

CANADIAN MENNONITE

August 25, 2023 Volume 27 Number 17

Grassroots reconciliation at the Spruce River Folk Fest

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Tell us what you think

BY TOBI THIESSEN
Publisher



Have you completed our opinion survey? If not, here is your invitation to do so. We need your help to re-think how *Canadian Mennonite (CM)* can best serve the church. Please use the link below.

CM is actively researching new ways to gather and deliver news. We are looking at various options to engage our community in conversations about faith.

Like every other newspaper or magazine, we see subscription numbers decline year after year. Statistics Canada reports that magazine circulation in Canada fell by an average of four per cent per year since 2013. One in five Canadian magazines closed between 2015 and 2019. Just in the last couple of years, many community newspapers closed or moved to digital-only production. *CM* is still here, but our print numbers match the national trend.

Meanwhile, when we look at the digital audience, we see readers of all ages coming from every province to our website. It seems that the problem of declining subscription numbers is not that *CM* content is irrelevant. The problem is that a magazine is not the place many people go to get news anymore.

How, then, do we serve the faith community in 2023? We want to engage newcomer churches and ensure their voices are represented. We want to engage young people and affirm their involvement. We want to offer people on the fringes a way to stay connected to the church. And we want to honour

the faithful members who value *CM* in its present form. In all of this we want to provide the regional and nationwide churches of Mennonite Church Canada with respected news coverage in print and online.

We currently print 22 issues per year, a higher frequency than most magazines. Should we go to a reduced frequency and use the savings in postage to print on better quality paper? Photos would look better on higher grade paper and there would be higher contrast between the black text and the white paper, making it easier to read. Would such a change make the magazine better for readers or not?

It's obvious that we need to meet people where they are, and that means engaging with the church using digital media. But how? Would podcasts be helpful? More online events? These are technical questions about how we use media to inform and engage people, and we are curious to hear what you think.

We also ask larger questions about what value there is in a Mennonite-connected news source, and where our focus should be. Do we want articles that inspire and foster spiritual well-being? Should articles affirm what we believe and encourage unity? Is it important to foster dialogue on matters affecting faith today? How important is it to connect with other people in the church across the country? Are we building a sense of identity across the church as we report news?

Survey respondents are giving us good feedback so far. One person wrote: "I think we sometimes get too stuck in

our insular understanding of what being a Mennonite means. Hearing other people's opinions and stories [keeps] us from simply confirming our own biases. I think it also fosters hope in the good things the church is doing. Sometimes it is hard not to get bogged down by the failures of the church. *CM* is able to share about the good without shying away from the bad that needs to be talked about."

Another person wrote: "I think there is great value in providing a connection point between congregations around the country. . . . I love hearing stories of what congregations are doing for social justice, activism and climate action. I would love to hear more positive stories and have the magazine be a source that connects people and provides ideas for faithful living."

When it comes to specifics about how *CM* can do better, respondents are frank. "Don't ignore the established, 'older' congregations and MC Canada members, while still challenging their views with more current issues," said one person. Another respondent said that "greater diversity amongst staff, generationally, ethnically and theologically is key."

Someone told us we are too "hyper" and we need to relax. More than one person said we worry too much trying to be all things to all people. Thank you for these comments. We welcome more input.

CM is evolving. Help shape our next chapter. Go to www.surveymonkey.com/CM_mag_ideas. ☞



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The Spruce River flows past the teepee where a pipe ceremony was held to open the Spruce River Folk Fest.

PHOTO BY EMILY SUMMACH

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Madalene Arias writes about the big decisions faced both by churches that are fading and ones that are growing.

Historical society apologizes to Semá:th First Nation

A century after Mennonites first settled on lands that were once a lake critical to Indigenous people, an apology is offered.

Consider the birders

Aaron Epp visits the intersection of faith and birdwatching.

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Tree quote

When the elders in my community see someone very busy with many things, they advise the person by saying, "A person with two legs cannot climb two trees at the same time." Their message to the busy person is to calm down, set priorities and do one thing at a time. —Pastor Desalegn Abebe, head of Meserete Kristos Church

Source: MKC News July 2023



Desalegn Abebe



50 YEARS AGO

'Miracle money' for the needy

Kitchener — Fifty dollars carefully saved, ready for sending to Mennonite Central Committee, designated for "helping needy persons" almost did not arrive.

The intention of banking the funds and immediately sending a check to MCC did not quite become a reality. Hours before the deposit was to have been made, fire struck the donor's household, gutted the house, and charred the purse containing the donation.

Fortunately, a neighbor picked up the charred purse to find the bills and other contents all consumed —all, that is, except the small corner containing the serial number of each bill. The donor on hearing

this took the remains to the bank. The bank replaced the charred corners with new bills.

A check for the money was received by MCC (Ontario). An accompanying letter of thanksgiving requested that this "miracle money" be used to help needy persons.

—Douglas Snyder.

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Mennonite Reporter, Sept. 3, 1973



Popecast

A new Italian-language podcast from the Vatican features stories from young people along with responses from Pope Francis. The Pope responds to a young woman with bipolar disorder, saying, "always look ahead, not to lose sight of the horizon . . . and the horizon is God."

Source: Vatican News

Photo: Catholic Church England and Wales, Flickr

Church becomes research site

In the wake of a train derailment in the town of East Palestine, Ohio, in February, First United Presbyterian Church volunteered its building for use by researchers from the University of Kentucky who hope to understand the derailment's effect on local residents. Rev. Fritz Nelson says hosting the research team is a way to address the community's needs, both physical and spiritual.

Source: Religion News Service

Photo: Paul Lavelle, Flickr





Church Leaders Permit Waitresses to Work on Sundays

“Sunday is a day of rest,” explains Rev. John F. Stobbe of East Kronsart Brethren Church. “That means that every single one of us should be able to take the day off and just head over to Smitty’s after church for an iced tea and breakfast skillet. No one should have to work!”

Stobbe explained . . . the one exception to the rule. “The Lord said that if a child or ox falls into a well we are permitted to rescue it, even on the Sabbath. . . . Well, when I’ve got a hankering for a short stack combo with a side of smoked country ham, who can argue that’s not just as essential an emergency as a drowning child or livestock?”

By Andrew Unger. Excerpted with permission.



A moment from yesterday



In December 1924, this family was starting a new life in more ways than one. Katharina (Enns Rempel) and Jacob P. Braun, both widowed, separately emigrated from the Soviet Union to Ontario. A few weeks after their arrival, they were married in the Waterloo region. Here, the newly blended family prepares to move from the home of their first Ontario Mennonite hosts. They would eventually settle in Niagara.



archives.mhsc.ca

/// Readers write

Be in Touch

- Send letters to 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 or at 1-800-378-2524 ext 5.

✉ Humans, humus and healing

The portrait of a family living a subsistence-level lifestyle (“Humans and Humus,” July 28) might well trigger in many people a resolve to be more self-sustaining and less wasteful. Seems to me, though, that eschewing the mechanization and the advances of the Green Revolution will never be an answer to the problem of feeding seven billion-plus people. The search for sustainability must take place at the leading edge of agricultural advances, not in reverting to methods of the past, seems to me. It’s a global village now.

We probably all lament the same wastefulness, the same environmental degradation that economic greed has visited on us and future generations. We owe thanks to the Wiederkehr family and others who have actually rolled up their sleeves to demonstrate even the little practices leading toward a hoped-for healing, however small the acts may seem. It’s not in much talk but in the doing that tending of creation will become habituated in our generations and coming generations.

GEORGE G. EPP, ROSTHERN, SASKATCHEWAN

✉ Escapism

The editorial (“Of beets and chainsaws,” July 28) and the article by Andre Wiederkehr (“Humans and humus,” July 28) raise several important issues for our time. First, what constitutes enough for healthy, secure, enjoyable living. Second, the use of knowledge and technology to carry out sustainable farming. Third, use of arable land to feed the world.

With respect to the second issue, it is debatable whether the approach discussed is the best option. On the third, the article fails. For the Wiederkehers’ approach to be normative for all, their 40 hectares would need to provide “enough” for at least 70 persons.

The strength of the article is the first issue. But the article and editorial fail to define what constitutes enough, and the question of how we attain that value within the larger community receives no attention.

I would like to add two personal experiences from 30 years of teaching and research on economic development. After

the energy crisis in the 1970s, someone prepared a documentary comparing the approach to farming of an Amish family in Ontario with a Mennonite farmer in Saskatchewan. I showed this film in my introductory economics class. The farming technology used by the Amish was basically the same technology used on the prairies during my youth—a heavy reliance on human labour and horse power. The Saskatchewan farmer primarily used fossil fuel as an energy source.

A punch line in the film is the Saskatchewan farmer saying, “My approach to farming is not sustainable.”

For me, the primary message was that an Amish life based on enough was foreign to the Saskatchewan farmer. He represented where most of us as Mennonites were at in the 1980s.

Second, research shows the most efficient approach to farming, based on energy output per energy input, was slash-and-burn agriculture. It broke down over time because population growth meant the time allowed for land to recover gradually decreased. Eventually many farmers had to learn to subsist on one piece of land. Also, for various reasons, people began to live in towns, some of which grew to be cities. This became possible because many farmers moved beyond merely producing for themselves to provide the food needed for cities to flourish. Along the way we decided, possibly were induced, to always want more.

For now, the editorial and the Wiederkehr experience is contemporary escapism, as practiced by the monastic movement. Like monks of the past, you serve as a conscience for the rest of us. But for your life to become normative, the focus needs to be not the technology used to farm, but rather an explicit understanding of enough. What is it? How do we get there? How do we make it attractive to many others?

HENRY REMPEL, WINNIPEG (FORT GARRY MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP)

✉ Work and play

Randy Haluza-DeLay’s well written reflection (“Thinking about leisure,” July 28) calls to mind the words of Mark Twain, who said that, “work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do; play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do.”

PAUL THIESSEN, VANCOUVER

✉ The jewel of tension

I’m responding to Walter Paetkau’s letter (July 28) on “The duty of tension” (June 16). Paetkau seems to view it as a good thing to bring new perspectives to a certain problem or disagreement between peoples. I agree.

In my view, this tension has to be accompanied by mutual respect for a positive outcome to result.

I was living in California when the Republicans held the White House under Ronald Reagan. The most productive

period of the Reagan years came when the Democrats had the majority in the House of Representatives led by Tip O'Neill. Tension and disagreement reigned between these two branches of government. Reagan and O'Neill had a healthy respect for each other. Reportedly they would meet at least twice a week for dinner along with a glass of wine or three. Things went smoothly and business got done.

There is also a good example within our own Mennonite world. When Canadian Mennonite University was formed, two prominent institutions—Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Mennonite Brethren Bible College—came together with tension and respect to create what is a jewel in the Mennonite crown.

RICHARD PENNER, SASKATOON

/// Online Comments

✉ Wise and innocent

A fraud is a deeply sad situation on so many levels (“Million-dollar fraud hits Winnipeg church,” July 28).

Is there a wider learning? What would a counter-culture that decreases the chance of repeating this sadness look like?

It is so hurtful when people's instinct to stand by their family and friends becomes a liability. That specific vulnerability affects all age groups.

All the best to the leaders and all the people of Bethel Mennonite Church in this trying time. Biblical passages are swirling in my mind as I write. Biblical laments are applicable. It is so true across many eras and so much too bad that in life we must be wise as serpents while being innocent as doves.

LOIS EPP, CALGARY

✉ The privilege of leisure?

This great column raises important questions about how we socially understand leisure. There's the sense that leisure is the privilege of those who can afford it. Instead, we should consider whether we can afford not to value our health and spirituality by taking time off and participating in leisure activities.

CHERYL TEELUCKSINGH

/// Milestones

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones announcements within four months of the event. Please send Milestones announcements by e-mail to milestones@canadianmennonite.org, including the congregation name and location. When sending death notices, please also include birth date and last name at birth if available.

