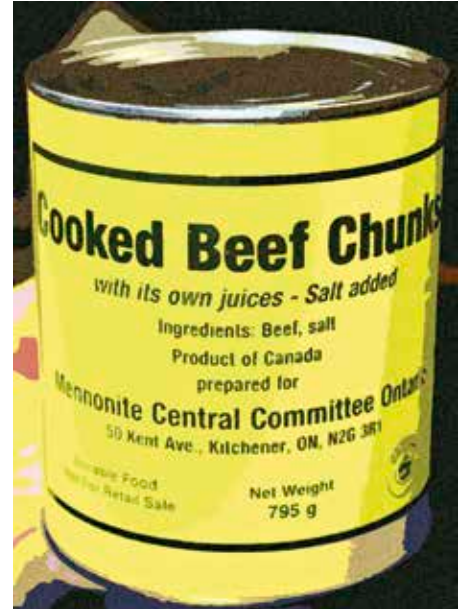
I did), but I still think that a weeklong project involving 400 volunteers canning 21,000 or so cans of meat for distribution to starving people around the world was newsworthy.

For our non-meat-eating readers, I’m glad that, in recent years, *CM* has been able to cover the work of the Ontario Christian Gleaners, whose volunteers produce millions of dried vegetable soup packets, along with other food products, for the same worthy cause each year.

- “Say no to the logo” front cover

Back in 2011, the new Winnipeg Jets hockey team got a new logo that





A MENNOPIX DIGITAL ART VERSION OF 'RECIPE FOR RELIEF: HOMAGE TO ANDY WARHOL' BY ROSS W. MUIR

featured a fighter jet insignia. In the Oct. 3 issue, we ran a two-part feature, one part asking, "Should Mennos cheer for fighter Jets?" and the other claiming, "New logo a distraction to talking about peace and violence."

Dan Johnson, our graphic designer at the time, and I worked on the cover, which is more strident than the two inside pieces. We wanted to catch people's attention and draw them into the feature. It worked, but in ways we didn't expect. For some reason, we thought the declaration was self-evident for our Mennonite readers.

Wrong. We offended both Jets' fans and others who just didn't like to be told what to believe or do.

According to some, even our board chair at the time got it wrong, when she said, "Of course, they should say no."

#### • Numerous stories of pastoral misconduct

Having covered the crime and court beats for *The Expositor* for 11 years, and winning feature-writing and community-service awards from the Ontario Community Newspapers Association in 1997 for a three-part, eight-story series called "The public perception of guilt and innocence," it mostly fell to me to continue this at *CM*.

This time, I knew to expect two equal and opposite complaints: One side wonders why such stories need to be dragged in front of readers (especially if the accused is dead), while the other has serious trouble with the word "alleged."

Because the press has to follow the libel laws of the land, pastors (and others) are presumed innocent in the law courts until proven guilty, unlike church tribunals, including Mennonite Church Canada, that use the concept of "preponderance of evidence," or other similar language, to decide on guilt or innocence.

I remember one pastoral misconduct story that was initially submitted by a correspondent, in which a pastor faced criminal charges. But the church had jumped ahead of the slow-moving legal process and was working to restore him in the eyes of God and the church. I can't remember the verbal gymnastics we went through to portray both realities without libelling the accused, but we did it.

And since the #MeToo movement made headlines in late 2017, journalists have faced being called out for not being "allies" of those making "allegations." Even before the movement, I always maintained that journalists writing news—crime or otherwise—don't have the luxury of being allies or

taking sides. If you want to do that, write an op-ed or wave a banner.

#### Final dispatch for CM correspondents past and present

Again from Michael Herr's opus.

"The three of us travelled around together for about a month that summer. At one lz [landing zone] the brigade chopper came in with a real foxtail hanging off the aerial, when the commander walked by us and almost took an infarction.

"Don't you men salute officers?"

"We're not men," Page said. "We're correspondents." ❧



PHOTO BY EUNICE MUIR

*On his second birthday, Ross points to a typo in the local newspaper, and his future career path is set in stone.*

## OPINION

### /// Readers write

#### 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.

#### ✉ Reader finds assurance in the Holy Spirit's presence

Troy Watson has exposed us to the topic of the Holy Spirit among us as believers, in his April 7 column, "Many Christians do not believe in the Holy Spirit."

The presence of the Holy Spirit gives us comfort, guidance, conviction and much joy. Let's discuss it further. Questions quickly emerge:

- **Why are we** hesitant to speak on this topic?
- **Might a witness** of the Holy Spirit in my life be viewed among fellow believers as boasting?
- **Is there a** difference between my sense of God's presence in my life, and the presence of the Holy Spirit? We quickly see the work of the Holy Spirit with God's voice in Christ's ascension (Acts 1:11). We know the Spirit was present at Pentecost, or when an ill or dead person comes to life.
- **What is the** guideline where this act is the work of the Holy Spirit? We know that our brothers and sisters in the South see the work of the Spirit in dreams in finding a marriage partner or a call from God to conversion. The Spirit is recognized in the casting out of demons.
- **Is it glib** to speak of near-death accidents and hospital cures as the work of the Spirit? I can make reference to at least six of these near-death "savings." Some believers view this as coincidence, even luck. But each experience has given me confirmation in later years that God is real, cares for me, and is with me.

JOHN PETERS, WATERLOO, ONT.  
(WATERLOO NORTH MENNONITE CHURCH)

#### ✉ Doubt and faith both need to be modelled

**Re: "Within a shadow of doubt," March 24.**

This article is deeply appreciated. The tension between doubt and faith can feel disconcerting and troublesome, and the church does not always provide a welcoming or safe space for doubt.

My own journey away from pastoral ministry was largely due to a growing dissonance between what I was supposed to believe and what I could with integrity actually embrace at the time. I felt, perhaps mistakenly, that I needed to leave

ministry to have the space and time to wrestle through a season of doubt.

Perhaps it would be a much more fruitful journey for everyone if leaders could more openly and honestly model and share the doubting side of the spiritual experience.

By the way, I have personally benefited from Brian McLaren's books *Faith After Doubt* and *Do I Stay Christian?*

GARY HORST (ONLINE COMMENT)

#### ✉ Low-carbon food

**I applaud Mennonite Church Canada for affirming climate action as a nationwide ministry initiative. However, I believe the six initiatives are missing something very important.**

Why isn't diet a key element of MC Canada's work?

It is well documented that our current methods of food production, particularly red meat and dairy, account for a high percentage of both greenhouse gas emissions, as well as agricultural land use. I also recognize that all of us have complex relationships with the food we eat, from cultural patterns and family-of-origin expectations, to convenience and simply entrenched desires (as much as we don't want to admit it).

However, if we, as a church body, are truly invested in sustainable climate action, I think we need to elevate the importance of a sustainable diet and take a hard look at our own fridges and pantries.

JASON YUEN, TORONTO  
(TORONTO CHINESE MENNONITE CHURCH)

### /// Milestones

#### Births/Adoptions

**Goodman**—Esme Marx (b. April 17, 2023), to Ellen and Rob Goodman, Toronto United Mennonite.

#### Deaths

**Bock**—Margaret (Klassen), 57 (b. June 3, 1965; d. April 10, 2023), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

**Dyck**—Peter, 100 (b. Dec. 18, 1922; d. April 17, 2023), Grace Mennonite, St. Catharines, Ont.

**Hess**—Ruth Evelyn, 98 (b. July 14, 1924; d. April 8, 2023), Wanner Mennonite, Cambridge, Ont.

**Neufeld**—Shirley (nee Sawatsky), 84 (b. Nov. 30, 1938; d. April 3, 2023), Bethany Mennonite, Virgil, Ont.

**Yantzi**—Betty, 92 (b. June 6, 1930; d. April 6, 2023), Shantz Mennonite, Baden, Ont.



## FROM OUR LEADERS

## 'Camp shapes people'

Janet Peters

I am looking ahead to my last summer as associate program director of Mennonite Church Manitoba's Camps with Meaning (CwM) program; my last summer spent travelling to and from Assiniboia and Koinonia; my last summer training and supporting an amazing group of young adults; and my last summer watching staff, volunteers and campers make connections and have ridiculous fun.

As I look ahead, I am also looking back over the past five summers of doing all of those things (even during the pandemic!) and, in that process, reflecting on my own experiences and how important camp has been for me and for so many of us. I would guess that, if we look around at church leadership folks, we will discover many of them worked at camp in their younger days. Camp shapes people in so many ways.

Our CwM camps have begun using words like "unplug," "connect" and "grow" to describe what we do and how we do it in our summer camp, leadership development and rental programs. Camp is a place where we unplug. Hopefully from our phones, our emails

and screens. But also unplug from our everyday routines. Slow down, move to a different rhythm, make space for different adventures. Unplugging opens a space for God to show up differently. I feel it when I turn into the Assiniboia driveway, or round the last few curves of the Koinonia road. The trees, the air, the water, the sounds. I breathe differently at camp, and space is made for Spirit.

