


CANADIAN MENNONITE

January 26, 2024 Volume 28 Number 2



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IMPOSSIBLE PEACE

Rethinking our response as flames of violence spread

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Brave birds still fly through fog

KATHRYN LYMBURNER

Chair, Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service

The other Sunday, the chairs in our sanctuary were pulled up to round tables. You know you're in for something different when that happens, and this extrovert with opinions to spare was pumped. I was going to share the heck out of whatever needed sharing. I couldn't contain my glee when I discovered there were news stories at each table. Best Sunday ever.

I scanned through the news story on the table I was at: Gaza. Okay, I thought, I can do this one. Four years of political science, a lifetime of news and information gathering. Game on. With friends living in Beirut and acquaintances directly affected on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the conflict, I felt there were meaningful things I could share.

My table despaired. When would we see the conflict resolved? How would both sides be able to back down? I worried for the youth now emboldened for future violence.

Next we were asked to remove a star from an envelope. Each star contained a word, and these "star words" were to be our guides for this year. I picked out my word. I wish I could tell you that I remember it, but what I do remember was that it didn't feel right. I threw it back. No one said we had to keep the first one.

My second word was "Patience." Yup, I thought, that's my word.

I don't think of myself as a very patient person. I like order, I like structure. I like a goal and I like a plan that gets me to my goal. Waiting around



for things to unfold? Not for me. A strategic plan for new directions and ideas on how to get there? Sign me up. Will there also be several meetings about it? Great, I'm in.

But having patience means things are not in control. Things are not happening. I'm probably waiting. It means sitting in a place of unknowing, and that frequently requires faith. I find not knowing something frustrating, mostly because I can't plan for unknown things, although that doesn't stop me from trying.

Lately, in my personal life, I've had to practice a lot of patience, and so when I hear that word I think of change and also uncertainty. There are several things I'm patiently, or not so patiently, waiting for, and all of them will bring change.

A few days after pulling "patience" out of the envelope at church, I was working on a page in a devotional journal about cultivating fruits of the spirit. The journal is bright pink with

gold embossing and empty space for writing the prompted Bible passage in your own words. It asked me to read Psalm 27: 13-14. I wrote down: Wait for the Lord. Be strong; be courageous. Wait for the Lord. You will see goodness.

Funny, I thought, that sounds like my star word. The gold-embossed heading told me I was working on cultivating the fruit of "patience."

Change can be a negative when it is scary. War and genocide. To me that's unimaginable scariness. The loss of a loved one. Scary. The loss of a job. Yup, scary.

For almost a year, Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service has worked on a strategic plan for new directions. Change has been on the horizon for a little while. Don't worry, the printed magazine is staying.

At times this process has felt fast and scary. It has also been positive. This new roadmap will allow for more and diverse voices to share their gifts and talents with the broader church. It's new territory. We are excited. The process has required faith and courage. I'm certain it will continue to demand both, but it also needed patience while we dreamed and wrestled with the idea of a new future.

While I'm working on my patience this year, I have two notes stuck to my computer monitor.

The first says: "I hope beautiful things fall into place in a thousand little ways you didn't expect." The other: "Brave birds still fly through fog." ❧



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Photo by Piotr Chrobot/Unsplash

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CM What in the World



The Gospel according to Scorsese

Legendary director Martin Scorsese is making a film about Jesus. After attending a conference on the aesthetics of Catholic imagination in Italy last year, Scorsese met briefly with Pope Francis. Later he announced: “I have responded to the pope’s appeal to artists in the only way I know how: by imagining and writing a screenplay for a film about Jesus.”

Source: LA Times

Photo: Neil Grabowsky/Wiki Creative Commons



The spiritual cost of batteries

In South America’s “Lithium Triangle”—a key mining area covering parts of Chile, Argentina and Bolivia—Indigenous peoples say mines are breaking their spiritual bond with land, waters and traditional ways. Companies take over lands, deplete water reserves and pollute. In Argentina, a national Catholic organization is joining the fight.

Source: National Catholic Reporter

Photo: Maggy Idrobo-López for Pexels

Fundamentalism and Mennonite identity

If we are to maintain a distinctive Mennonite identity, then fundamentalism is not a valid option. The days are past when a Mennonite was someone who wore funny clothes and ate funny food.

If now we are to be fundamentalists, as many in our ranks would have us be, then we might just as well join the Missionary Alliance Church or the Evangelical Free Church or any number of such fundamentalist groups that many Mennonites have indeed been joining in recent years.

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YEARS AGO

LETTER FROM JAY DELKIN, LONDON, ONTARIO
MENNONITE REPORTER JANUARY 21, 1974





33 churches burned

At least 33 churches in Canada have burned to the ground since the discovery of suspected unmarked graves near the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in May 2021. Of those, 24 are confirmed arson cases.

Source: CBC

Photo: Artem Makarov for Pexels



Indian Christians uphold caste system

Nivedita Louis's recent book, *Christhuvthil Jathi* (Caste in Christianity), highlights the "strange phenomenon" whereby Christianity established itself in India without any fundamental change to society. Today, while Christian leaders fight to have lowest caste members recognized as equals, within Indian Christian communities, the caste system remains strictly upheld.