Weddings

Funk/Brandt—Mary (Rempel) Funk (Jubilee Mennonite Church, Winnipeg) and Gilbert G. Brandt (River East Church, Winnipeg), April 29, 2023 at River East Church.

Schultz/Renaud—Michael Schultz (Poole Mennonite Church) & Chantal Renaud, June 24, 2023 on the groom's parents' farm.

Deaths

Bauman—Joanne, 80, (b. Nov. 22, 1942; d. July 3, 2023), Elmira Mennonite Church, Elmira Ont.

Bauman—Velina, 87, (b. Aug. 4, 1935; d. July 27, 2023), Elmira Mennonite Church, Elmira, Ont.

Braun—Daniel, 70, (b. March 23, 1953; d. July 18, 2023), Lethbridge Mennonite Church, Lethbridge Alta.

Erb—Marjorie Elaine (nee Steckly), 80 (b. June 6, 1943; d. July 17, 2023), Wellesley Mennonite Church, Wellesley, Ont.

Hiebert—Erdman, 77, (b. Jan. 10, 1946; d. July 15, 2023), Steinbach Mennonite Church, Steinbach, Man.

Gascho—Mary, 95 (b. August 15, 1927; d. June 20, 2023), Poole Mennonite Church, Poole, Ont.

Klassen—Lydia, 91 (b. May 11, 1932; d. July 29, 2023), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

Kropf—Ralph, 97 (b. June 22, 1926; d. June 24, 2023), Poole Mennonite Church, Poole, Ont.

Matthies—Alfred, 91 (b. Jan. 26, 1932; d. July 23, 2023) Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington Ont.

Schmidt—Viola, 100, (b. Dec. 10, 1922; d. Aug. 6, 2023), First Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask.



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FEATURE

Stepping overboard

Eight church experiences in uncertain waters

By Josh Wallace

Florence Driedger turns to look out the window before she replies to my question. “Well, we never know from one year to the next who and how many . . . whether we’ll still be functioning. We think we will be, but you never know.”

Uncertainty about congregational futures is nothing new. In my role as Mennonite Church Saskatchewan’s church engagement minister, I attract confessions of this uncertainty like a magnet. In the foyer after speaking in a local congregation or at a Mennonite Central Committee fundraiser, a church council member might pull me aside and say, “Josh, we’re just not sure how much longer we can keep going.”

What’s the source of this uncertainty? Usually it’s resources—specifically, a lack of them. The congregation is aging, members are moving to the care home, members are dying. Their kids haven’t come back to church. Shrinking numbers correspond to deficit budgets, reduced hours for the pastor, increased worry that the congregation is just a roof repair away from closure.

But it’s not just people or money that are missing; it’s also energy. The same handful of people fill every committee position, plan worship, look after the building. They’re exhausted.

Curtis Wiens, facilitator of Forest Church in Saskatchewan, names a question that amplifies all this: “If our congregation isn’t as robust and vital as it was, does that

mean that God is no longer robust and active? Has God left the group?”

While Florence isn’t sure what the future may hold, she’s not anxious about her congregation. “Whether we are big or small,” she tells me, “it doesn’t mean that we are less faithful.” Her husband, Otto, also on the call, smiles and quotes Jesus: “Where two or three are gathered, there I am.” Otto says, “if there are two families, or three people, that’s where Jesus is too.”

Indeed, the congregation that meets in their Regina home, Peace Mennonite Church, faithfully welcomes an astounding array of folks from across continents and all sorts of social divides.

My conversations with Florence, Otto and Curtis are part of a larger project, two of eight conversations with congregations scattered across Mennonite Church Canada. Each congregation, in its own way, is charting a path through the surging seas of societal change and congregational anxiety. When I asked regional church ministers for leads on folks finding hope by doing church differently, I received stories from congregations in all five regions.

What I heard was less a potluck of how-to’s than testimonies of how congregations continue to meet a God who walks on the roiling waters. Curtis names something like this in reflecting on Forest Church, a monthly worship gathering that meets at Shekinah



PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Curtis Wiens leads a Forest Church service the first Sunday of every month at Shekinah Retreat Centre.



GAMEO PHOTO BY BERT FRIESEN

Aberdeen Mennonite Church at Trinity Place.

Retreat Centre. This gathering, he says, “declares something about God, who continually reaches out to us, regardless of the energy within the four walls of our [congregations].”

Initially I was surprised by the variety of shapes and formats these congregations took. I thought I’d be speaking mostly with young, missional entrepreneurs pushing the edges of what we think of as church. Instead, the majority of congregations I spoke with started before I entered grade school. One is just sneaking up on its hundredth anniversary. Some meet in homes, others in traditional church buildings, many virtually, one around a bonfire at a camp. A few arrived at their current format on purpose; most got there by just being willing to experiment and adapt. They’d make up a Venn diagram of overlapping clusters of congregations intentionally focused on young people and students, a number of house churches, communities making their home with folks pushed to the margins, and congregations finding creative workarounds to keep on keeping on.

Many of these congregations have concerns and hopes common to churches throughout MC Canada: “What do we do about buildings?” “How do we make decisions?” “How do we join what God is doing in our community?” While their varied responses don’t offer a roadmap out of uncertainty, they evidence how adjusting what we take for ordinary—where we meet, how we meet—can help keep us walking with the Spirit.

Bricks and mortar

Pastor Teresa Enns Zehr describes the history of a willing flexibility Aberdeen

Mennonite Church has about buildings. When the Winnipeg congregation first organized in 1957, it already had a building. But aging brought a need for a more accessible space. In the early 2000s, they sold their facility and began to rent space from the nearby, more-accessible Trinity Lutheran Church. When the Lutheran congregation closed in 2013, they gifted their large facility to Aberdeen. But as the congregation’s needs shifted over the next years, they decided to return to being renters in the building, selling the building to St. Kateri Tekakwitha Catholic Indigenous Parish. Creative flexibility about space has allowed Aberdeen to remain present in their neighborhood.

Others navigate space in different ways. Many, like Peace Mennonite, Pembina Fellowship in Southern Manitoba, and SoulHouse in Scarborough, Ontario, meet in homes. Little Flowers Community in Winnipeg’s West End now meets in a home, but Jamie Arpin-Ricci tells me how it began as a used bookstore purposefully providing community gathering space in the city’s cold winter months. Still others, like Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship in Vancouver, have found space online that a physical building couldn’t provide. When their long-term rental arrangement disappeared just before the pandemic, virtual gatherings enabled them not only to continue worshipping together but also to open their virtual doors for homebound folks to return to the conversation.

Leadership

I spoke with many more lay leaders than paid professionals in these interviews. This is another thread: creative leadership. Otto Driedger from Peace Mennonite jokes that one benefit of lay leadership is low overhead. Fran Giesbrecht of Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg names other gifts of the model. He outlines how, inspired by early Anabaptists, pastoral care and other tasks of leadership are discerned within congregational K-(koinonia)-groups, including a rotating roster of five lay ministers.



FORT GARRY MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP PHOTO

Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg.

Fran says that being mentored into this ministry has been incredibly rich. “We have found that there are so many people who are pastors,” he says. Lay ministry recognizes and reawakens latent gifts of the Spirit.

And even among congregations with professional leadership, some are finding ways to rejig what that means. I hear the story of Springridge Mennonite Church near Pincher Creek, Alberta, where pastoral leader Tany Warkentin works 0.3 of a full-time position, focusing on facilitating worship, drawing in the gifts of others in the congregation and wider community.

Participation

This leads to a nearly universal theme among the congregations I spoke with: all members expect to participate in the work and the worship of the church. Fran says, for Fort Garry, this goes back to their origins in the late 1960s. The fledgling community said, “We are small, so we have to assume that every activity we have is going to be inter-generational, from babies to seniors, and when the church calls you, you’re probably going to have to say yes.”

Sandy Plett names a similar commitment to intergenerational involvement at Pembina Fellowship. She says she was drawn to this rotating fellowship of four house churches by its interactive, informal style and the fact that “kids are welcome and integrated and part of everything.” Ideally, this participatory spirit means individual gifts and passion have room to be known and to grow.

Travis Martin of Point Grey pictures his congregation as a “discussion.” Chan Yang, another member of Point

Grey, says that it was just this spirit of conversation, enacted each Sunday in 15-minute discussions following the sermon, that drew him into the congregation.

This participatory, conversational model of being church shows up in the mentoring relationships Colin McCartney of Connect City in Toronto nurtures with young leaders in his under-resourced neighborhood. He tells me how these young people are already out there, “planting churches, doing mission . . . they just need to be apprenticed, equipped and resourced.” Connect City’s spiritual coaching keeps spinning out new “unique expressions” of church.

Decisions

Conversation also typifies decision-making in many of these churches. Fran remembers the meeting where Fort Garry decided to “promptly stop voting,” opting instead for a consensus-oriented discernment process. Some congregations, like Fort Garry and Aberdeen, build this method of making decisions into their board and committee structures. Others, like Pembina Fellowship and Forest Church, seek consensus through more informal conversations.

Teresa describes how Aberdeen employs sharing circles so that everyone has a chance to speak into decisions as they seek consensus. “At times that does feel slow,” she says, “but it’s sort of a ‘leave no person behind’ approach.” Veronica Dyck of Point Grey believes the slow process of making decisions together is “worth it,” avoiding the kind of power politics that end up hurting people.

Church service

Some congregations consciously identify themselves as a means of mission—Colin of Connect City tells me how we can’t “start with a church service, you start with mission.” Others view themselves as more of a sustaining community for members who are active outside the congregation. Sandy pictures Pembina Fellowship as “the potting soil around me”; she goes out and does her work, and the congregation is where she comes home to. “What God is doing in us,” she

says, “is sustaining us, helping us care for each other.”

I hear Jamie of Little Flowers Community bring together these two themes, talking about his congregation’s motivation to address injustice. “There are barriers to belonging; we need to break down those barriers. . . . The primary vocation of the church is to be the rich soil of belonging in which things will take root and flourish according to their nature.”

In his book *Churches and the Crisis of Decline*, Andrew Root names how churches and denominations usually work from the assumptions that resources are what they need for life—that congregations need members, budgets, programs, etc. to weather whatever storms arise. Root pushes back with an alternative story: What brings life is God—and witnessing when God shows up. We can’t manipulate our resources to get God to show up. What we can do is wait. And it doesn’t take much to wait—just patience, flexibility, and a bit of hope.

That’s what I hear in these stories: hope. Also patience, a dash of bold creativity, and a lot of stubborn flexibility. Jamie shares with me a core motto of Little Flowers Community: “What we have right now is all we need right now

for faithfulness right now.” Is there need? Surely, and a good deal of uncertainty, too. But, he says, “our faithfulness is not dependent on something we don’t have.”

This is no justification for battering down the hatches or dropping anchor where we are, to try to preserve the form of church we currently have. Sandy of Pembina Fellowship reminds me that “it doesn’t have to be forever to be real church; there are positives and negatives in every model.” We keep sailing. We keep taking the next steps, even when we know they might fail. Jamie closes our interview by encouraging MC Canada congregations to try new things before crisis forces us to. “It’s like when Peter got out of the boat,” he says, “he didn’t know he was going to walk on water. He had to do something that by every other standard he knew was going to fail.”

There’s no map out of these uncertain waters, but we step out in hope, beyond what we’ve assumed is the way church has to be, waiting to meet God walking toward us. ❧

Josh Wallace is church engagement minister for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan. He can be reached at churchengagement@mcsask.ca.

There’s no map out of these uncertain waters, but we step out in hope . . . waiting to meet God walking toward us.