Camp is also a place of connecting. We connect with creation by running barefoot in the grass, digging in the garden, jumping in the lake. We are immersed and able to connect with God through creation, but also through music, sharing our stories, the rhythm of conversation and silence.

And we connect to each other. The intergenerational community at camp is unique and valuable. Campers connect with youth and young adults who connect with site staff, pastors and older volunteers, and together we experience a week of fellowship. The connections and relationships I have built with young adults, as well as pastors and congregations, have been genuinely joy filled, life giving and faith deepening for

me.

And we grow at camp. Campers and staff grow in faith and trust, in resilience and independence, in kindness and empathy, in skills and abilities. Camp was the first place where I was asked to lead things, encouraged and appreciated for my gifts and my self, and it continues to be that place for me. I have been stretched, affirmed, challenged and nurtured, and I am so grateful to have spent this past season of my life at camp.

People of all ages can benefit from the unplugging, connections and growth that happen at camp, but it is especially so for the young people, who will one day lead our churches and communities. Camp shapes people. ☸



*Janet Peters has been the associate program director for Camps with Meaning for the past five summers and is looking ahead to her last summer in the role.*

## A moment from yesterday



Text: Conrad Stoesz

Photo: Conference of Mennonites in Canada / Native Ministries Collection

This picture is of the Pauingassi Trading Post, located 276 kilometres northeast of Winnipeg and 16 km from the Manitoba and Ontario border. Mission worker Henry Neufeld brought a request from community elders for a store focused on community well-being, as well as economic viability to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and a partnership developed with the newly established Christian Investors in Education group. On Feb. 26, 1969, the trading post opened to instant community approval on the front porch of a cabin. Now residents did not have to shop at the Hudson's Bay Store in Little Grand Rapids. By 1971, the store had a positive balance sheet, and profits were returned as dividends. A new building and residence were built in the early 1970s. In 1973, a general store opened in Pauingassi, but soon ran into trouble with the community. The general store became known as "the store of trouble" and the trading post as a "store of peace." The Trading Post was sold to a private businessman in 1989 and the store burned down in July of that year. Shortly thereafter, the Hudson's Bay Company-owned Northern Store moved in to Pauingassi.



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 THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE
 

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# Talking more about power

Arli Klassen

It was Easter Sunday, and after the sun came up over the horizon during our congregational sunrise service, we all tramped inside to share an amazing potluck breakfast spread. My husband Keith landed at a men's table, and I watched with interest as they became very animated in their discussion.

Keith was sitting with Ravi, a man from our congregation originally from India. It was Keith's first time to be in casual conversation with him. Keith mentioned that his grandparents had been missionaries in India, and India had been a huge influence on his family. Ravi wanted to know where, and with whom. Hyderabad! Yes, that is where Ravi was also from.

The conversation moved along, and Ravi knew the church, the leaders and the history. He began to talk about the church being embroiled in what is becoming a multigenerational lawsuit over the property that was left behind by the missionaries. Ravi was of the opinion that the missionaries had done great work, but the property was a big problem. He is still angry with the church leaders who are fighting over control over that property, and he knows the conflict has moved on to the next generation in the church, causing

serious division. This story is also well known to Keith, and both Ravi and Keith began to commiserate over church leaders who wield too much power.

Ande from Eritrea was also at this breakfast table. He spoke up, saying that this is an issue in his country, too. Some church leaders want to protect their control, and will do whatever it takes to maintain their power and authority within their church.

Others spoke up around the table. The issue of power and control by church leaders was recognizable as an issue here in Ontario, too. Keith recalls the stories he's heard of the days of the bishops, who carried significant authority in the church, not only around clothing, hair coverings and cars, but about communion and church discipline.

All the men agreed that they have seen the misuse of power by church leaders in their churches in their own countries, leading to divisions, with people following that leader or this one. Keith was intrigued to see the nods of recognition of similar issues, whether the conversation was about the Anabaptist church in India, the Anabaptist church in Eritrea, or the Anabaptist

church in Ontario.

Kimberly Penner, in her Jan. 10, 2022, *Canadian Mennonite* article on power, had this to say: "We all exist within relationships of power, including in the church. This is not a bad thing. What we need to do is figure out what power we have and how to use it well. We can use our formal power wisely, to empower those with less informal power."

I grew up in an era and a church when women had little formal power, with few expectations, and training or role models on how to manage power (as a woman). Yet I have held formal relationships of power in both management and governance in the church and church-related organizations for the last 25 years. It is a constant struggle for me to not back away from power, and to not abuse power, but to use my formal and informal power as wisely as possible.

It is somewhat ironic that it was at a men's breakfast table where talk about the abuse of power by church leaders took place. It is not surprising that the conversation easily crossed cultures and borders.

As Penner wrote, "If we are serious about being peacemakers, then we need to talk more about power." ❧



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## Et cetera

### Hope despite fear in Sudan

Armed conflict broke out in Sudan on April 15, 2023, triggering fears of a humanitarian crisis. According to the World Health Organization, at least 459 people died and more than 4,000 were injured in the first week-and-a-half before a temporary ceasefire came into effect. Sudanese churches were concerned when a Roman Catholic cathedral was struck with a rocket and an Anglican church in Khartoum was also targeted.

Source: World Council of Churches

(PHOTO BY PAUL JEFFREY)

*Children dance during Catholic Mass in a village in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan.*



## VOICES AND STORIES

# Darkness and light in worship

Anneli Loepp Thiessen

**W**hen Sarah Kathleen Johnson was an undergraduate student at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont., she wrote a hymn text based on Psalm 139. More than a decade later, Len Enns, her former choir director at Grebel and a prominent Mennonite composer, would set the text to music, and the pairing would become *Voices Together* No. 200: “Darkness is not Dark to You, God.”

Johnson’s meditation on Psalm 139:11-12 explores this rich imagery, and reflects on themes of faith, doubt and certainty.

In a video about the song featured on MennoMedia’s YouTube channel ([bit.ly/442pXUS](http://bit.ly/442pXUS)), Enns describes his creative process: “Each verse of that text by Sarah Kathleen . . . begins with a statement of fact, and each verse then ends with a corresponding response or action or understanding. In my hymn tune, these two elements are connected with a brief, perhaps, inspiration.” In the first verse, the statement “Darkness leads to what is true” is highlighted by an ascending phrase that culminates in a sustained note and is followed by a rest. Enns explains that this pause is the only major pause in the whole hymn, and this sequence enlivens Johnson’s text by

emphasizing these powerful statements.

The *Voices Together* hymnal committee was particularly drawn to Johnson’s text because of the way it reframes stereotypical images of darkness as negative, and light as positive. In her text, darkness is used as a positive image, and light is even used negatively.

The committee’s desire to include this subverted imagery was in response to a report conducted by Tony Brown during the process of compiling *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (1992). He surveyed the *Mennonite Hymnal* (1969), and discovered that there were 49 cases of dark imagery used questionably (or negatively), seven cases of darkness cast positively, zero cases of light used questionably, and 33 cases of light cast positively.

In a 2020 blog post for Anabaptist Worship Network ([bit.ly/3LtQdQO](http://bit.ly/3LtQdQO)), Katie Graber reflects further on Brown’s report, and highlights how language of “light” has been associated with whiteness, purity and good, while language of “dark” has been associated with sin, black and evil. These associations can transcend worship language and have detrimental impacts on how worshippers understand race.

She suggests that “considering how language of darkness and light impacts

our perspectives and biases can lead us to more fully understand how our congregational worship can actively work to fight racism.”

Johnson’s hymn is one way of changing assumptions around light and darkness in worship. Another hymn that can serve this purpose is No. 281 in *Voices Together*, “Joyful is the Dark,” which was written by Brian Wren for *Hymnal: A Worship Book* in response to Brown’s study.

In addition to offering a reflection on Psalm 139 and giving language for the positive portrayal of darkness, “Darkness is not Dark to You, God” may also be meaningful for communities in times of grief or crisis. Like the recommended use for “When Pain or Sorrow” from the March Voices and Stories column, communities may find it helpful to learn “Darkness is not Dark to You, God” before a time of tragedy, so that it is known when it is needed. It could also be meaningful during a Longest Night service during Advent, or when a congregation is facing the unknown.

If communities are looking for a familiar tune to sing the text to, they can also pair it with the hymn tune PICARDY, which is commonly paired with “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” (*Voices Together* #65). ❧



Anneli Loepp Thiessen is a PhD candidate, co-director of the Anabaptist Worship Network and was a committee member for *Voices Together*.

## Et cetera

### Militarism killing our planet

The global tools of war, including aircraft, tanks, heavy machinery and diesel power generators, are major polluters. Taken together, the world’s militaries have a larger carbon footprint than most countries. Only the countries of China, the U.S. and India emit more greenhouse gases. Tackling the climate crisis means reducing global militarization, says Community Peacemaker Teams.