Questions for your church

1. **Where we meet** can be a blessing, burden or barrier. How is your gathering space a doorway for life? How is it an anchor for anxiety?
2. **Anabaptist faith believes** the church isn’t a building or a pastor; it’s the people. In what ways does your congregation involve the gifts of each member in its worship and ministry?
3. **We try to** manage conflict and uncertainty through formalized policies and procedures. In doing so, many voices get left out. In what ways could your congregation approach decision-making more like a conversation, or a prayer chain?
4. **Congregations feel pressure** to close because there’s no one to chair the hospitality committee or not enough budget for even a part-time pastor. We don’t need either of those in order to watch and wait together for God to show up. What other assumptions about what’s necessary to be church might you try living without?

See related resources at
www.commonword.ca/go/3544

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FROM OUR LEADERS

Creating a community of calling

Tim Wiebe-Neufeld

The first time I remember hearing of a shortage of pastors was over 35 years ago. I was in the process of completing my Bible College degree, and a conference leader was encouraging me to consider a career in pastoral ministry.

While uncertainty about leadership for the church is not new, the task of calling forth leaders is especially challenging during changing times. Shifts in society and the church have changed the place of biblical education and the viability of ministry as a career choice for young people. Many congregations are smaller, with fewer full-time pastor positions. When there are vacancies there are fewer candidates to fill them. These realities affect churches of various denominations and types.

As times change, the church needs new approaches to ministry and to the way it calls people into leadership roles. At Canadian Mennonite University's ReNew conference this past winter, Kathleen Cahalan of St. John's School of Theology and Seminary in Minnesota identified several considerations for developing leadership in the church today.

First, Dr. Cahalan noted the importance of nurturing a sense of vocational calling for all within the faith community. There are many gifts and many ways to live out one's commitment to Christ, regardless of whether one's gifts or calling relate directly to church leadership. When we see God's calling as a given part of Christian discipleship, we invite all to consider the place of faith in life decisions.

Second, vocational calling is not only a question for early adulthood but for all ages and demographics. At every stage of life, we are tasked with asking what God is calling us to do with our time and abilities. Thirdly, we are called "as

we are, because of who we are." Our interests, experiences, and stage of life are part of what makes us suited for particular roles.



COLLEGEVILLE INSTITUTE PHOTO

Kathleen Cahalan of St. John's School of Theology and Seminary in Minnesota.

For the church to live into these priorities, Dr. Cahalan offered characteristics of what she calls "a community of calling." These characteristics include some familiar practices:

The practice of discernment. While good decision-making skills are important, discernment recognizes the role of God's Spirit. Dr. Cahalan noted that discernment involves listening for God's guidance as we reflect on God's calling for us, seeking God's direction as we test options and confirm choices, and waiting as we trust God to reveal the way forward. By placing vocational

choices within the context of discernment, we invite the presence of God and community into what is often seen as an individual task.

The practice of prayer. The medieval writer Julian of Norwich said, "The whole reason why we pray is to be united into the vision and contemplation of God to whom we pray." Individually and collectively, prayer and spiritual practices involve releasing control as we seek alignment with God's leading. While prayer may take many forms, it ultimately provides a means to live out the discernment steps of listening, seeking, and waiting.

The practice of storytelling. From the biblical text to the sharing of testimony, story is a central aspect of faith. Through story we share how Christ is present in our lives as individuals and as a people. When we share how faith has led us in the past, we inspire each other to seek God's guidance today.

While this may not be radical, I am encouraged at how renewed commitment to practices like these provide fertile ground for church leadership to emerge in a changing world. As we seek to faithfully respond to God's calling for the church today, I trust the God in whom we place our hope to provide the church with the leadership it needs. ❧



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

THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

Deconstructing or reconstructing?

Arli Klassen

I heard some strong language this summer about church from various extended family members. I'm sure this is not just in my family! Conversation at family gatherings is not usually conducive for more thoughtful or caring conversations, but these phrases caught my ear and attention.

"I'm done with church."

"I'm done with denominations."

"I'm deconstructing my faith."

In July, a new research report was released by the Public Religion Research Institute in the United States. It listed the top reasons why people leave their faith community (Christian and non-Christian faiths). The primary reasons include:

- **No longer believing** in the religion's teachings
- **Negative teachings about** people who are LGBTQ+
- **Family that didn't** take faith seriously
- **Scandals involving religious** leaders

I learned this summer that "deconstructing faith" is a thing, with books, videos, blogs, and even a Wikipedia page. When I look at my family members who are involved in deconstruction, I see them compassionately engaging with people who experienced betrayal and trauma through their church experiences. I see family members leading these people toward healing.

This reminds me of a book my husband, Keith, and I read as young adults: *Escaping from Fundamentalism*, by James Barr. It played a significant role in helping us to hold on to faith, and to stay in the church, while our belief systems shifted dramatically.

Much later, I remember leading a fascinating seniors Bible study class in which we revisited Bible passages about which the participants had heard only one interpretation in their younger

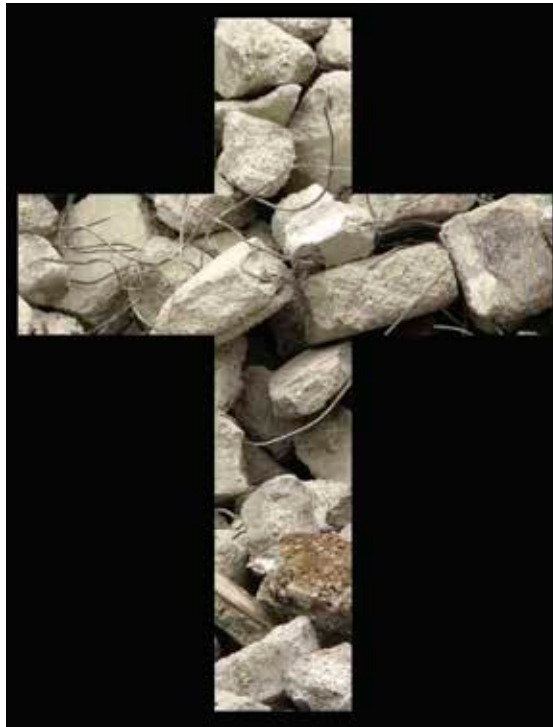


PHOTO BY BETTY AVERY

years. Together we explored how those passages might be understood in different ways today.

This summer I remain intrigued that a neighbouring congregation did a worship series on Bible stories learned as children, and how they might be understood differently, today, as adults. This is all part of "deconstructing faith," by re-examining the religious ideas we were taught in our past, and learning to look at them differently today. This is a normal process throughout our lives.

But does it necessarily follow that one leaves the church completely? Or loses one's faith in God, or stops being a

Jesus-follower? It is clear from the research studies that most people who stop going to church do not lose faith, just church participation. The focus on believing in a certain way in order to belong to church is a struggle.

I heard another phrase from a family member this summer: "I love my church. It is a safe place for me." That is a wonderful testimony of confidence and hope.

More conversation is needed to know what makes church a safe space, for my family members, and for your family members. Can church-goers be authentically who they are at church, or do they have to put on a cheerful face, along with good clothes? Which church-goers need to hide and protect their identities (race, ethnicity, gender, marital status, etc.) in order to go to church? For whom is church a safe space, where a person is supported to stretch and grow into being even more of the person God made them to be? And for whom is church not a safe space?

My hope is that our churches are welcoming and affirming safe places for all people. I know that differences in worship style mean that it is easier for people to belong in some congregations than in others. I hope those are primarily differences in culture.

I love my church too. It is a safe space for me to keep exploring who I am in the context of a diverse faith community and the mystery of God. ☿



Arli Klassen is a member of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, and can be reached at klassenarli@gmail.com.

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Organic architecture

Troy Watson

This is the first summer I haven't gone camping for at least 25 years, maybe my entire life. Since Tammy and I got married 23 years ago, our family holidays have focused on hiking, kayaking and sleeping in tents. Often in the rain. My family suggested we try something different this year, and I found myself connecting with God and nature in a new way—through architecture.

American architect Frank Lloyd Wright is famous for the development of what he called “organic architecture.” He believed architecture should study and honour nature, and be inspired by it. We do not live on nature, he proclaimed, we live in it. Therefore, our buildings should be built in, not on, nature. Using local materials and integrating what was already there, Wright created living spaces in which nature was amplified rather than ignored, and added to the beauty of the landscape.

I've visited a number of Wright's buildings over the past decade, but this summer we visited his crowning architectural achievement, Fallingwater, a house in southwest Pennsylvania. One of the reasons I'm so fascinated with his work is I can't find words to describe why they move me so deeply. Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic Paul Goldberger shares this sentiment. “Great architecture,” he says, “like any great art, ultimately takes you somewhere that words cannot take you. . . . Fallingwater does that the way Chartres Cathedral does that. There's some experience that gets you in your gut and you just feel it, and you can't quite even say it. My whole life is dealing with architecture and words, and at the end of the day, there is something that I can't entirely say when it comes to what Fallingwater feels like.”

When something hits me this deeply, beyond words, I can only describe it as a spiritual experience. At Fallingwater, I was seeing nature and architecture with

fresh eyes. It reminded me of a place in Portugal called the Convent of the Capuchos, or the Cork Monastery. It was built in 1560 by Franciscan monks committed to simplicity and poverty, with the intention of honouring the harmony between human and divine construction. Like Wright's work, it was built into the landscape, not on it. The humble buildings are inseparable from the vegetation and enormous granite rocks on site, the interior consisting only of stone and cork from the surrounding property. It was an inspiring and sacred place for me.



FLICKR PHOTO BY MARIANO MANTEL

Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater house.

Beyond words

Our family also visited the iconic Wrigley Field in Chicago this summer, to watch a Cubs baseball game with friends. One friend said it felt like church as we entered the ballpark and saw the field for the first time. I felt something too. There was a special vibe in this old building, with its rich history, traditions and community. It is the National League's oldest ballpark and retains its historic character, with a hand-operated scoreboard, red brick walls and ivy-covered outfield fence. It is surrounded by an old neighbourhood, where people live right

next door. There are old apartment buildings adjacent the ballpark with rooftop seats, where people sit and watch the games. Wrigley Field is part of the neighbourhood, integrated into its surroundings, and it brings people from the community together. It sounds strange, but being there and walking around the bustling neighbourhood felt like a spiritual experience.

I am prone to seek refuge in nature, away from people and the city, in order to recentre myself in God. To have my eyes opened to the spirituality of architecture, buildings, cities and ballparks, filled with people, felt like a significant awakening. For starters, I was struck by the potential for all occupations, like architecture, to become a calling. To serve a higher purpose, God, nature and others. I'm also seeing the city I live in, its buildings, including my own house, with new eyes. As wonderful as it would be for everyone to have houses and churches designed by “organic architects,” this often comes with a price tag that is also beyond words. Regardless, I find myself asking new questions about our homes and church buildings. How can we revision, remodel and renovate in ways that honour God's creation and are inspired by nature? How can our buildings be more integrated with our surroundings and become places that bring people in our communities together? How can we create environments for others to have spiritual experiences, beyond words, when they visit the places we live and gather for worship? ☞



Troy Watson is a pastor at Avon Church in Stratford, Ontario, and can be reached at troy@avonchurch.ca.

RIDING THE WAVES OF INTERCULTURAL CHURCH

The hopeful demise of ethnocentrism

Joon Park

Perhaps you remember the 2000 box office hit *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. It tells the story of a young Greek American woman, Toula Portokalos, falling in love with a non-Greek WASP, Ian Miller. Her family struggles to accept him while she struggles to come to terms with her cultural identity.

Acclaimed as a romantic comedy spiced with a celebration of ethnicity, this movie goes beyond romance. Toula's Greek father Gus's dialogue comically represents the exaltation of the Greek culture and the inevitable, accompanying ethnocentric point of view: "Now, gimme a word, any word, and I'll show you how the root of that word is Greek."