Source: Community Peacemaker Teams



## LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

# Extending grace instead of labelling enemies

Troy Watson

According to a recent *Wall Street Journal*-Norc poll, the smallest percentage of Americans (12 percent) said they were “very happy” since 1972. These “very happy” people share a number of common traits. They are more likely to value community, personal relationships and marriage, above things like careers and money. They are also more likely to believe in God, and be older females in their retirement years.

People who are actively involved in church are also, statistically, more likely to be older females who believe in God and value community, marriage and personal relationships. Is there a connection? Does church involvement make us happier?

According to the Pew Research Center, it does. Some researchers have also noted that the decline in happiness levels in North America, over the past 50 years, coincides with the decline in church participation. Studies have also shown regular church attenders tend to live longer, even though they’re not necessarily physically any healthier. In fact, some studies report highly religious people in America have higher rates of obesity.

Regular church involvement may not make people physically healthier, which is something we might want to explore, but it’s a factor in experiencing higher levels of happiness and well-being. I think the primary reason for this is that church involvement strengthens and deepens our relationships with God, other people and ourselves. Healthy, loving relationships are what the way of Jesus is about. The Greatest Commandments, after all, are to love God with your whole being and love other people

as yourself.

This all sounds great, but it makes me wonder. If church participation increases our happiness and quality of life, why is church attendance in decline? And why do so many church members seem to be . . . um, kind of grumpy? (This last question is based on an observation repeated to me from many people, both inside and outside the church.)

There are no simple answers to such questions. There are many factors, though. One is that churches are prone to making secondary things our “main thing.” We lose our primary focus of deepening relationships with God, one another and our neighbours—which includes our enemies and us. Instead, we focus on what and who we stand for, and what and who we stand against. I see this happening in many churches, both on the right and the left.

I understand the need to “stand for something.” It’s an important ingredient in developing and sustaining a movement, and the church is definitely called to be a movement.

Unfortunately, another important ingredient in sustaining a movement is to name a common enemy. It’s interesting that it doesn’t matter who a movement labels as “the problem.” Any scapegoat, guilty or innocent, will do.

What strengthens a movement is naming an enemy that somehow represents the primary problem or threat to those in the movement. Once a movement identifies a common enemy, it builds momentum and allegiance among its followers, as long as the common enemy poses a threat.

This often requires “prophetic pundits” and “spinmeisters” to

perpetuate the perception that the threat of the enemy is real. In doing so, the movement builds a sense of pseudo-community, based on fear, suspicion, judgment, self-righteousness, self-protection and even hatred, which are all virtues that Jesus extols for his church. I jest.

This is not at all the kind of movement Jesus inaugurated. There is a reason he and the New Testament authors repeatedly announced that:

- **Our enemy is** not human;
- **Our enemy has** already been defeated; and
- **The real battle** is internal, in our own hearts and minds.

One thing that makes the movement of Christ different is that it’s not a rally against a common enemy group. It’s a movement of allowing the power of love to break through the illusion of division and separation. The Gospel proclaims that in Christ there is no longer an “us vs. them” mentality. The Body of Christ is called to embody this new reality, with former “enemies” from “warring tribes” participating in the same community, all focusing on strengthening and deepening healthy relationships with one another, our neighbours and God.

The Jesus movement was, and is, intended to be joyful, loving people in community, extending grace to all.

This last part is important but sorely missing in our current social landscape. As Christians, extending grace is supposed to be our niche in the “market” of religion and spirituality. ❧



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## RIDING THE WAVES OF INTERCULTURAL CHURCH

## Revisiting intentionality

Joon Park

Once upon a time, there was a belief in the Canadian Mennonite church that if it welcomed new people of colour, immigrants and refugees, these newcomers would eventually join and integrate into the church. This was an illusion. The church's initial welcome may have played as a curious gesture to get to know the new people, but did not warrant a success of embracing and integrating the new people.

From the early 1990s through to the 2000s, a group of Korean students and immigrants knocked on the doors of Canadian Mennonite churches in Winnipeg, Toronto and Vancouver. Tired of the prosperity-gospel message and individual salvation heavily marketed in Korean churches, they desperately sought an alternative, a radical faith of following Jesus.

As new people to Canada, they were exposed to the Mennonite faith and church, whose members strongly embodied Christ, community and reconciliation-centred beliefs. These beliefs served as a refreshing contrast to what they learned in Korea. But their fascination did not last. Two or three decades later, almost all of them have left the Mennonite church.

Among intercultural church practitioners, there is one universal truth that is timelessly shared: An intercultural church can happen by accident, but it does not survive without intentionality. The church must consistently and communally take intentionality very seriously. If we want to be an intercultural church, we must test how biblically intentional we are, how intentionally patient we are and how intentionally hopeful we are.

Yet when it comes to the Mennonite church where I have survived for the past 19 years, this word "intentionality" is still treated as an uninvited guest.

I wonder how many more trials and errors our Mennonite church has to go through before we fully understand and embrace the real value of intentionality.

I know how generous and hospitable Mennonite elders are. I know how non-judgmental the Mennonite leaders are. I know how traditional the Mennonite church is. But this is not enough to achieve an intercultural church.

Mennonite grandfatherly love for the people of colour has a limit. Unless the church goes beyond this, integration can be hardly sustained. Unswerving intentionality toward intercultural integration should permeate the church from beginning to end, even until our last days on Earth.

This requires that we have a firm grip on God's mandate of unity in Christ (Revelation 7). It requires an embrace of our ruthless dependence on God's providence along the way (Psalm 127:1). Intentionality itself is also not enough.

When I was at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, in Elkhart, Ind., from 2009 to 2011, studying theology and dreaming of a future when I could use my intercultural expertise for the Mennonite church, I came to know Village Baptist Church in Beaverton, Ore., a pioneering multicultural church in the United States. I read about it in Mark Deymaz's book *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church*.

Then I visited the church and was able to interview the missions pastor, John Jordan.

Founded in 1949, the church's desire was that God would use it as an "instrument and testimony . . . to reach a multitude of neighbours with the Gospel of Jesus Christ." The church remained in the realm of the purely white congregation until a Korean stranger, Mr. Lee, knocked on the pastor's door in 1990. He randomly

asked Don Jensen, lead pastor at the time, "Why does your church exist?" The pastor simply told Mr. Lee, "We exist to meet the needs of the community."

Thirty years later, the church became one of the biggest, intentional and exemplary multicultural churches, embracing five ethnic ministries under the same roof: Korean, West Indian, Chinese, Hispanic and English. And with one ledger!

The following statements of this church, from a document I obtained when I visited there, tell us all how important it is to have intentionality even in the stage of envisioning the church's future:

- **We are a church** devoted to becoming culturally inclusive—multicultural as opposed to monoculture.
- **We are a church** where all cultures embrace the same mission, vision and beliefs.
- **We are a church** that is intentional to reach the demographics of Washington County.
- **We are a church** that is intentional to build a biblically and culturally qualified leadership that is multicultural, effective in reaching the diverse cultures of our community.
- **We are a church** that is intentional to reach first, second and third generations.
- **We are a church** whose aim is to be a diverse community that reflects both united oneness and individual identity.
- **We are a church** that is a diverse community in which no ethnicity is primary.

By which statement are you challenged the most? ❧



Joon Park is intentional interim co-paster of Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton.

## NEWS

# U2's Mennonite string section

*Richard and Paul Armin look back on their contribution to The Joshua Tree, one of the biggest albums in rock history*

By Aaron Epp  
Senior Writer

There was nothing unusual about it when Richard, Paul and Adele Armin walked into the recording studio on New Year's Eve in 1986. It was just another job, really.

Music producer Daniel Lanois called Richard the day before and requested that the siblings, all professional musicians living and working in Toronto at the time,

come to Grant Avenue Studio in Hamilton, Ont., to record string parts for an album he was working on: *The Joshua Tree* by U2.

Richard and Lanois had become acquainted through Toronto's music scene. Richard frequently contributed cello parts to projects recorded at Grant Avenue, which Lanois co-founded.

"I was always happy to hear from

Danny," Richard told *Canadian Mennonite* by phone from his downtown Toronto apartment at the end of March, "because he always had really interesting projects."

At around 7 p.m., the Armins sat down in the studio's control room with their instruments. Lanois and recording engineer Bob Doidge played them "One Tree Hill," the song they would be playing



PHOTO BY OLAF HEINE

The *Joshua Tree* made U2 superstars. The band—Larry Mullen, Jr., Adam Clayton, Bono and The Edge—is pictured here in 2017.



THE CANADIAN MENNONITE PHOTO COLLECTION / MENNONITE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

**The Armin String Quartet, pictured in 1955. From left to right: Paul, 11, viola; Adele, 10, second violin; Otto, 12, first violin; and Richard, 11, cello.**

on. After listening to the song about 10 times, the Armins devised a simple arrangement and began recording. Their work was guided in part by U2 guitarist The Edge, who was on the phone with Lanois throughout the session.

Three or four hours later, the session was over. Ten weeks after that, the album was out, and people around the world could hear the Armins' playing.

"It was a very devotional kind of song,

and it was quite profound to listen to," Richard said. "We approached it like a hymn—a Mennonite hymn—and, given our background, we knew how to do that."

#### **'Mennonite churches gave us a start'**

Marta Goertzen fell in love with, and married, a teacher named James Jay Armin, and together they gave birth to a string quartet.

Jay and Marta started their family in southern Manitoba in the early 1940s. Towards the end of the decade, the family moved to Leamington, Ont., where Jay was the principal of United Mennonite Educational Institute (now UMEI Christian High School). Marta was a homemaker and talented visual artist, having studied at the Brooklyn Museum School of Art in New York.

In 1953, the family moved to Riverside,

Ont., a town that is now part of Windsor. There, the children started learning their instruments. Otto, the eldest, and Adele, the youngest, both took up the violin. Twins Richard and Paul picked up the cello and viola, respectively.

“We each had an affinity for [our] instrument,” Paul recalled when reached at his home in Pictou, N.S., last month. “We were able to play anything that was put in front of us after a while.”

Faith wasn't an important part of the family's life, but the cultural aspects of being Russian Mennonite played a vital role. The family spoke German at home, connected to Mennonite churches wherever they lived, and helped with the music at the churches they attended. The family travelled across Canada twice, with the children performing in Mennonite churches along the way. During the first tour, they billed themselves as the Mennonite Armin String Quartet.

“Mennonite churches gave us a start,” Paul said. “We were able to play lots of concerts and lots of different music, both folk music and the heavier classical works, for these audiences. . . . It was all Mennonite churches for our first few years of existence, that got us to a professional standard of playing.”

The quartet often performed on CBC radio and TV. In 1961, they were granted scholarships to study at Indiana University. After studying and performing together for a couple years, the siblings went their separate ways.

In their youth, none of them aspired to turn music into a career. Still, all four became professional musicians:

- **Otto performed** with various symphony orchestras across Canada before becoming first concertmaster with the Hamburg Philharmonic in 1977. Today, he is retired and still lives in Germany.
- **Adele toured** extensively, played on hundreds of recordings, and was a member of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra for 20 years. At one point, she backed Sammy Davis, Jr. as part of an all-woman orchestra. She died in Oshawa, Ont., last July following a two-year battle

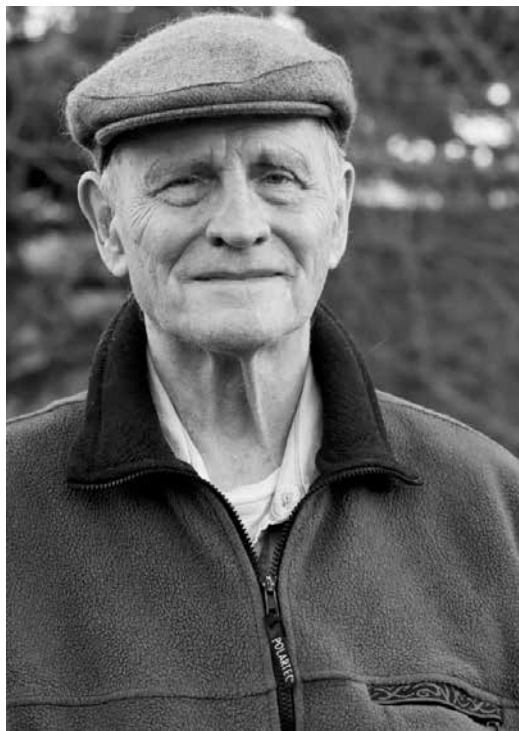


PHOTO BY ANNA PEREDA

Paul Armin pictured at home in April 2023.

with cancer.

- **Richard was** a professional musician in the United States, and spent an eight-month stint working with Don Shirley, the pianist whose story inspired the Academy Award-winning 2018 film, *Green Book*. Eventually, Richard joined the Toronto Symphony for five years, followed by a five-year stint in the rock band Lighthouse. He worked as a session musician in Toronto for the rest of his career.
- **Paul's career** took him to New York, where he played on Broadway and studied at the Manhattan School of Music. Then he headed to London, England, where he performed with what is now the Royal Opera. When he returned to Canada, he performed at the Stratford Festival, joined the Montreal Symphony Orchestra for two seasons and toured with Lighthouse for a year. After starting a family, he settled down in Toronto and became a high-school teacher.

Richard, Paul and Adele did recording sessions together throughout the 1970s and '80s, playing on everything from commercial jingles and films, to folk

albums. In the liner notes to *The Joshua Tree*, they are credited as the Armin Family.

### 'Unusual for string players'

On “One Tree Hill,” the Armins played electro-acoustic instruments they had developed, called Raads. Recording engineer Bob Doidge recalled the Armins being pleasant people who were nice to work with. “They didn't really write anything out,” Doidge told *CM* last month. “They were good at winging it, which is unusual for string players—extremely unusual”

It's safe to say that *The Joshua Tree* is the most famous album the Armin siblings appeared on. Released on March 9, 1987, the album—U2's fifth—made the band superstars. It landed them on the cover of *Time*, produced three hit singles and earned them the Grammy Award for Album of the Year.

In the 36 years since its release, *The Joshua Tree* has sold more than 25 million copies, making it one of the world's best-selling albums.

Given that the album includes the U2 classics “Where the Streets Have No Name,” “I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For,” “With or Without You,” and “Bullet in the Blue Sky,” it can be easy to forget about “One Tree Hill.”

Still, the song is significant in the band's history. It's about Greg Carroll, whom U2 singer Bono met in 1984 while on tour in New Zealand. On the first night they met, Carroll and his friends took Bono up One Tree Hill, one of the highest of Auckland's largest volcanoes. Carroll started working for the band, and subsequently formed a deep friendship with Bono and his wife, Ali Hewson.

Carroll was killed in a motorcycle accident in Dublin on July 3, 1986. The lyrics to the song reflect Bono's thoughts at his funeral.

In the memoir he published last year, *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story*, Bono recalled the keyboard beat that provided the song's genesis. “It became the foundation of a song we called ‘One Tree Hill,’ after the place overlooking Auckland where we had spent such a special time with Greg,” Bono wrote. “The song could





PHOTO BY AARON EPP

*U2 performs at Soldier Field in Chicago, Ill., in June 2017 as part of a tour commemorating The Joshua Tree's 30th anniversary.*

carry the grief we could not."

### 'Back to our beginnings'

Paul agrees with his brother about the hymn-like quality of "One Tree Hill" and mused about the way the string parts resemble the hymn arrangements he and his siblings played when they were growing up. "In a sense, [U2] certainly got the right string players," Paul said. "[We went] back to our beginnings."

Neither brother is religious, although Richard describes himself as "spiritually

oriented." Now 78 and retired, he plays his cello occasionally, but in recent years has become more interested in silence. "I've discovered that, in silence, something goes on within us that is truly creative," he said. "It doesn't show outwardly, but inwardly. It's a profound experience."

More than 1,700 kilometres away, Paul is also retired. He has fond memories of playing with his three siblings, back when they had no intention of billing themselves as a string quartet and were simply drawn to making music together.

"We didn't really play together so much as we listened [to one another], and the playing was automatic," Paul said. "We had a lot of fun with the music." ❧



# Young adults cultivate connection and hope at climate retreat

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe  
Manitoba Correspondent  
HEADINGLEY, MAN.

On Earth Day 2023, young adults from across Canada gathered at Camp Assiniboia, near Headingley, Man., for a time of lament, reflection and celebration at the Living Hope-Centering Connection retreat.

Forty-eight people came together throughout the weekend of April 21 to 23 to talk about climate change and creation care, and to worship and play.

“I’ve been involved in planning more than a hundred youth gatherings,” said Kathy Giesbrecht, Mennonite Church Manitoba’s director of congregational ministries. “None has felt as significant, important or critical as this one.”

The event was created for youth and young adults, of which there were 20 from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, but with guests, staff and their children, the ages of participants ranged from 5 to 65 years old.

“It was really fun to meet new people,” said participant Lia Campbell-Enns, who recently finished her first year of university. “Everyone cared about the environment and the Earth, and it just felt like a really good space to talk about that stuff.”

Participants joined interactive workshops led by A Rocha and Mennonite Central Committee. They created art with local artist Sashira Gafic, including a group art project they hope will travel between regional churches; and they heard from guest speakers and members of the MC Manitoba Climate Action Working Group, who led table conversations around various topics.

Emily Rempel, a member of the event’s planning group, said: “We wanted the retreat to be a space for conversation about climate change, a space to hold all our feelings about it, where it was okay to be angry about climate change, and feel grief and fear, and to hold that in a sacred



PHOTOS BY DARRYL NEUSTAEDTER BARG

*Participants engage in several table discussions, exploring various topics surrounding climate change.*



*Guest speaker Boma Okorosaye-Orubite shares his thoughts with the group.*

space. But we wanted people to leave feeling hopeful too.”