In Gus's perspective, there are two kinds of people in the world: Greeks and those who wish they were Greek.

The greatest barrier to becoming an intercultural church does not lie in any external elements—buildings, capital, etc.—but in our own internal, ethnocentric tendencies. This ethnocentrism puts one's own group or nation (from the Greek *ethnos*), its assumptions and judgments, in the centre (*kentron*) of everything. It also develops into a rigid belief that some or all aspects of its culture are superior, leading to the division of the whole into us and them.

For example, ancient Greeks tended to perceive other groups as barbarians (which means babblers), the Chinese called their country the "Middle/Centre Kingdom" (中華), and the Jewish belief system includes the notion of "the chosen people."

No one is free from ethnocentric tendencies unless we live in a cultural vacuum. Ethnocentrism is not a modern creation but an ancient phenomenon. The word itself was coined by the Polish sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz in 1879, but in Christianity, its origin goes

back to Genesis, when Adam and Eve were kicked out of Eden because of their self-centeredness.

What Adam and Eve did to survive in the unknown post-Eden world was to put themselves in the centre of the world, superiorizing themselves and disfavoring other alien cultures. That's the history of Israelites in the Old Testament, which finally brought God's condemnation. The ancient Israelites did not know their self-centred perspectives were limited and parochial, giving birth to false assumptions about other nations, buying into ethnic superiority, arrogance and hostility, and finally forgetting that the Gentiles are fellow heirs (Ephesians 3:6).

**No one is free from
ethnocentric tendencies
unless we live in a
cultural vacuum.**

So, we, as modern-day ethnocentrists in the name of Mennonites, seem indelibly indebted to these early human ancestors, even though we are generally not aware that we are ethnocentric. Even in my intercultural Mennonite church context, when African members use the Djembe on the upbeat, and shout amen and halleluiahs, this was often met with displeasure from white members who regarded it as unacceptable in worship.

We are bombarded by societal forms of bias, prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination. Is this world any more dignified than ancient eras?

The church, which should be a refuge from these unfortunate anti-gospel phenomena, is no safer than any other part of society. It is often a hotbed for superiority, nationalism and

discrimination, in the name of protecting its purity and fidelity to God. We should ask ourselves: to what extent is the Mennonite church ethnocentric, insular and self-serving, using this as a shield while cherishing our cultural identity?

In the united, intercultural body of Christ, there is no place for ethnocentrism. Remember how the gospel of Jesus crossed the cultural boundaries and ministered to the Gentiles. Jesus retells the story of the widow of Zarephath in Elijah's time and the healing of Naaman the Syrian, the healing of a Gentile (Samaritan) in the group of ten lepers, the healing of the Syrophenician's daughter, the healing of the Roman centurion's servant, the story of the Good Samaritan. I name just a few.

Ethnocentrism is not compatible or reconcilable with the teaching of Jesus. There is no middle ground. Ethnocentrism is a thing to be crushed by the power of the Gospel message, a truth that is universal and always applicable. We cannot be ethnocentric and a follower of Jesus at the same time. Jesus on the cross ended human ethnocentrism. Why do we so often sing "Jesus, Be the Center" (*Voices Together*, #584, by Michael Frye) in Sunday worship? Because truly, the one and only centredness we need is not in us but only Jesus Christ our Lord. "Jesus be the center, be my source, be my light, Jesus..." Let's sing out loud. We are now all equally safe. ☞



Joon Park serves as intentional interim co-pastor at Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton.

The facility of faith

Fading churches and growing ones both face big decisions about buildings

By Madalene Arias
Eastern Canada Correspondent

John Enns remembers a time when 200 children filled the Sunday school classrooms at Waterloo Kitchener United Mennonite Church (WKUM).

Currently, the congregation has 225 registered members, but less than half attend. The majority are in their 70s. Enns, who chairs the vision team at the church, says most newly retired members prefer to spend their Sunday mornings elsewhere.

Enns's grandfather helped found the church and looked after the construction of a pipe organ that is now the subject of some concern to the congregation as the church's future is unclear.

Three kilometres away, the building in which Shalom Worship and Healing Centre rents space can barely contain the people or energy of the primarily Eritrean congregation, one of the newer additions to Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. The building belongs to Chin Christian Church, another MC Eastern Canada congregation, which meets there in the afternoons.

Back at WKUM, Enns says when the time comes to assist with general upkeep or repairs in their 132-year-old facility, few hands are available. The sanctuary is in use only once a week. Donations are declining.

"As I look at the statistics," says Enns, "we probably peaked in the 1980s." He says they could try to get back to 200 or 300 people, but "that's not the church of the future; that's the church of the past."

Many Mennonite Church Canada churches across the country can surely relate to sliding numbers and the decisions they necessitate.

In B.C., Mountainview Mennonite Church in Vancouver closed in 1996 and chose to sell their building and put proceeds of the sale into an endowment fund to support future urban ministry in the region.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN ENNS

The pipe organ at Waterloo Kitchener United Mennonite Church.



WKUM CHURCH PHOTO

Waterloo Kitchener United Mennonite Church.

The fund has supported a range of church initiatives, including MC B.C.'s Indigenous relations work.

The fund is largely depleted, but proceeds from the sale of another property will support initiatives of MC B.C. into the future. After spending two years considering

various affordable housing options for the Peardonville property—site of the Clearbrook Mennonite Church, which disbanded in 2015—MC B.C. decided to sell the multimillion-dollar property instead. The housing projects were either too complex or did not align well with the regional church's goals.

In small-town Saskatchewan, multi-million-dollar price tags are rare. Hanley Mennonite Church closed in 2021 but has been unable to sell its building. In the hamlet of Superb, 200 kilometres west of Saskatoon, Superb Mennonite Church has found itself in a similar scenario after holding its final service in 2020.

Back in Ontario, a June vote at WKUM resulted in 88-percent approval for selling their 15 George Street property to Beyond Housing, formerly Menno Homes.

The property has not been appraised and no dollar figures are available yet.

The current plan, though preliminary, is to demolish the church and construct a new four-storey building that will include housing, roughly 10,000 square feet of office space for Community Justice Initiatives—a non-profit focused on restorative justice programs—and worship space for WKUM. The project would take in the range of five years to complete. Apart from the church decision to sell, no decisions have been finalized.

Norm Dyck, MC Eastern Canada's mission minister, recognizes that redevelopment of WKUM will contribute positively to the housing needs in uptown Waterloo, but he is sad to see the potential of a vibrant community hub and worship space torn down.

Before WKUM made its decision to sell, they held discussions with Dyck to explore the possibility of sharing the building with two groups looking for space.

One of them was Shalom Worship and Healing Centre. Dyck says Shalom members

were prepared to explore a rent-to-own scenario in which they would have taken over maintenance and upkeep, along with related costs, while still providing space for WKUM to worship.

Markham Christian Worship Centre was also interested. This Tamil-speaking MC Eastern Canada congregation shares space with two other congregations in Markham. They have started a worship group in Kitchener and were exploring rental of the WKUM space.

“Both of these groups could have been a great fit for [WKUM],” Dyck said in an email to *Canadian Mennonite*.

But Enns, referring to the church’s Russian Mennonite roots, says those options did not “resonate” with the church in the same way that working with Community Justice Initiatives and Beyond Homes did. Plus, they felt the churches would have an easier time finding space than Community Justice Initiatives would.

Additionally, WKUM recognized the need for affordable housing in the vicinity of the church and felt it would be an ideal location.

Dyck says he is concerned that the narrative of the declining church has “arrested” the imaginations of some church leaders. He also notes that congregations thinking of selling may not be fully aware of how rezoning will decrease available worship space in the future.

He says local and regional governments are largely opposed to rezoning existing properties for religious activity. Once a church is gone, so are future worship options in that location.

He also notes that growing churches looking for space cannot compete with prices developers offer for properties.

Alignment

Eric Friesen sees questions of church property in light of his 30-plus years in commercial real estate, construction and property development in various provinces and abroad. He says churches considering major projects should strive to create a mission statement that aligns with their values before embarking on any construction project.

“Everybody needs to be clear on the purpose for the project,” he says. “Everything needs to be aligned.”



WATERLOO KITCHENER UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH PHOTO

For congregations thinking specifically of redevelopment for housing, Friesen warns that construction of multi-residential units can become complicated quickly. In addition to various other factors, including layers of government regulation, he says the real estate and construction sectors include people who may put their personal interests ahead of the common goal.

“You need to be talking to people who are going to be working for you and not for themselves,” says Friesen. There is a lot of money to be made in redevelopment of large properties.

Friesen, who assisted with a \$220,000 upgrade to the MC Canada headquarters in 2020, offers his expertise to churches looking at redevelopment, energy efficiency upgrades or total reconfiguration.

Friesen attends Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary, and he says that, like many Mennonite Church Canada worship buildings, the Foothills building is at the age where major work—like roof repair and furnace replacement—is on the horizon.

Friesen has been in communication with MC Canada about energy audits and their implications for the long-term maintenance of church facilities. He does not want to see churches rush into decisions without full consideration of practical implications.

Setting an example

Dyck points to the Trinity Centres Foundation, a well-established Montreal-

based organization that works with empty or near-empty church buildings to create community hubs in which church plants can thrive, while also providing housing and gathering space for the community.

Of the many models of church building use, three MC Eastern Canada congregations in Markham have found something that works well for them. Markham Christian Worship Centre (CWC), Hagerman Mennonite Church and Chinese Christian Mennonite Church share a building. They divide the costs of operation and maintenance. None of the groups—which range from about 40 to 70 attendees—would be able to afford the building on their own. Markham CWC’s pastor, Kapilan Savarimuthu, says total monthly contributions average about \$1,000.

Hagerman and Chinese Christian worship in separate sanctuaries on Sunday mornings, while Markham CWC comes in later in the day, in addition to weekday gatherings. Hagerman’s pastor, Roberson Mbayamvula, looks after scheduling to avoid double bookings.

“It’s been really, really good,” says Savarimuthu about sharing the space with the other two groups.

He adds that all three churches focus on their goal of spreading God’s message and love of Jesus.

“When you focus on that, the small things won’t be a matter, right?” ▮

Grassroots reconciliation at Spruce River Folk Fest

Story and photo by Emily Summach
SPRUCE RIVER, SASKATCHEWAN

Music is a universal language. In Saskatchewan, music is also the language of reconciliation. On August 15, the Spruce River Folk Fest was held to encourage friendship and understanding between Mennonites and Indigenous neighbours.

Ray Funk, who hosts the event on his farmyard near Spruce River, Saskatchewan, expressed excitement and relief at re-launching the event, which was last held in 2019. “It felt wonderful to again be able to organize a folk fest with an equal level of quality, participation and message proclamation as before COVID,” Funk said. “We certainly did notice the disappearance of some of the institutional connecting tissue that was there before COVID, particularly the closing of Grace Mennonite Church in Prince Albert. I suspect our church and missional life will become more project, mission and spirit-driven, and less reliant on institutional heft in the future.”

More than 150 attended the event, which raised over \$5,000 for the Stoney Knoll Young Chippewyan Band. The

story of the band was the subject of the award-winning 2017 documentary *Reserve 107*. The folk fest was launched to help raise funds and bring further awareness to the cause of the landless Young Chippewyan Band.

Gary Laplante, a descendant of the Young Chippewyan Band, opened the music festival by sharing the history of how his ancestors were given a piece of land near Laird, Saskatchewan, as part of the treaty with the Canadian government. The land was known as the Stoney Knoll reserve. The people faced desperate conditions and starvation and left the area in search of food and better living conditions. Shortly after, the Canadian government declared the prime farmland of Stoney Knoll to be “vacant” and “abandoned.” In 1887, the Stoney Knoll reserve was dissolved and the land was parceled out to Mennonite and Lutheran settlers.