Rempel led the group in a ritual of lament. People prayed, sang and shared food together. The next day, they threw a party to celebrate Earth Day. Just like a social—Manitoba’s signature party that celebrates a soon-to-be married couple—it had a DJ, dancing, fasha and a raffle of thrifted prizes.

“A lot of the weekend was pretty heavy, which was good in itself, but I think the lightness and dancing, and screaming to Taylor Swift, was also this beautiful moment of connection,” Rempel said with a laugh.

Sandy Plett, MC Canada’s climate action coordinator, said one outcome that she hoped would emerge from the retreat was:

“We’re building a foundation for a church that can, and will, respond to the climate crisis. A foundation of hope against all odds, hope in community, hope as a way of living rather than a specific outcome.”

Giesbrecht initiated the retreat after serving as Camp Assiniboia’s pastor for a week last summer and being inspired by the young adults. “Every day I drove home and I thought the church . . . needed to do more. And, in my position, my role in the church, I could do more.”

She was moved by the support she quickly received from every corner of the church. MC Manitoba freed up time for her to organize the event and money to subsidize young people’s participation costs. MC Canada agreed to contribute money, meaning the participation could

extend beyond Manitoba. The Climate Action Working Group transported people to and from the airport and hosted many conversation sessions.

“It was a very profound experience for me, I have to say,” Giesbrecht said. “I’m just so grateful. So many people prayed for us, sent messages of support. It really was overwhelming. . . . For me, as a leader in the church, it is critical that this age group knows that this isn’t theirs to carry, it’s all of ours together.”

The young adults from out of province were encouraged to connect back with their congregations and the initiatives going on in their regional churches.

The retreat ended with this question, posed by Plett: “Who will you invite along on your next steps?” ❧



*Throughout the weekend, 48 people attended the Living Hope-Centering Connection retreat, including 20 young adults from across Canada.*

# Hospitality and diversity set a table together

*MC Alberta hosts first ever Taste of MCA event*

By Emily Summach  
Alberta Correspondent  
DIDSBURY, ALTA.

When most people think of Mennonite cuisine, they think of perogies and farmer sausage, or perhaps fresh rollkuchen dipped in Rogers Golden Syrup.

Yet at A Taste of MCA, a Mennonite Church Alberta event at Bergthaler Mennonite Church near Didsbury, on April 12, the menu featured dishes like chicken biryani, chicken kabobs and roti, injera and spicy lamb, corn soup and sticky rice.

Karen Janz, the chair of MC Alberta's Community Building and Programming Committee, said her team created the event to gather folks in an embodied way for one of the first times since the pandemic.

in-person AGM in March of this year, but often that only attracts delegates, so what else could we do? We thought we could pull something together over food. Our first thought was a potluck meal, but that eventually transformed into this amazing, multicultural event."

Dishes from 10 different countries were served at the event: Mexico, South Sudan, Germany, Russia, Ethiopia, Ukraine, Philippines, Swiss Mennonite, Italy and Chin people from Myanmar. Displayed at each table was information about the respective dish and the story behind when, where and how that dish was typically served. People from each of the countries represented are a part of an MC Alberta congregation.

said Janz. "In their home cultures, that's how they get together, over these big meals, not just over coffee and playing cards, you know?"

The event also featured musical performances by Ethiopian, Pakistani and Chin singing groups, as well as scripture reading in multiple languages.

"A big part of the event, too, was learning to worship with people from different cultures, and singing in their native language," Janz said. "Occasionally, words that are universal, like 'Hallelujah,' would come out. Or, you know, the choruses were kind of repetitive, so by the the third time through people were singing along, and clapping, which is very un-Mennonite. These diverse cultures are part of the Mennonite church, and we want to worship with them and like them."

There were 127 people around the tables that night, representing 11 of the regional church's 12 congregations.

Boei Sampok, a 14-year-old from Calgary Chin Christian Church, was one of about 30 people from his congregation who attended the event. He said he came to the event because "I heard there'd be food," and "to meet people from the Mennonite church. The food was good, tonight was very cultural and diverse."

Others agreed that it was curiosity that brought them out, and the chance to connect with people and experience



PHOTO BY JAN WILHELM

**Reuben Tut, left, Manas Ngongjock, Shim Beack, Joon Park, Tim Wiebe-Neufeld, Tracy Brown Ewert and Zander Ewert share smiles and stories around the table.**

"One of our committee members was asking about a way . . . to bring people from our entire conference together in some way," she said. "We held our first

"There was so much enthusiasm from the New Canadians to share their food at this event, many of them said they especially love cooking for other people,"

some new food together.

As much as people came for the food, it was the seeds of connection and shared stories that were the most beautiful parts of diverse people sitting across the table from one another.

“There was a ton of humble pride in sharing food and, in singing together, we became connected,” said Suzanne Gross, who served as the emcee for the event. “We tried to create space to share the stories from our lives. On each of the tables, we had story prompts, you know, questions like, ‘What sort of games did you like to play as a child?’ Some of the questions were deep, some a bit more casual.

“The whole point was to share these stories with one another and to be in charge of our own narrative. There is a Pakistani family from Calgary who were part of the event. They were so happy to share their food, and we invited them to sing a song. We all learned the ‘hallelujah’ part of the song, and by the third verse we were harmonizing!

“In the iceberg of culture, food and music are above the water, which is great. But I also saw the knitting together, and a sense of belonging happening, which is the part of the iceberg that is below the water. It was such a celebration,” she said, beaming. ❧



PHOTO BY JAN WILHELM

*A Taste of MCA event drew people from ages 1 to 100, including young Sarah Sin and her mom, Lal Pui.*



PHOTO BY TIM WIEBE-NEUFELD

*A Chin choir performs at the event.*

# Two congregations withdraw from MC Manitoba

*Both desire to remove affiliation with congregations that are affirming of LGBTQ+ people*

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe  
Manitoba Correspondent

In the same year that two congregations joined Mennonite Church Manitoba, adding new member churches for the first time in a decade, two congregations have also withdrawn from the regional church.

Carman Mennonite Church will officially leave MC Manitoba on Sept. 1 and Springfield Heights Mennonite Church in Winnipeg will leave on July 1. Both congregations stated the main reason for terminating their memberships was their desire to remove affiliation with congregations that are affirming of LGBTQ+ people.

"I see this as part of an 'unsettling and re-settling' that is happening among all denominations but, of course, we're noticing it particularly among Mennonite denominations," says Michael Pahl, MC Manitoba's executive minister. "Congregations are leaving conferences, pastors are leaving congregations, and congregations and pastors are being expelled from their denominations." And he says that congregations and pastors are switching conference affiliation and moving between denominations more freely than ever before.

"The reasons for this 'unsettling and re-settling' revolve around social, political and theological differences," he says. "No one yet knows where things will settle out, or what all the impacts will be of this re-settling that's happening."

The recommended discernment process for withdrawing from MC Manitoba, laid out in its bylaws, calls for a year of prayer and conversation with MC Manitoba leadership and within the congregation.

## Carman Mennonite

Carman Mennonite followed the process carefully, engaging in discussions with Pahl



MC CANADA FACEBOOK PHOTO

*Carman (Man.) Mennonite Church.*

and each other for nearly a year.

Abe Elias, Carman's congregational chair, says it was a very difficult decision, given the congregation's good relationship with MC Manitoba and its alignment with certain values. But the regional church's position on LGBTQ+ affirmation had long been problematic for many of Carman's members.

"We could no longer support the conference with their decision on the level of support they were offering the affirming churches," Elias says. "We respected [Pahl's] input, but it just became clear that we were not on the same page."

The pastor notes the congregation's membership has suffered significantly due to this issue. When members voted to remain part of MC Manitoba five years ago, a considerable number of members left the congregation. The same decision a while later produced the same results.

With the guidance of an interim pastor and several meetings, the church council decided to bring it to one more vote at the congregation's annual meeting.

"We felt, if we didn't grant that [vote], we would probably lose more people." He

says Carman Mennonite has explored the idea of affiliating with a different denomination, but first will be taking its time to process and plan.

## Springfield Heights

Springfield Heights Mennonite did not follow the regional church's recommended process, Pahl says. Soon after MC Manitoba's annual gathering in early March, Springfield Heights' church council called a special congregational meeting to discuss and, within the same meeting, vote on leaving the conference.

Pahl says the decision came unexpectedly. The regional church was not informed of the vote before it took place, or invited to speak to the congregation and answer questions.

Springfield Heights had been in the midst of working with MC Manitoba on a pastoral search, and told regional church leadership it would be stepping back from that search only shortly before it voted to withdraw its membership.

Dietrich Klassen, Springfield Heights' congregational chair, says it was a decision the church had been ignoring for a long time and finally needed to deal with, as some members asked why the church is still part of the denomination. He adds that 100 percent agreement could never be achieved, even with a whole year of discussion.