“But,” Laplante emphasized, “the families wouldn’t let go of the story.”

It was the stubborn hope of the Young Chippewyan people that brought their descendants back to the Laird area to

share the story of their stolen land.

While the journey had many challenges, rooted in fear and prejudice, the Young Chippewyans led the way to deep reconciliation with the Lutheran and Mennonite landholders. Laplante expressed his thankfulness for the close relationship that has developed between the groups. “Our prayers to the Creator were heard,” he said. “Our relationship together has a spiritual foundation. What’s happening here is grassroots reconciliation, which is way more meaningful than that political reconciliation that comes from Ottawa.”

It was this grassroots movement toward reconciliation that brought out crowds of people to listen to music and feast on bannock burgers and strawberry rhubarb pie. One attendee, Donna, from Saskatoon, said, “Truthfully, I’m not Mennonite or Indigenous, but I’m really interested in understanding more about reconciliation, so that’s why I’m here.” She explained that she had taken a class on Indigenous issues and wanted to learn more about what was happening. On her way home from a trip to the lake, she spotted the sign for the folk fest and decided she’d come. “It’s great to see so many people here,” she said.

The value of the folk fest remains significant because the Young Chippewyans’ land claim with the Canadian government is ongoing. In 2022, Ottawa confirmed that the band had met the minimum standards for a land claim. The government now has three years to decide how to proceed. The band was feeling hopeful that the government would make a decision soon about the claim. LaPlante says that prior to the federal cabinet shuffle in July, Marc Miller, who was Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations at the time, said in a meeting with band representatives that he wanted the Stoney Knoll issue “dealt with in six months, not three years.”

While the appointment of a new



Cree elder, Harry Lafond, offers the opening prayer at the Spruce River Folk Fest as Ray Funk (centre) and members of the bluegrass band O’Kraut look on.

minister, Gary Anandasangaree, may slow down the process, LaPlante says he's still hopeful for good things to come.

Canadian Mennonite asked the minister's office what steps have been taken with regards to the land claim and what the expected timeline is. In an email, Randy Legault-Rankin, spokesperson

for Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, said: "We recognize how important this land claim is to Stoney Knoll Young Chippewyan band and are actively working on it."

Back at Spruce River, it is stubborn hope that fuels the daily efforts towards reconciliation and justice. "Today is about

grassroots reconciliation," said LaPlante. "It's about friendship. We're correcting the wrongs of the past, in a good way, through food and music."

Funk echoed this too: "Working together and being patient does pay off." ❧

Musical sharing at Muskeg Lake Cree Nation

By Phyllis Goertz and Harry Lafond
MUSKEG LAKE CREE NATION, SASKATCHEWAN

About 75 people gathered at Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, located an hour's drive north of Saskatoon, on August 6 for the Singing in the Arbor event. The event, which included music, food and relationship-building, was sponsored by the Cree Nation and Mennonite Church Saskatchewan's Walking the Path initiative.

Muskeg Lake elder Harry Lafond has been a long-time member of the Walking the Path group, and much of the success of this event was due to his leadership.

The event was emceed by Lyndon Linklater, a well-known Indigenous speaker and knowledge keeper, with roots in Northern Ontario and Thunderchild First Nation in Saskatchewan. The afternoon opened with greetings and a prayer offered by Muskeg Lake elder Dolores Greyeyes Sand, followed by a land acknowledgment from Randy Klassen of Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan. Randy noted that his grandparents arrived in Rosthern in 1925, completely unaware of Treaty 6 and the unfulfilled obligations of the Treaty, which continue to this day.

The rest of the afternoon was filled with song. The initial welcoming song was sung by Brenda Montgrand and Mona Caribou from Sandy Bay. A Mennonite choir then shared several songs, under the direction of Jordan Wiens with accompaniment by Sharyl Reikman. Their first song was a hauntingly beautiful piece about the buffalo, with lyrics by Jo Cooper, a Métis woman with close connections to the Ancient



PHOTO BY RANDY KLASSEN

A group of Indigenous people and Mennonites gather under the arbor at Muskeg Lake Cree Nation.

Echoes Interpretive Centre in Herschel, Saskatchewan, and a rhythmic, drum-like musical setting by local composer Audrey Falk Janzen.

Other selections by the Mennonite choir included Larry Nickel's "True Evangelical Faith" and the 606 doxology. Brenda and Mona then led in several songs, including old favourites like "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus," in both English and Cree.

Dolores Greyeyes Sand then offered several solos, including a moving Cree version of "Ave Maria." A group of mostly younger people from the Catholic church at Muskeg Lake, under the leadership of elder Harry Lafond, sang a very enthusiastic version of "This Little Light of Mine." The

musical portion of the event ended with an open mic time. Edmond Lucier from Muskeg Lake just happened to have his guitar with him, and shared a couple of songs. And from the younger end of the audience, we had two young friends (and one mom) bring an inspiring song from Veggie Tales. It was an intimate, encouraging and heart-warming afternoon of sharing faith through music. The singing was followed by a generous meal of farmer sausage, bannock and a delicious selection of potluck salads and dessert, accompanied by wonderful conversations where we got to know each other a bit more. The first Singing in the Arbor event was held in 2019 and we hope to have more. ❧

A complicated centenary

Reflections on the Russlaender train tour

By Shelisa Klassen

The premise of the “Memories of Migration” Russlaender centenary train tour is a complicated one.

The July tour commemorated the journey of the historic migration of 21,000 Mennonites from Russia to Canada by taking a train and various other forms of transportation from Montreal to Abbotsford. The tour made many stops along the way as it followed the path taken by the Russlaenders. Participants examined the way Russlaenders built new communities and weathered hardship together.

But a closer look at the past and present circumstances of the Russlaender centenary reveals that stories of migration and ethnicity are rarely so concise and uncomplicated. Certain stops on the tour allowed for an exploration of some of the difficult and complex elements of the Russlaender experience.

These Mennonites were settlers. This was emphasized in many elements of the tour, but particularly in the conference titled “The Russlaender Mennonites: War, Dislocation and New Beginnings,” hosted at the University of Winnipeg. The settler experience is ultimately one of displacement, of both those who settle and those who were there first. For settlers like Mennonites to occupy land, usually at the request of a nation or empire, the original inhabitants must lose their place on that land, and the settlers must move from elsewhere to occupy it.

The story of the Russlaender experience is one of displacement and loss and tragedy, but the way we tell such stories of Mennonite migration often ignores other perspectives and fails to examine Mennonites as “implicated subjects,” a theme explored by Reina Neufeldt about the Kanadier Mennonite experience in Manitoba. She writes that “Mennonites saw Indigenous communities through initial stereotypes and pioneer lies (to be feared, satisfied) or as labour, and did not see the complexities of Indigenous communities,



PHOTO BY SHELISA KLASSEN

A view from the train window during the “Memories of Migration” tour.

the everyday interactions as significant, nor the problematic structures around them, in which Mennonites played an important supporting role.”

The tour closed with a tour of Semá:th First Nation. This offered an excellent acknowledgement of the way that our own histories often succumb to pioneer lies about the consequences of the movement of Mennonites. Specifically, as emphasized by Richard Thiessen, when he offered an apology on behalf of the Mennonite immigrants, our histories have often failed to see, respect or understand the people who were displaced by the settlers’ arrival.

Another complexity present in this tour was that Mennonites from one ethnic immigrant stream should not be equated with the Mennonite church. Not in Canada, and especially not globally.

When touring the churches in Yarrow, Arnold and Greendale, B.C., it became clear that while these churches were started by Russlaender Mennonites, today their membership is far more diverse, reflecting the changing demographics of the communities in which they are located. The racial and ethnic diversity of the Mennonite church is often at odds with how we tell our history. This can risk alienating fellow Mennonites who do not share certain

surnames, foods or linguistic background. And yet, as a historian, I think there is a time and place for telling these stories, as long as we understand that they are simply one aspect of the Mennonite experience in Canada.

Ethnic Mennonite immigration is part of that story, but so are the stories of Mennonite-sponsored Vietnamese refugees, and French-language Mennonite churches in Quebec, and Mennonite-run residential schools, and the stories of all the other people of varying backgrounds who have found a spiritual home within Mennonite churches. The Mennonite church of 2023 is not the same as the Mennonite church in 1923, and while we can look back, we must also look forward. ❧

Shelisa Klassen is a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. She participated in the third and final leg of the “Memories of Migration” tour.

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 **Anabaptist Mennonite
Biblical Seminary**

Historical society apologizes to Semá:th First Nation

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

The draining of [Sumas Lake] and our settlement on your ancestral lands was devastating and demoralizing and disrespectful.”

That was part of an apology offered to Semá:th First Nation Chief Dalton Silver and his people by Richard Thiessen, president of the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.

The statement was part of a July 24 event at the Semá:th longhouse east of Abbotsford, B.C. The event concluded the Memories of Migration train tour that marked 100 years since the start of Russlaender Mennonite migration to Canada in 1923.

In the 1920s, the B.C. government drained Sumas Lake, also known as Semá:th Lake. Located between Chilliwack and Abbotsford, the large, shallow lake was vital to the Semá:th people. Many Mennonites settled on the fertile lands that resulted from the draining of the lake.

“On behalf of those of us gathered here today who care about our Mennonite

story, I want to acknowledge the pain and loss that the Semá:th people have endured as a result of the draining of the lake and our settlement on your lands,” said Thiessen. “I am sorry that this happened to you, and I am sorry for the role that our settler ancestors played in this devastating chapter of your lives.”

Thiessen approached Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) B.C. earlier in the year regarding a possible apology. The conclusion of the train tour seemed an ideal opportunity.

“I told MCC B.C. that I wanted to have some sort of public event with local Indigenous leaders that would acknowledge our impact on them, particularly in conjunction with the draining of the Sumas Lake by the B.C. government and the subsequent establishment of Yarrow, Greendale and Arnold on the newly created Sumas Prairie,” said Thiessen.

Bridget Findlay of MCC B.C. contacted local Indigenous leaders to help coordinate the event. About 200 people came,

including the train tour group, representatives of MCC B.C., the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C., members of local Mennonite congregations and about 30 members of the Semá:th First Nation and other Indigenous groups.

The visitors were welcomed with words and song by Chief Silver and Semá:th councillor Chris Silver.

MCC B.C. executive director Wayne Bremner told the Indigenous group that he had gifts to offer, but wanted to emphasize that “it was not about us.” He first presented a quilt to Chris Silver. The quilt, made by the MCC quilting group, depicted a lion and a lamb to symbolize reconciliation and right relationship.

The other gift was that of song. Henry Engbrecht of the tour group led the Mennonites in singing the doxology. “We

Sharing history

Chief Dalton Silver, Semá:th First Nation

My grandpa used to say that in the Coast Salish Territory, Semá:th was the central location where the people used to gather.

The people gathered in the summertime, as we had Semá:th Lake [known in English as Sumas Lake] that once offered every species of fish right there at the front of our village. And in the wintertime, people gathered there from all parts of the Coast Salish Nation for the winter ceremonies. And I hope some time in the future that we can re-establish Semá:th as a central place amongst the Coast Salish, that we can gather again and maintain the ties that we once had as Salish People.

In the modern context, with our new surroundings, we need to interact with our new neighbours. We need to build relationships, share our histories so that we can better understand each other while maintaining our identity as Semá:th. We need to strengthen our position in the local economy and in society itself. ✎

SOURCE: SUMASFIRSTNATION.COM



CITY OF VANCOUVER ARCHIVES.

Sumas Lake, known as Semá:th Lake to the local Stó:lō people, prior to it being drained by government in the 1920s.

explained that it was a song to the Creator in thanks for the gifts given to us,” said Bremner. He told the Indigenous people present: “We thank God for the relationships with you.”