"We can't see ourselves going that direction," Klassen says, of LGBTQ+ affirmation, "and by being part of the conference, we feel strongly we are supporting that." He says Springfield Heights has not yet discussed the possibility of affiliating with a different denomination.

## Fallout

Pahl says both congregations were



GAMEO PHOTO BY BERT FRIESEN

### Springfield Heights Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

instrumental in forming and growing a regional church in Manitoba. “Their decision to break fellowship with the other congregations that make up MC Manitoba feels like a death in the family,” Pahl says. “And we know, too, that it’s hard for many people in those congregations. . . . We are always very aware of the personal, relational impact of these corporate decisions. We grieve every loss, and we mourn with every person impacted by that loss.”

The worship service at MC Manitoba’s

annual gathering this year named these changes and made space for people to bring them before God in lament. This included River East Mennonite Church, which withdrew from the regional church last year, citing LGBTQ+ affirmation as its reason for departure, too.

Pahl worked hard to assure Carman and Springfield Heights that MC Manitoba doesn’t pressure its congregations to be

affirming or enter discernment processes.

“We want to support congregations wherever they’re at on LGBTQ+ inclusion,” he says.

In February, the MC Manitoba Board approved a guiding statement on “creating space” for discernment on LGBTQ+ inclusion, outlining the regional church’s diversity on the matter and commitment to be together amidst differences. Pahl invited all pastors and other church leaders to give feedback on that statement before it was published. ❧

## MC Manitoba LGBTQ+ Guiding Statement

**M**ennonite Church Manitoba is a community of congregations covenanted together for fellowship, mutual support and shared ministry. We encourage congregations to discern the Spirit’s leading for themselves regarding their welcome and affirmation of LGBTQ+ people, and this has meant that our congregations are in different places theologically and practically regarding this. We continue “making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3), recognizing that our unity in Christ is not complete uniformity of belief and practice, and that diversity can be a beautiful, if sometimes surprising, gift from God.

In our shared spaces as Mennonite Church Manitoba, we strive to provide a welcoming and safe place for everyone. These shared spaces include our annual gatherings, our Mennonite Church Manitoba office, our Camps with Meaning camps and programs, our committees and working groups, and our resourcing workshops and events. To make these shared spaces safe for all, we will avoid disparaging remarks about one another’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, and we will respect chosen names and pronouns. We will also avoid disparaging remarks about one another’s perspective on LGBTQ+ welcome or affirmation, and we will not promote our congregation’s position as normative for all congregations. ❧

Further information on this statement can be found at [mennochurch.mb.ca/creatingspace](http://mennochurch.mb.ca/creatingspace).



### News brief

## Spirit of MDS Fund grants help Canadian churches



CONNECT CITY PHOTO

### Refugee youth at a 2022 Connect City summer camp.

Three Mennonite Church Canada congregations—two in Ontario and one in British Columbia—have been approved to receive grants from the Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Spirit of MDS Fund:

- **In Toronto, Connect City** will use a grant of \$5,000 from the fund to assist refugee youth. One way the church will assist them is by once again offering a summer camp that allows youth to get out of the cramped quarters of the shelter where they live, which is located in an old hotel.

- **Niagara United Mennonite Church** in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., will use a grant of \$5,000 to build a laundry facility for seasonal workers who come to the area each year from Jamaica and Mexico to work on local farms. The workers are housed by local farmers. In many cases, says Kathy Rempel, a church member, the housing is adequate and workers are satisfied. But one thing that is lacking is a good facility for laundry.

- **Sherbrooke Mennonite Church** in Vancouver will use a grant of \$5,000 to expand its services for newcomers in the city, such as refugee claimants and new immigrants. The church is expanding its assistance by providing non-food products, such as personal hygiene items, menstrual products, laundry detergent and dish-washing soap.

For more information, or to apply, visit [www.mds.org/spirit-of-mds-fund](http://www.mds.org/spirit-of-mds-fund).

—MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE

# Kelowna church sells property and moves

By Amy Rinner Waddell  
B.C. Correspondent

**M**embers of Kelowna First Mennonite Church are selling their church building, but that doesn't mean they are closing their doors. As of May, the small congregation is meeting in a nearby seniors residence.

With fewer than a dozen seniors attending Sunday morning services, maintaining a church building was no longer manageable. Last year, the congregation began looking for a purchaser, and accepted the offer of Willow Park Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation whose south campus had been meeting in a school.

With Willow Park South taking possession on May 1, First Mennonite members were busy during April cleaning out files, music, books and other items significant to the congregation.

Just last year, First Mennonite celebrated its 75th anniversary. Membership has fluctuated over the years, reaching its peak of 89 in 1995, and it has gradually declined since then.

The retirement of the last resident pastor, combined with the pandemic three

years ago, led the congregation to begin hiring virtual pastors. Lisa Martens Bartel first filled that role, and Ken Dueck is the current virtual pastor, preaching regularly by Zoom.

The congregation has a "strong desire to remain a worshipping community," Dueck says. "We could continue worshipping in the church building, but would have to work around Willow Park's schedule, and the time available wasn't suitable for us."

When First Mennonite explored options to hold worship services elsewhere, it found an ideal location just next door at the Northwood Retirement Resort. Northwood has offered its theatre room for Sunday morning services, including projector, sound system and theatre seating. First Mennonite's worship services will be open to all residents of Northwood.

Kevin Barkowsky, Mennonite Church B.C.'s interim executive minister, who pastored First Mennonite from 2011 to 2015, says, "Mennonite Church B.C. would like to wish First Mennonite Church Kelowna God's richest blessings as they

transition to a new building and new opportunities for ministry at Northwood." ❧

## /// Staff change

### Grebel hires new peace scholar



Eric Lepp will join Conrad Grebel University College as assistant professor of peace and conflict studies (PACS) on July 1, becoming the college's newest tenure-track faculty member.

He earned a PhD from the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute at the University of Manchester, England; an MA in peace studies at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame; and a bachelor of social work from the University of Waterloo.

He is familiar with the PACS program as an alumnus of Grebel and a former staff member. This winter he co-curated an interactive exhibit in the Grebel Gallery entitled "Your Wall Can (Not) Divide Us" that features photos of vibrant street art and graffiti from conflict-affected areas around the world as well as an interactive graffiti wall.

"I am looking forward to working with the faculty, staff and students in the peace and conflict studies program to intentionally chart our direction together through theories and practices that are emerging in response to our increasingly polarized world," he says of his new appointment.

—CONRAD GREBEL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE



NORTHWOOD RETIREMENT RESORT PHOTO

*Kelowna First Mennonite Church, built in 1989, sold its property to an MB church, and now worships next door in the theatre room at the Northwood Retirement Resort.*



# CPT receives International Peace Award

Community Peacemaker Teams International  
INDEPENDENCE, MISS.

Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT) was awarded the International Peace Award by the Community of Christ Church and the Shaw Family Foundation on April 22 during the church's international conference.

Honouring CPT's 35 years of peacemaking, the awarding body said, "We do this in recognition of your significant contribution to peacemaking through nonviolent accompaniment with those actively working for human rights and just peace. Your work includes spiritually centred peacemaking, evidenced by your multifaith relationships and organization. And we recognize that you do all this with a willingness to put yourself in harm's way"

Receiving the award, Muriel Schmid, CPT's administrative director, reflected on the conference's theme of courage. "The peace award gives us courage and encourages us literally to continue our journey of the work of peace and justice, which can never be done in isolation," she said. "Your community and our community will continue the walk together. . . . We can be courageous together."

Sending a message of thanks from Colombia, Milena Rincón, CPT's program director, highlighted the centrality of "authentic relationships" in CPT's work of accompaniment which has shaped the accompaniment practice.

"We remain committed to building accompaniment relationships where the voices and experiences of those who are part of CPT and those we accompany continue to be valued, heard and honoured," she said. "To advance in this commitment, we must continue to reflect on our reason for being CPT, listen when we are challenged and affirmed, and be willing to transform ourselves and be accompanied on this journey."

A \$25,000 cash award accompanied the recognition for CPT to continue the work of transformative peacemaking.

The International Peace Award has been presented annually since 1993. ❧



PHOTO SUPPLIED

*CPT's award depicts two hands, the smaller hand cradled by the larger, and both cradling a globe.*

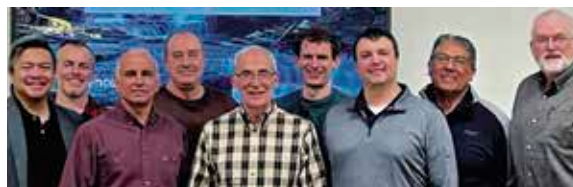
## News brief

### Mennonite Men approves grants for planting 121,000 trees

GOSHEN, IND.—Mennonite Men approved \$121,000 for 11 grants to support tree-planting projects around the world. Besides two grants that went to American congregations, the other nine were awarded to Mennonite community projects outside the United States: four each in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola, and one in Benin.