To conclude, Thiessen said, “By listening to each other’s stories and understanding each other’s pain and losses, we hope we can walk together on the path of reconciliation. We hope that this event

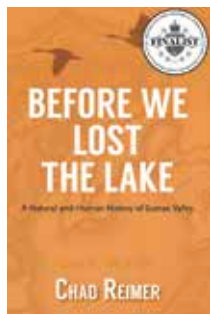
can be a signal that we want to do things differently. We want to see you, hear you, understand you, respect you, and build a better relationship with you.” ❧

Lost Lake

Aaron Epp

Truth comes before reconciliation. A 2018 book tells the story of Sumas Lake, how it was drained 100 years ago and how that impacted a First Nation.

In *Before We Lost the Lake: A Natural and Human History of Sumas Valley*, independent scholar Chad Reimer recounts that prior to the 1920s, much of the Central Fraser Valley was covered by the lake. It was about 4,050 hectares, but during the spring freshet, it often expanded to three times that size.



The lake supported sturgeon, trout, salmon, grizzly bears and geese, and its wetland habitat was a destination for migrating birds and a breeding ground for both fish and waterfowl.

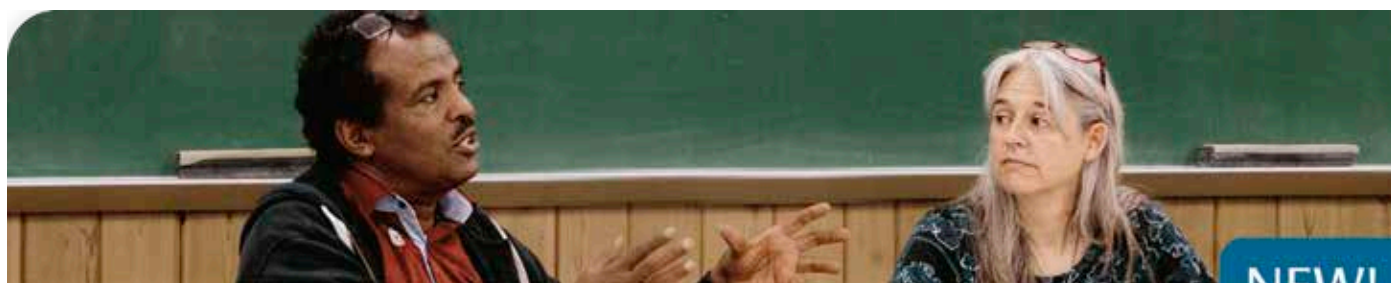
The lake was also central to the lives of the Semá:th people, a band of the Sto:lo Nation.

That started changing when settlers arrived in the 1800s. “No sooner had white immigrants settled into their new homes around Sumas Lake than they began thinking of ways to get rid of it,” Reimer writes. The opportunity to create rich farmland was too tantalizing to pass up, and the lake was drained between 1920 and 1924.

The Semá:th way of life vanished.

According to a review of the book published by the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia, Reimer mentions Mennonites only once in *Before We Lost the Lake*, but the relevance of the book to the Mennonite story is obvious.

“From 1929 onward, Mennonite immigrants and refugees arrived in the warm and fertile Fraser Valley,” the review says. “Their aptitude for farming soon raised them from poverty to prosperity. Yet, few of them—perhaps none—would have questioned the value of draining Sumas Lake, even though a landscape was devastated and, more importantly,” writes Reimer, “an aboriginal way of life was stolen.” ❧



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Consider the birders

Aaron Epp
Associate Editor

When Gordon Janzen was searching for a way to unwind, he found it by looking up.

Around 10 years ago, the Winnipegger realized he was working a lot and didn't have many hobbies. Looking to develop his interests outside of work, Janzen got a pair of binoculars and started birding.

Since then, birding (or birdwatching)—the act of watching, monitoring, feeding, filming or photographing birds—has become a way for the 64-year-old to relax.

"There's a lot of beauty in observing birds," says Janzen, who attends Home Street Mennonite Church. "I'm not a naturalist per se, but it's a way of paying attention to God's creation."

According to Birds Canada, a national charity for bird research, citizen science and conservation, a growing number of Canadians of all ages, abilities and backgrounds are expressing interest in birding.

When the most recent Canadian Nature Survey was released in 2012, it showed that birders will spend an average of 133 days in a year on the activity—more time than is spent on any other nature activity, including gardening.

John Pries of St. Jacobs, Ontario, recalls getting into birding when he was in elementary school. A friend invited him to watch for birds in a nearby field. When Pries awoke at sunrise and stepped outside, he could not believe the symphony he heard.

The 70-year-old recounted the experience in a sermon he gave at his church, First Mennonite in Kitchener, last summer.

Memories that stand out for Pries include his first look at a yellow-shafted flicker, watching a Baltimore oriole build a nest and seeing a flock of redpolls feeding on the ground less than two metres from where he stood.

The retired environmental technologist

enjoys birding at least once a week. During the migration season, he does it once or twice a day on the five-acre property where he and his wife live.

"It is relaxing, therapeutic, [and it] provides exercise and fresh air," Pries tells *Canadian Mennonite* in an email. "[It] often surprises me when I learn something new about birds that I may have seen a thousand times or see a species that I have not previously seen on our property."

Rewarding and enjoyable

Merri-Lee Metzger has similar feelings. A retired teacher who lives in Floradale, Ontario, Metzger has been interested in nature—and birds in particular—her entire life.

"Since retirement, I have had more time to spend outdoors, usually with a camera in hand," she says in an email. "The whole adventure of discovering, hearing and seeing creatures, and of being allowed into their worlds, is rewarding and enjoyable. But beyond that, hours spent in creation are calming, healing and regenerative."

Metzger does the majority of her birding on the farm where she lives. Spring and summer bring Baltimore orioles, hummingbirds, eastern bluebirds, brown thrashers and more. Winter brings snow buntings, horned larks, lapland longspurs and snowy owls.

Photography adds another dimension to Metzger's birding.

"When I am able to record a special moment or sighting with my camera, it allows me to carry some memories home with me, and to share my experience with others," she says. "A photo is always a bonus and is only taken if a subject will not be bothered or interrupted in its important survival activities."

Like Metzger, photography is linked to birding for Asher Warkentin of Pincher Creek, Alberta. Warkentin started taking the occasional quick photo as a way to confirm with other birders what he had seen. Eventually, that grew into taking



PHOTO BY CHRISTINA JANZEN

Birders flock to the bus windows during an excursion as part of the 2023 Camps with Meaning birding retreat.



PHOTO BY MERRI-LEE METZGER

A Baltimore oriole.

PHOTO BY JOHN PRIES

A Nashville warbler.

high-quality photos of some of the birds he encounters.

"It's a fun other avenue that birding can take," Warkentin says.

At 19, Warkentin disproves the stereotype that birdwatching is only for retirees. An uncle introduced him to birding seven years ago. Since then, it's become a fun, relaxing hobby that the Canadian Mennonite University science student does frequently.

"It gets me outside more than I would otherwise," Warkentin says. "It doesn't feel like a successful day unless I've been outside listening for birds."

One of the things Warkentin finds appealing about birding is the way it can connect people.

"[Birders create] such a strong community, and it forms those friendships between people who might not otherwise have anything to do with each other," he says. "I go birding with people who are 65, 70 years old. It's such a welcoming, happy-to-help environment. You go anywhere and you find out who the main birders are there, and they will definitely be happy to go birding with you or help you out."

Birding retreat

Like Warkentin, Janzen has made new friends through birdwatching. He and three others organize an annual birding retreat through Camps with Meaning, the camping ministry of Mennonite Church Manitoba.

The 21st retreat took place at the

beginning of June and brought together nearly 40 people for a weekend of birdwatching, a keynote presentation by a local owl expert, and worship. Participants, who ranged in age from 12 to older than 90, observed 129 species over the weekend.

"It's been fun interacting with others at the retreat in a common pursuit," Janzen says. "And it's been especially helpful for me to have a place where there are more experienced birders to learn with."

In addition to looking at physical features, birders tune in to things like movement and sound when identifying different species. While she enjoys looking at birds, Rosie Perera of Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship in Vancouver, B.C., relies on her ears in addition to her eyes.

"I like listening to the songs and learning to identify them by their song," says Perera, 59.

A retired software engineer, Perera learned to appreciate birds when she was growing up in Massachusetts and observed the different species that would use the birdfeeder in her family's backyard.

Birding became a full-fledged passion in 1995 when she participated in a Caribbean cruise led by John Stott, an Anglican cleric and theologian from England. Stott's books include *The Birds Our Teachers: Biblical Lessons from a Lifelong Bird Watcher*.

The intersection between birding and faith came up again during Perera's graduate studies at Regent College. One of her professors, American theologian

Eugene Peterson, mentioned in class how birding is about slowing down, observing and being patient.

That same approach works well with the Bible, Peterson suggested.

"That helped me slow down and become more observant when birdwatching, but also in life and when reading scripture," Perera says.

For Metzger, it's easy to make a connection between birdwatching and faith.

"Immersing ourselves in God's natural world enables us to connect deeply to the one whose creativity and imagination have brought all of us, human and non-human, into being," she says. "Beyond that, the responsibility for good stewardship of the earth and its resources has been entrusted to us."

According to Pries, appreciating the natural world is especially important in the face of the climate crisis.

"Raising awareness with others of the beauty and joy that birds bring to our lives improves the potential for species survival," Pries told his congregation last year. "Let's take the time to appreciate what we have. Get outside. Get in touch with the natural world and let it penetrate your being. Enjoy the many parks and campgrounds, some of which are minutes away from our homes.

"We can't simply focus on the negative and let it overwhelm us," he concluded. "The more we are in touch with the natural world, the greater the potential impact we can have in preserving it." ❧

Singing to Ukraine

A personal story of war, friendship and music

By Carol Ann Weaver

February 23, 2022, was a relatively ordinary day on our planet. Until 10:30 p.m. Ontario time—early morning of February 24 where Nataliia Kurhan lives—when I heard a reporter announce breathlessly, “Missiles are being fired; the invasion has begun.”

I saw streaks descending behind the reporter on the screen and heard the sound of rockets.

In the year-and-a-half since that day, the Ukraine war has ended and up-ended countless lives in ways most of us in North America cannot imagine. It has also weaved its way into many of our own lives in ways we could not have expected.

Why does Ukraine matter so much to me? Is it “The Blessing,” my orchestra piece that was performed by the Ukrainian Philharmonic Orchestra at the Opera Theatre in Kyiv six years ago?

Is it my family, friends and colleagues who have Ukrainian chapters in their lives? My husband, Lyle Friesen, comes from the people who left Molotschna (now Zaporizhzhia), Ukraine, for Canada in 1874.

Is it the constant news of missiles and ruined cities, people living underground, hospitals razed?

When I hear of Ukrainians being captured from their homes at midnight, children taken from their families and a girl gang-raped, my indignation turns into outrage.

A month after the invasion, I could no longer stay silent; music began to cry out as my own personal response to this atrocity. “Singing to the Children of Ukraine” was born.

Yet I needed to meet a Ukrainian who knew from the gut what the war meant.

A local paper published an article about Nataliia Kurhan, a brave Ukrainian teacher, translator and administrator. I contacted her, and we quickly became close friends. Nataliia escaped Ukraine with her two daughters and cat by driving for eight days,



PHOTO BY INGRID BAUMAN

Carol Ann Weaver (left) and Nataliia Kurhan at Hawkesville Mennonite Church in May, 2022.

only at dark. By March 2022, she arrived in Kitchener, Ontario.

I dedicated my song to her. I also asked her if the song should only express pain or also hope and restoration. She insisted the song needs hope. Three sections developed: a wordless outcry; a song of grief for those who have passed away; and a song of hope for recovery and return home.