Most of these international projects will provide seedlings both for long-term reforestation efforts and for short-term economic support of local communities that will learn sustainable forestry practices while earning income from the trees through fruit and charcoal-production (to reduce cutting trees in intact forests).

Once planted, trees from these 11 projects will nearly triple the number of trees already planted through Mennonite Men's JoinTrees project, from just over 100,000 to 297,658. The goal of the project is to plant a million trees by 2030 to help restore God's Earth.



MENNONITE MEN PHOTO

*At its semi-annual meeting, the board of Mennonite Men approved \$121,000 for 11 grants to support tree-planting projects in the U.S. and Africa.*

To contribute to this project, visit [mennonitemen.org/jointrees](https://mennonitemen.org/jointrees).

—MENNONITE MEN



# Canadian couple help out in Kentucky

*'A great opportunity to help people who have gone through so much'*

Mennonite Disaster Service

**C**rooked roads, crooked walls, crooked ceilings, too. As they worked with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) installing drywall in a home in Breathitt County, Ky., Carol and Richard Bergman of Grunthal, Man., realized nothing was quite straight.

"We were working on an old house, so the walls weren't straight, the ceiling wasn't straight," says Richard, 60, who served as a crew leader at the project. "There were some challenges with the drywall."

As they met the challenges in repairing houses damaged by a July 2022 flood, the couple, who are members of Elim Mennonite Church in Grunthal, were also able to meet people recovering from the disaster that hit the rugged and mountainous eastern part of Kentucky.

"I think the people are amazing," says Carol, 56, who was an assistant cook with MDS. "They're in such good spirits. They are welcoming us and are positive about the future."

Most people serve with MDS for a week. But, as substitute teachers, the Bergmans were able to take more time to serve for a month as leadership volunteers.

"It was nice to get to know the different volunteers," says Richard, of the longer time they spent at the project.

At the same time, they were there long enough to see how the recovery progressed over time.

"We were happy to be part of the effort to help a number of families get back into their homes," he says. "It's something that we could do to show our gratitude and help people who are in a hard time right now."

Carol has a new perspective on how people are coping with the loss of their homes. "Would I be as gracious if I lost my home? I don't know," she says. "It teaches



PHOTO BY PAUL HUNT

**MDS volunteers Carol and Richard Bergman, at left, help repair Ed Southwood's home.**

me that we're all human, but that we have a great God who helps us through all kinds of trials."

The Bergman's service in Breathitt County is the fourth time Richard has served with MDS, and the third time for Carol.

Serving with MDS also "enriches our lives," Carol says, noting that they have made many new friends from across North America. "I'm a changed person because I served with MDS."

"We have it pretty good, so it's a way for us to give back," Richard says. "It's always good to give someone else a leg up when they need some help." ❧

To learn more about volunteering with MDS, visit [www.mds.org/volunteer-canada](http://www.mds.org/volunteer-canada).



## News brief

### Virtual game show raises funds for Camp Valaqua

"Survey says!" Mennonite Church Alberta hosted its third annual Family Feud event to raise funds for Camp Valaqua. One-hundred-and-twenty people, in 20 unique teams, participated in the virtual event held on April 15.

"This is the third annual Family Feud event that I have run," says Kevin Stoesz, who organized the event. "Prior to the Family Feud event, I ran three trivia nights. The switch to Family Feud came when we realized that it will be more accessible to a wider audience. Family feud can accommodate a larger age difference with fairness. . . . The team named Almost Family won the event. . . . First round was, 'I asked 100 high schoolers,' the second round was, 'I asked 100 people,' and the third round was, 'I asked 100 Christians.'"

The Family Feud raised \$3,441.50 for Camp Valaqua.

—BY EMILY SUMMACH



PHOTO SUPPLIED BY RUTH BERGEN-BRAUN

**Camp Valaqua, Mennonite Church Alberta's only camp, is located near Water Valley.**

# Online church in 2023

By Emma Siemens  
CM Intern

From households clustered around computer screens to sanctuaries filled with people, church services have taken a variety of forms since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic more than three years ago.

Although the days of holding church services solely by online meetings are firmly in the past for most congregations, the pandemic undoubtedly forced churches to consider technology use anew—in what it takes from a congregation, but also in what it can bring.

“There was an urgency to do church well online,” says Lisa Enns, pastor of Winnipeg’s Charleswood Mennonite Church, in reference to pandemic worship-service planning. “People were isolated, people were lonely, and people were stressed. My sense of pastoral care kicked in.”

Like many churches then, Charleswood Mennonite chose to hold its Sunday morning worship services over Zoom throughout the pandemic, due to the online platform’s interactivity. In addition to being able to send messages to one another over Zoom throughout the service led by the worship team alone in the sanctuary, the congregation was also split into randomly assigned breakout room groups after the service, to approximate “foyer conversations” between households.

Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg also incorporated breakout rooms into its online church services.

“But it wasn’t the same as being in the same space and seeing someone across the room, and saying, ‘There’s so-and-so. I’d like to talk to them,’” says Pastor Lynell Bergen. This barrier to natural fellowship was reinforced by the loss of physical touch, she says.

For both churches, holding their worship services only online was always

understood to be a temporary response to the temporary demands of the pandemic.

“A huge piece of not being in person was the stress of performance,” says Enns. “It wasn’t about what you were actually doing. It was wondering, will the technology actually work? Is the worship meaningful this way? I just remember constantly longing to be back in person.”



ISTOCK.COM PHOTO BY DOIDAM10

While both churches are now worshipping in person once more, their services are still offered in some form online. The losses that came with being limited to online church can be overcome, while the advantages of this format can continue to benefit the churches overall.

Hope Mennonite is still offering service attendance online.

“It expanded the possibility of what we could do,” says Bergen. “We could have someone who didn’t live in Winnipeg preach or share.”

This was something Hope began doing during the pandemic, and still does today.

Bergen also says there are a number of people who continue to attend the church every week by Zoom who otherwise wouldn’t be attending at all.

“They have formed their own community,” she says. “They can’t be in our church physically for one reason or

another, so this gives them a chance to be present in another way, and to create a bond with other people.”

Charleswood Mennonite, on the other hand, now records and livestreams its services, making the recording available online for anyone to watch once the service is over.

“We will likely never stop livestreaming,” says Enns. “Now that we know we can, for those people who cannot come into church, it feels important.”

Beyond regular congregants, both Bergen and Enns also note the ability of online services to attract newcomers to their churches.

“It can be a way for people to check out the church without having to step in the door,” says Bergen. Attending church online can allow newcomers to answer questions like, “Who are these people? What happens when they gather? Is this a church I might feel comfortable in?” she says. “Zoom is still there, still available, if people want to step in the door metaphorically.”

That said, worshipping as closely together as possible is still the goal for Hope Mennonite.

“We don’t record our services,” Bergen says. “If you’re not there at 10 o’clock, you’ve missed it. There’s something about that, that we’re all here together, and this is when we meet, and you’re welcome to join us.”

Enns and Charleswood Mennonite share this value of togetherness in worship.

“The time in the foyer is the best part of being back,” says Enns, adding that she cherishes “being able to greet people, to hear that buzz of energy and conversation in the foyer.”

“We always have to quiet people down before the service, and that’s good,” says Enns. “It’s good noise.” ❧

# Ottawa group uses unique fundraising method

Story and Photo by Carla Klassen  
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

For more than 20 years, a refugee support group at Ottawa Mennonite Church has used an unusual fundraising method that has allowed it to provide hundreds of thousands of dollars in rent subsidy to newcomers. The rising cost of living has made this support all the more important.

Since 1979, the church has sponsored, or informally supported, more than 380 newcomers from nearly 30 countries. In 2001, the work took on new dimensions.

Conversations at church around the lack of affordable housing resulted in the formation of the Ottawa Mennonite Refugee Alternatives Shelter Corporation, commonly known as OMRA. This small group realized that the financial support provided by the Canadian government simply didn't cover the real costs of living in a city like Ottawa. In response, it set out to provide a way to make the transition to Canadian life just a little more manageable for people who had already been faced with so much.

Seeing a need for compassionate landlords, the group decided to purchase a townhouse using donated funds and grant money. The concept was to offer a refugee family subsidized rent in the house for their first couple of years in Ottawa.

The plan achieved its goal and, over the next 10 years, the group bought three more homes. In 2017, it changed course. In the face of growing need, it decided to sell two of the houses and use the resulting revenue to offer subsidies to families renting other housing.

With this change, the church went from assisting four families living in their four



*Linda Redekop, left, and Maria Rigby have been part of Ottawa Mennonite Church's refugee resettlement work since its start.*

homes, to helping 35 families meet their rent payments.

Currently, this small volunteer-run organization provides around \$150,000 in rent subsidies annually; between \$150 and \$750 per month per family, depending on need. The money comes from interest on the revenue from the houses that were sold, rent from the remaining properties, donations and the ingenious fundraising activity the group has used since 2001.