The work was premiered at Hawkesville Mennonite Church, in Hawkesville, Ontario, on May 3, 2022, with multiple subsequent choral and solo-vocal performances at various churches and events in Ontario and Goshen, Indiana.

Captured

On May 13, 2022, I received an alarming text from Nataliia: “Just got the terrible news from my mother that Russians just captured Ihor, my relative, and they demand \$100,000 to free him.”

Ihor had been captured weeks earlier, possibly tortured, and would only be released with a ransom payment far beyond their means. No longer was the war distant or hypothetical.

I reached out to Mennonite Central Committee, but they could not help this man. The Ukrainian government could not help either, since he was in Russian-held territory.

Nataliia knew she had to help bring Ihor’s 16-year-old son Nikita to Canada. She busily wrote messages to Ukrainian government offices, but, as she noted, “there are thousands of such requests for help in Ukraine.”

The ensuing days were laced with tensions. Was Ihor fed? Did he have warm clothing? Was he alive?

On May 17, 2022, three weeks after Ihor’s initial capture, Nataliia reported that he had been miraculously released. She saw

him on video call. “He looks five years older and lost weight . . . but still, he is alive!” she wrote.

Ihor had been kept in a dark garage for three weeks and tortured. He had been captured for having a Ukrainian flag and Ukrainian symbols on his phone.

The good news of his release was tempered by the fact that the Russians confiscated his passport and belongings, so he lives in a kind of house arrest, not able to travel beyond his immediate region.

In the following weeks, Ihor and his wife were able, through tremendous effort and with much help from Nataliia, to get their son Nikita to Canada.

A son’s story

I interviewed Nikita, with Nataliia translating. “The Russians came in the middle of the night and took my father,” he told me. “We didn’t know what to do. We had a lot of fear. We had to hide for three weeks. I hid in a closet, others, in different rooms. They threatened our family a lot.”

He shared too how the family learned that Ihor had been fed once every three days. His captors sent electrical shocks into clamps on his fingers until he fainted. “Some people couldn’t bear this and died,” Nikita said of others who were held captive with his dad. “People living nearby have heard constant screams from this place, ever since the Russians occupied the town.”

Nikita told of his father’s release. “They put a sack over his head. He thought he would be shot. Instead, they brought him home, but forced him to give them money, otherwise our whole family would be shot. I’ve never seen my father so scared.”

Now, Ihor is allowed to travel only in certain areas, so he can continue his business and give the Russians the money they demand in exchange for his freedom and that of his family.

“He’s under their total control,” Nikita says. “Even his phone is bugged; yet when he calls, he speaks to me in Ukrainian, which is risky.”

Song of spirit and tumult

Hearing from this young man, it was time to write music for Ihor. I thought of what sustains people imprisoned like Ihor, though some for much longer. Freedom of spirit seems to be one essential key.

At that time, I was also commissioned by Canadian pianist Amelia Grace Yates to compose a piano solo. I called it “Spirit Unbound,” for Ihor. The piece was premiered by Yates on March 26, 2023, in Burlington, Ontario.

As a preface to her performance, she said that in the piece listeners would hear the “tumult” of the invasion, “balanced with music of hope” as well as fragments of the Ukrainian national anthem.

Subsequently I created a composite soundscape, called “Ukraine Grief,” in

coordination with Nataliia. It incorporates her voice as she talks about the grief and pain of the war, along with the sounds of air raid sirens recorded by friends in Dnipro, and parts of “Singing to the Children of Ukraine” and “Spirit Unbound.”

Nataliia says, “grief has many sounds, including hopelessness, despair and loss of meaning of life.” Within this soundscape her single voice represents the gravitas and poignancy of millions who have also suffered inordinate loss due to this invasion. As she calmly talks about grief, she reveals the strength, steadiness, focus and courage required to survive this war.

It has been an honour to learn to know Nataliia and other Ukrainians whose lives have connected with mine. My life has been changed by knowing about this war through their eyes, ears and hearts. The spirit of Nataliia and my other Ukrainian friends has guided my music, bringing me to a more intimate place of identity with those in the epicentre of this unfathomable tragedy. What hurts one hurts us all. Sometimes music can understand this better than we can. Is that not why we sing? As Canadian songwriter Leon Dubinsky says, “We rise again in the voices of our song.” ❧

Carol Ann Weaver is a composer, pianist and professor emerita of music at Conrad Grebel University College.

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Art gallery nurtures connections with the past

By Maria H. Klassen

An art gallery lines the hallway between the sanctuary and the auditorium of the Niagara United Mennonite Church near Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. The art hanging there reminds viewers of God's guidance through difficult times, including separation, loss and escape.

When the Russlaender centenary train trip stopped in Ontario in early July, about half of the participants took a tour that included the gallery and the church. The "Memories of Migration: Russlaender Tour 100" was a re-enactment of the original train trip taken in 1923 when many Mennonites arrived in Canada.

Among the pictures in the gallery is a restored painting created by Martin Klaassen, great-grandfather of Randy Klaassen, titled "Memory of Home." Painted in 1871, it is Martin's memory of Tiegenhagen, West Prussia, the village where he had lived before migrating to Russia. Somehow the picture survived the Great Trek, where a group of Mennonites followed Claas Epp eastward through Asia. The Klaassen family subsequently immigrated to Oklahoma in 1894 and to Canada in 1918, eventually settling in Morden, Manitoba.

"Gate to the Past" is a pen and watercolour image of the entryway to the farmyard of Hermann Dau in Eschenhorst, West Prussia. Renate Dau Klaassen crafted this image from her paternal grandfather's life in 1978 when she was a teenager, working from a black and white photo. Dau left this home when he was drafted into the German military at the start of the Second World War. His wife, Christel, fled from there in advance of the Russian invasion in January 1945, with their six children. Renate's father, Hans Hermann, the eldest, was nine.

"I created this image of the gate as a gift for my aunt, who would have been old enough to remember this home that she had to leave forever," commented Renate.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RENATE DAU KLAASSEN

"Gate to the Past" by Renate Dau Klaassen



PHOTO BY MARIA H. KLASSEN

Marjorie Wall Hofer admires Leah Klassen's painting "In the Garden."

Leah Klassen is a newcomer to the art gallery. She loved the idea of connecting with her ancestors and heritage through art and says her work "could be called Neo Mennonite folk art." Most of her art is done in acrylics, and her painting "In the

Garden" portrays a mother's love for her child. Her work is inspired by her deep love and admiration for her grandmother, Katie Klassen, who came to Canada alone, without family, from Germany.

Leah also draws inspiration from her great-great-grandmother, Sarah Funk Loewen Falk (1867-1943). Relatives gifted her with photocopied images of drawings found in Sarah's sketchbooks during her life in Russia, and the flowers and bunnies in her painting came from images in these sketchbooks.

"I was impressed by the variety of art by different artists," commented Marjorie Wall Hofer, a participant on the Russlaender tour. "There is everything from realistic still-life and farm scenes to modern expressionism. The most intriguing were the bold, colourful interpretations of sketches from a notebook which survived the Great Trek. A mix of art I'd expect to see in a modern metropolitan gallery." ❧

Adventure Club engages kids

By Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

Every Tuesday morning this summer, children from Emmanuel Mennonite Church have been searching for a sheep while finding fun through nature-themed stories, water games, art projects, and hands-on creation care activities.

An alternative to the traditional Vacation Bible School, the Kids' Summer Adventure Club gives children ages 5 to 10 something to look forward to each week while ensuring the leaders stay fresh and enthusiastic. This summer, Emmanuel paired with Level Ground Mennonite Church to run the camp, as both congregations have small numbers of children.

The lessons and activities were collectively chosen by Rachel Navarro and Abby Bergen of Emmanuel Mennonite and Josh Willms of Level Ground. The theme this year is Jesus' parable of the lost sheep from Luke 15.

A game board in the Emmanuel foyer gives participants a chance to move their playing pieces forward by doing activities to collect small prizes along the way, with a grand prize waiting at the end. A continuous activity each week has been looking for a stuffed sheep hidden somewhere—inside the Emmanuel church building—or outside, when the group played water games at Level Ground.

Bergen is excited about her participation in the summer program. She portrays "Abbian Jones," a takeoff on the popular movie adventure character Indiana Jones, complete with appropriate costume. "[The program] is so unique," she says. "I put the kids in charge of exploration and I like seeing their smiling faces."

"It's so important for us as churches to work together," said Josh Willms of the cooperative program. "Emmanuel and Level Ground seem to connect really well and we're looking forward to doing it again next summer." ❧



PHOTO BY AMY RINNER WADDELL

Abby Bergen, summer intern at Emmanuel Mennonite Church.

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Lymburner elected chair of Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service

By Tobi Thiessen
PUBLISHER

On May 13, Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service (CMPS) held its 52nd AGM via video conference. CMPS is the non-profit body that publishes *Canadian Mennonite* magazine.

Kathryn Lymburner of Stouffville, Ontario, was elected chairperson, replacing Henry Krause of Langley, B.C. Krause leaves the board after nine years, six as chairperson. In his final report, Krause said: "I continue to be optimistic that [CMPS] can meet the challenges before us. . . . We have excellent staff and a vision for strengthening and supporting the church in its various forms and ministries across the country."

Lymburner brings to her role as chairperson 10 years of experience as editor/

publisher at *Blue Line* magazine. She is also a photographer. Lymburner attends Rouge Valley Mennonite Church.

"[*Canadian Mennonite*] is the go-to hub for Mennonites in Canada," said Lymburner. "This unifying voice is valuable for the denomination. I look forward to supporting the publication as it reimagines how we share news with an Anabaptist lens through various platforms."

Also elected to the executive committee are Karen Heese of Markham, Ontario, as vice-chair; Aaron Penner of Winnipeg as treasurer; and Annika Krause of Montreal as secretary.

Two new people were elected to the board: Donna Schulz of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, and Brenda Suderman of



Kathryn Lymburner

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Winnipeg, who replaces Ken Reddig. Art Koop of Edson, Alberta, was re-appointed to a third three-year term.

Two directors continue their terms: Lois Epp of Calgary and Alex Tiessen of Rosthern. During the year, Carl DeGurse of Winnipeg and Eun Young Kwon of Surrey, B.C., stepped down from the board, leaving vacancies that have yet to be filled.

In 2022, CMPS reported a deficit of \$1,300 based on revenue of \$766,600 against expenses of \$767,900. Members of the public who donate \$25 during the year may register to attend the annual meeting and vote on proceedings. The annual meeting is held in May. CMPS publishes its annual report on its website (canadianmennonite.org/about-us). ✎

Tobi Thiessen serves as publisher of Canadian Mennonite. She can be reached at publisher@canadianmennonite.org.

Jam

By Maria H. Klassen
ST. CATHARINES, ONTARIO

In 2004, at the age of 70, Hans Juergen Wiens sold his business, including several farms, a feed business, and his last pig, all in one year. He was unemployed and restless. But then, one night, he remembered his mother's resourcefulness. After the Second World War, when there was a food shortage all over Europe, she taught her children to pick wild berries in the forest and to dig leftover potatoes from the fields that the farmers had harvested. The family never went hungry. Many years later, when his mother came to visit in Canada, she made a big batch of plum jam, using Lombard plums that the farmer could not sell because they were too small.

Those memories got him thinking. Like the Lombard plums that were too small, there were other possibilities such as surplus rhubarb and peaches that were too soft to sell. With advice from his brother, who had also enjoyed his mother's jam, Wiens found a new hobby in his retirement. He began experimenting until he found the right pectin to make the perfect jam.



PHOTO BY MARIA H. KLASSEN

Hans Juergen Wiens and his jars of jam.

In the first few years, all the jam that Wiens made was given away. He converted one of his barns into a certified kitchen, with annual inspections, and now produces

60 varieties of jam. The hobby has grown into a big business that employs Wiens, his daughter and two grandchildren full-time. The jams are sold in 15 different markets, in a bakery and a meat shop.

"This jam business is possible because of all the fruit, and the many varieties, harvested in the Niagara area," he says. "All the fruit used in the jam-making is fruit that cannot be sold on the market or in stores; it is not perfect enough." Wiens receives so much second-hand fruit he can hardly process all the fruit that is offered.

Over the years, Wiens has been involved at Niagara United Mennonite Church. Because he was self-employed, his time was flexible, and he was able to serve on various boards in the community. Organizations such as MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates) and MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) have benefitted from his jam. From humble beginnings to two successful businesses, Wiens lives out his faith, and uses creativity in his retirement career. ✎

News shorts

MCEC appoints regional ministry associate



Myrna Miller Dyck

Appointed by Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, **Myrna Miller Dyck** of Baden, Ontario, joins Cathrin van Sintern-Dick and Stephen Reist as a regional ministry associate beginning Aug. 15. Working alongside Al Rempel, regional minister, and Marilyn Rudy-Froese, church leadership minister, the team resources pastors, chaplains and congregations. Myrna previously served on the MCEC leadership council and currently coaches pastors in

the Transitioning into Ministry program. She was a pastor at Steinmann Mennonite Church for 16 years.

Ministerial credential reinstated after 36 years

Thirty-six years ago, Keith Schrag had relinquished his ministerial credential after being questioned for being a gay man. He

continued serving as a lay pastor at Ames Mennonite Church in Iowa until his retirement earlier this year. This past June, Mennonite Church USA reinstated his ministerial credentials. He continues to advocate for the welcome of all into church, regardless of sexual orientation.

SOURCE: ANABAPTIST WORLD

South Central Conference withdraws from Mennonite Church USA

By an 81-percent vote, delegates of the South Central Conference approved a recommendation to withdraw from MC USA. South Central has 30 member congregations, some of which plan to leave and rejoin MC USA. While no reason for the withdrawal was given, the discernment process included listening sessions about the LGBTQ-affirming resolution that MC USA delegates passed a year ago. Four other conferences have left MC USA since it was formed in 2002.

SOURCE: ANABAPTIST WORLD

Calendar

British Columbia

Oct. 20-22: MC B.C. women's retreat at Camp Squeah, "Planted-Rooted-Growing" with Bonnie Esau. To register, go to www.mcbc.ca.

Manitoba

Sept. 17: Join us for a We Are All Treaty People Celebration from 1-4 p.m. at the Forks Centre Field in Winnipeg! For more information, contact MCC's Indigenous Neighbours program coordinator at 204-925-1911 or IndigenousNeighbours@mccmb.ca.
Nov. 8: Dual Hybrid Book Launch. Join host Sue Sorensen and authors Ariel Gordon ("Sightseeing") and Mitchell Toews ("Pinching Zwieback"), both creators with Winnipeg's At Bay Press, Wednesday, November 8 @ 7 p.m. in the atrium at McNally Robinson Booksellers, Grant Park, Winnipeg. Info: bit.ly/GordonToewsLAUNCH.

Ontario

Until Aug. 31: MCC New Hamburg Thrift Centre is hosting Food Trucks every Thursday. Picnic tables are being supplied by the Home Hardware in Wellesley at a reduced price. Wilmot has made a donation to cover the cost of one of these tables.
Sept. 1-3: Labour Day Weekend retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp. For more information, go to www.slmc.ca/retreats.
Sept. 10: Grebel alumni are invited to return to Grebel for a celebratory picnic, marking 60 years since the College first opened its doors. Enjoy family-friendly activities, tours, a hymn sing, reconnecting with professors, exhibits highlighting Grebel's past and present, and a picnic dinner. Don't forget the Ultimate Frisbee tournament! Enjoy a pre-dinner program, with hosts Pete and Kendra Whitfield Ellis, and President Marcus Shantz. Registration and more at: www.uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/anniversary-picnic.
Sept. 15-17: Men's Retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp. For more information, go to www.slmc.ca/retreats.

Sept. 16: Detweiler Meetinghouse (3445 Roseville Road, Ayr) is a Doors Open Waterloo Region site. From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., learn about the history of our people and buildings from 1855, and walk in the adjoining Roseville cemetery for a self-guided tour. Updates can be found on our Facebook page.

Sept. 16: Greater Toronto Area Mennonite Festival for World Relief from 10 to 4 p.m. at the Willowgrove Farm, day camp and nature school in Stouffville. For more information, visit mcccanada.ca/get-involved/events.

Sept 18-21: Bruce Trail Hike, hosted by Silver Lake Mennonite Camp. For more information, go to www.slmc.ca/retreats.

Sept. 25: MCC Ontario Annual General Meeting at 7 p.m. For more information or to register, call 519-745-8458 ext. 238 or go to their website at mcccanada.ca/get-involved/events/2023-mcc-ontario-annual-general-meeting.

Sept. 25: Join a mass choir to prepare to sing Handel's Messiah at Centre in the Square on Sunday afternoon, December 10, with the Kitchener Waterloo Symphony. Mennonite Mass Choir Messiah Rehearsals begin at 7:30 p.m. at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener. Register at www.mennosingers.com
Sept 29-Oct. 1: Fall Hike Retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp. For more information, go to www.slmc.ca/retreats.

Sept. 29-Oct. 1: Seeking Transformation: An Un/Learning Retreat for Christian Settlers with facilitators Derek Suderman and Tanya Dyck Steinmann. For more information visit fiveoaks.venue360.me/public/events/homepage.

Sept. 29-Oct. 1: Theatre of the Beat presents *I Love You and it Hurts*, three short forum theatre plays that reflect lived experiences of elder abuse, healthy masculinity, and intimate partner violence in youth relationships, with a focus on how to recognize the subtle early signs of abuse. Featuring 4 performances: Sept. 29&30 at 7 p.m. and Sept. 30 & Oct. 1 at 2 p.m. This is a special premiere production, before the fall tour. Crisis workers will be available at performances. For more information

about the show, or for tour bookings, email cedric@theatreofthebeat.ca or visit theatreofthebeat.ca/i-love-you-and-it-hurts.

Sept. 30: Urban Anabaptist Church Planters Workshop, "Tentmakers: Opportunities and Challenges for Developing Congregations" at the Ottawa Mennonite Church from 10-4 p.m. Doors open at 9 a.m. for coffee, snacks and fellowship. For more information and to register by September 15, go to mcec.ca/events.

Oct. 11: Conrad Grebel University College's 60th Anniversary Gala Dinner at 6 p.m., hosted by Eric Friesen. With stories we'll recreate memories of Community Supper and raise money for residence facility projects. We will also get a glimpse into the University of Waterloo's future as UWaterloo President Vivek Goel speaks about "Waterloo at 100." Purchase tickets at: uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/60th-gala-dinner.

Oct. 21: MCEC Youth Event at UMEI, 1-5p.m. at UMEI Christian High School in Leamington, Ont.

Oct. 28: Voices Together Resource Day, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Shantz Mennonite Church, in Baden, Ont., with hymn sing at 7 p.m.

Oct. 27-29: Fall work weekend at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp. For more information, go to www.slmc.ca/retreats.

Online

Aug. 15 and Sept. 14: Resettlement info session: Welcoming the stranger from 7 to 8 p.m. You're invited to learn more about the BVOR program and the profound impact you could have in welcoming the stranger in the upcoming information session. For details and to register, visit mcco.ca/events.

Oct. 12 and 15: Ted & Co present *We Own This Now*, a drama by Alison Casella Brookins that looks at love of land, loss of land and what it means to "own" something. Learn how the Doctrine of Discovery is still being used and causing harm today. Thursday, October 12, 7 p.m. at Steinmann Mennonite Church. Saturday, October 15, 7 p.m. at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate. Tickets online at: mcco.ca/we-own-this-now.

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



For more Calendar listings visit, canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.

Classifieds

Looking for a way to serve while sharing your faith? Menno-Hof, located in Shipshewana, Indiana, offers visitors from around the world accurate information about the faith and life of the Amish and Mennonites. Menno-Hof is looking for individuals and couples in agreement with Anabaptist values and beliefs to serve as host and/or hostess in 2024 for a minimum of two weeks (one month is preferable). Responsibilities include conducting tours and light housekeeping. Fully furnished apartments are available on-site. For more information contact Betty Lou Kline, daily operations manager: 260-768-4117 or blkline@mennohof.org.

Seeking Project Editor and Project Facilitator

Bring your passion for faith formation to *Shine* curriculum's innovative, supportive work environment. We seek a full-time Project Editor for *Shine's* quarterly faith formation resources and a full-time Project Facilitator to oversee *Shine's* new Everyday Faith project, a Lilly Endowment-funded initiative that aims to help parents and caregivers share faith and values with their children. Both are remote positions with some travel requirements. We value diversity and encourage people of color to apply. Find the position description at shinecurriculum.com/jobs/ and email resume and cover letter to jobs@shinecurriculum.com.

Employment Opportunities



Employment Opportunity Pastor

Hamilton Mennonite Church (HMC) invites applications for a full-time pastor who embraces the Anabaptist vision of peace. Located near McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, HMC has just over 100 members and 40 participants under the age of 18.

Our love for Jesus calls us to inclusion and we seek candidates who are fully LGBTQ+ affirming. The pastor will provide spiritual and pastoral leadership, supported by strong lay leadership.

The base salary starts at \$70,000 (plus benefits and pension) for candidates with an MDiv and increases for those with previous pastoral experience.

The position is open and we are eager for leadership to provide continuity for the many children and young families in our congregation.

Visit at our website at hmc.on.ca to learn more. Email pastoraltransitions@mcec.ca for a full job description or for a link to join in our hybrid worship services.



Employment Opportunity Pastor

Peace Church on 52nd (Vancouver, BC) is searching for one full-time pastor to serve in a culturally diverse urban setting, starting January 1, 2024. We hold to the Anabaptist theology, are members of Mennonite Church BC and MC Canada, and need a pastor to lead us as we strive to continue to develop our relationships with Christ, each other, and the community.

For more information, see application details and the job description at:
mcbc.ca/cell/container/default/id/13009.

Closing date for applications is Sept. 15, 2023.



ASSINIBOIA
CAMP & RETREAT CENTRE

Employment Opportunity Guest Group Coordinator

Assiniboia Camp and Retreat Centre seeks a 0.8 FTE Guest Group Coordinator. This important position is the first and primary point of contact for the many wonderful guests we have at camp each year and ensures that our guests and host volunteers feel welcome, and that their needs and any special requests are met during their stay. While 0.8 FTE, a unique feature of the position is the schedule which asks for closer to full time in rental season, therefore allowing for much of July and August to be off.

Job description and further info is available
www.campswithmeaning.org/news-events

Employment Opportunity

MCEC Operations & Finance Director

MCEC seeks a strategic and collaborative leader with experience leading Finance and at least one of the other key Operations functions of general Operations, Human Resources, Risk Management, Information Technology and/or Communications. This person will be a strategic thinker, experience serving on an executive team, is able to think long-term while also able to shape the appropriate execution through the Operations team. The Operations & Finance Director plays a key role in the day-to-day operations of MCEC, ensuring that MCEC's practices demonstrate good stewardship, meet industry best standards and adhere to charitable law requirements.

This is a full-time, permanent position. This role will remain open until the role is filled.

Visit www.mcec.ca/careers to see the full position description and to apply.



Advertising Information

Contact: 1-800-378-2524 x.224 or
advert@canadianmennonite.org

PHOTO BY ROSIE PERERA



**But ask the animals, and they will
teach you;**

**the birds of the air, and they
will tell you;**

**ask the plants of the earth, and
they will teach you;**

**and the fish of the sea will
declare to you.**

—Job 12:7-8



PHOTO BY MERRI-LEE METZGER