A number of large grocery chains have programs that allow community groups to retain up to six percent of the face value of grocery gift cards if they sell enough of them to meet the chains' specified sales

requirements. OMRA volunteers buy gift cards in bulk from the Loblaws, Metro and Farm Boy, then sell them at face value, retaining their cut of the sales. In the case of these chains, the minimum amount they need to sell is \$20,000 monthly, per store.

Over the years, the program has grown to include about 325 households, who use gift cards to buy roughly \$65,000 worth of groceries each month. Participants are from Ottawa Mennonite, five other congregations and several community groups. The program's cut of the sales, along with the credit-card points they use to purchase the cards—which they put back into the program—provides about \$50,000 annually in rental subsidies for refugee newcomers. OMRA also retains small amounts left on returned cards, as well as additional donations made through the program.

Everyone buys groceries. It makes no difference to most of them if they pay directly or use

a gift card. By simply adding a charitable middle-person, at no extra cost, a percentage of participants' monthly grocery bills go to a good cause. The only catch is that it requires a lot of effort on the part of volunteers. All of the orders must be tracked, payments received and cards ordered, sorted and distributed. This work is done by Ottawa Mennonite's volunteers.

Through these collective efforts, 325 households share their table, in a sense, with new neighbours in Ottawa. With the rising cost of living, this sharing helps families who have had so much else to deal with in their lives. ❧

# Schools choirs gather in Pennsylvania

By Kara Cornies  
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

The annual Mennonite Schools Council Choir Festival gathers choirs from throughout the United States and Ontario to rehearse and perform as individual and mass choirs, as well as to form new connections. Rockway Mennonite Collegiate returned to the festival this year after a hiatus of a few years.

The event was held at Antrim Brethren In Christ Church in Chambersburg, Pa.

Rockway's Senior Choir travelled to the April festival, where it joined choirs from Lancaster Mennonite High School and Shalom Christian Academy.

April 15 was filled with rehearsal, starting at 8:30 am. The choirs then held an evening concert for family and friends in the area. The day ended with all three choirs bowling together.



PHOTO SUPPLIED

*Rockway Mennonite Collegiate's Senior Choir performed at this year's Mennonite Schools Council Choir Festival in Chambersburg, Pa., in April.*

The guest Mass Choir conductor was Benjamin Bergey, a conductor at Eastern Mennonite University. Accompaniment was provided by Rochelle Niss, a music teacher at Shalom Christian Academy. Rockway's choir was conducted by Jeff Enns, and Lancaster Mennonite High School's choir by Emily Grimes.

The event serves to renew the love of singing for the participants. It brought much joy to the members of Rockway's Senior Choir. ☸

*Kara Cornies sings in the Rockway Mennonite Collegiate Senior Choir.*

## ☸ Staff change

### Pastoral transition in British Columbia



**Michael Turner** began in February as lead pastor of Cedar Valley Church in Mission. He earned a BA in ministry from Prairie College (formerly Prairie Bible Institute) in Three Hills, Alta., and has five years of experience as a youth and young-adult pastor at two churches in the Lower Mainland. He joins Grant Miller, executive pastor, on the Cedar Valley ministry team. He and his wife Morgan have one son and are expecting a second child this spring.

—BY AMY RINNER WADDELL



*Canadian Mennonite is building a community where differences are celebrated, and people can hear each other openly. Your support will help us to change the conversation, broaden our reach, and bring in differing, and contrasting, voices.*

Help us expand our worldview together.  
Donate today at [canadianmennonite.org](http://canadianmennonite.org).

**CANADIAN  
MENNONITE**

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

# God, our Loving Parent (Mother and Father)

Melody Steinman

I experienced God's love through my parents. They sought to pass along their belief and faith in God to their children. They had five children, of which I am the youngest. Although they were not perfect, I believe they did the best they could considering the circumstances and issues they had to deal with.

The longer I live, the more I realize the great challenge of raising five children who were born in the span of eight years. Both my parents had a Grade 8 education, and my father had an undiagnosed bipolar condition.

My father Olin loved to garden and, as children, we had to pick the fruits and vegetables, although I would have preferred to be doing something else. After picking them, my mother Vernetta got to can and preserve the food for us to eat later. One time my mother, brother and another sister picked 99 quarts of raspberries in one day. Fortunately, we sold some and, as children, we were paid 15 cents for each quart we picked.

Now, I can say with great integrity that they have given me a godly heritage and foundation for my own relationship with God as described in Psalm 78:5-7: *"He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the*



PHOTO BY DAVE NEUFELD

**Pictured, oldest to youngest: Vernetta Steinman, Sharon Neufeld, Katie Neufeld and Suzie Neufeld.**

*works of God, but keep his commandments"* (NRSV).

In May each year we reflect on the role of our mothers on Mother's Day. Women evaluate the impact they have made in the lives of others. The same is true for Father's Day in June.

Regardless, I am not a mother. I will never be a mother. My biological time clock has passed that stage in my life. But that does not mean that I do not know a mother's love. My mother fed and nurtured her five children at her breasts as infants.

I witnessed the same love, dedication and devotion shown by my sister with her husband, when their daughter was born well over 30 years ago. And now, my niece continues to love and nurture her own daughter with her husband. And so, I see God's love being passed down and I am awestruck.

This four-generational picture

encapsulates it all so well.

I can no longer express my appreciation for my father's love, since he is no longer living. But my mother is still living. I can still be there for her, even though some days she does not know who I am. Dementia often prevents her from recognizing her children, grandchildren, and, now, her precious great-granddaughter. My mother has wanted to be a great-grandmother for many years, and now dementia prevents her from knowing this reality to be true.

But, the longer I live, the more I see God, and wonder who God is as expressed through my mother. She, too,

has her moments of frustration.

Dementia has robbed her of one of her greatest joys as well as perceived and hoped-for roles.

Knowing this, I can own the promise of Isaiah 49:15, 16a *"Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I (the Lord) will not forget you. See I have inscribed you in the palms of my hands."*

I cannot help but wonder how my precious little great-niece will pass along this godly heritage she received to her possible children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

My prayer is that each one of us be drawn closer to God, our heavenly parent (father and mother). God our ultimate parent never changes, but freely and always welcomes and loves each one of us unconditionally. ❧

## Calendar

### British Columbia

**Oct. 20-21:** MC B.C. women's retreat.

### Alberta

**June 10-11:** Camp Valaqua hike-a-thon and garden party.

### Manitoba

**June 2-4:** 21st annual Manitoba birding retreat, at Camp Arnes. For more information, visit [www.campswithmeaning.org/birding-retreat](http://www.campswithmeaning.org/birding-retreat).

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

**July 15:** "Singing our Journey: Sangerfest 2023," at the Manitoba Centennial Concert Hall. Sign up to sing in the mass choir celebrating the centenary of the Russlaender immigration to Canada. For more information, visit [mhsc.ca/soj](http://mhsc.ca/soj).

### Ontario

**May 11:** MC Eastern Canada presents "Becoming a restorative church: Embodying our safe church

policy." A hybrid event, in English and French, at 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, and on Zoom, from 7 to 9 p.m. Learn more at [mcecc.ca/events](http://mcecc.ca/events).

**June 3:** MC Eastern Canada presents "Being a restorative church: Creating brave and accessible space." A hybrid event, at Shantz Mennonite Church, Baden, with French on Zoom, from 8:30 a.m. to noon. Learn more at [mcecc.ca/events](http://mcecc.ca/events).

**June 4-7:** "Tenth International Conference on Aging and Spirituality," at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo. To learn more, visit <https://uwaterloo.ca/ageing-spirituality/>.

**July 10:** "The Place of Memory: Reflections on the Russlaender Centenary," at Knox Presbyterian Church, Waterloo; at 7:30 p.m. The program of music, singing, reading and reflection features the premiere of "The Place of Memory" composed by Leonard Enns and performed by the DaCapo Choir. For more information, visit [uwaterloo.ca/grebel/place-of-memory](http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/place-of-memory).

**July 14:** Cheryl Denise will read her plainspoken and often humorous poetry at RiverSong, on Hawkesville Road west of St. Jacobs, at 7 p.m. Her readings will be complemented with singing by Jim and Charlie Bauman. Doors open at 6 p.m. for food and beverages.

To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send Calendar announcements eight weeks in advance of the event date by email to [calendar@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:calendar@canadianmennonite.org).

For more Calendar listings visit, [canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar](http://canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar).



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June 16	June 7
June 03	June 21
July 14 <i>Digital Issue</i>	July 5
July 28	July 19
Aug. 11 <i>Digital Issue</i>	Aug. 2
Aug. 25	Aug. 16
Sept. 8 <i>Digital Issue</i>	Aug. 30
Sept. 22	Sept. 13
Oct. 6	Sept. 27
Oct. 20 <i>Focus on Education</i>	Oct. 11
Nov. 3	Oct. 25
Nov. 17 <i>Focus on Books &amp; Resources</i>	Nov. 8
Dec. 1	Nov. 22
Dec. 15	Dec. 6
Dec. 29 <i>Digital Issue</i>	Dec. 20

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