Source: The Hindu Bureau

Photo: Front view of the Santhome Basilica in Chennai, 20 April 07 by PlaneMad



Fake miracles, real fame

A new BBC documentary examines six ways the late televangelist TB Joshua of Nigeria faked the healing miracles that made him one of the most popular Christian figures on earth. According to former insiders, Joshua used exaggeration, drugs in fruit drinks, payment of poor people to pretend to be sick, fake medical certificates and video manipulation. Joshua died, under a cloud of allegations of abuse and torture, in 2021 at age 57.

Source: BBC

Photo: Nigerian prophet Temitope Balogun Joshua (T.B Joshua), 22 November 2017

A moment from yesterday



Three junior nurses train at a clinic-hospital in Nhatrang, Vietnam, in 1966. Atlee Beechy reported in *The Canadian Mennonite* that 70,000 tons of explosives were dropped on Vietnam in the previous year and Mennonite Central Committee was responding by ministering to the "human spirit" and helping civilians gain the resources and skills to look beyond war to "a better life."

Text: Laureen Gissing-Harder

Photo: The Canadian Mennonite/
Mennonite Archives of Ontario



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.



✉ **Literature saves lives**

Your editorial and feature interview with Di Brandt struck a chord (“Poetic justice,” September 22, 2023).

I have been reading Brandt’s poetry and essays for decades; her poem, *questions i asked my mother* changed —no, saved—my life, as she has done for many others, especially women.

I encourage you to publish more articles about Canadian Mennonite literature and its authors. This is a lifeline for many who have been silenced and the ones who have had to go elsewhere for support and recognition as persons and writers.

Literature is vitally important to all communities; instead of vilifying and shunning writers who offer insightful truths and questions through fiction, we must open a way to dialogue, to understand, to hear. It is through literature, after all, that we learn kindness, humility and honesty.

Literature invites self-reflection and the abandonment of denial of feelings, injustices and a host of other things that exist within Mennonite communities. The whole point of literature is to make us aware of our communal hypocrisies and to make us face the injustices therein (and to make us do something about them).

To Di Brandt: Please do not repent of your writing. We need you.

RITA DIRKS, CALGARY, ALBERTA

✉ **Strong disagreement**

I disagree strongly with the last two paragraphs of Kyle Penner’s article (“To thine own self be true?” December 15, 2023).

He refers to choosing baptism, faith and following Jesus as “giving up part of our own journey.”

I believe choosing Jesus does not mean giving up part of my own journey. I believe choosing Jesus means choosing to find true meaning for my life.

Choosing Jesus means choosing to become an authentic human and becoming the person God wants me to be.

ROBERT BOARDMAN, TORONTO (TORONTO CHINESE MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ **Credit where credit is due**

The person who deserves the credit for the establishment of the Neuland Colony in Paraguay is Peter Derksen, its founder and long-time leader, not Hans von Niessen (“Resettlement giant dies,” December 15, 2023).

At the founding of the colony, Hans von Niessen was in his late teens. In 1957, he became my Grade 7 teacher. After my father, Hans Rempel, established the Mennonite Church in Neuland, and served it as leader for 12 years, von Niessen took over. Some years later, he emigrated to Germany.

At Neuland’s 75th anniversary two years ago, I don’t recall any reference to him, but plenty of references to Peter Derksen.

For historical purposes, some fact-checking might be in order.

JOHN REMPEL, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, ONTARIO (NIAGARA UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH)

Editor’s Note: According to the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO), the Neuland Colony was “organized on 4 June 1947 under the leadership of Peter Derksen.”

✉ Two-state solution no solution at all

I don't understand the West's insistence on a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Our world is full of the actual and human debris of these kinds of problems, based on moral and ethical circumstances rather than logic or politics: Genghis Khan's treatment of the locals as he swept through Asia and Europe; Ottoman treatment of Armenians; Nazi treatment of the Jews; Stalinist Russia's treatment of Ukrainians; Serbian treatment of Bosnians; and so on. The discontent continues to this day.

Regardless of the apparent injustices brought about by Western support of the 1948 establishment of Israel, it is abundantly clear that the people populating the place called Israel have done a commendable job of creating a state which is more or less democratic, innovative, productive and generally a pleasant place to live.

It makes no sense creating a separate state next door full of malcontents and deliberately hostile people. The people of these two states will be at each other's throats forever, and nothing will be solved.

I have worked in agriculture with people from both sides of this story for 45 years. My recommendation is:

Recognize the ability of the Israeli leadership to run a reasonably successful country.

Change the name of this country from the "Jewish State of Israel" to the "Democratic State of Israel." Run it like a true democracy in action, not only in name. Equal rights to everyone living there.

Change the boundaries of this country to Lebanon in the north, the Jordan River in the east, Egypt in the south and the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

The sooner, the better.

RICHARD PENNER, SASKATOON (NUTANA PARK MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ Eleven words

Unless you are against all killing, you are not a Mennonite.

WALTER QUIRING, COQUITLAM, B.C.

CM ONLINE COMMENTS



✉ Soul-warming material

Quite a heartening story and account of Bethany Manor residents presenting the Nativity ("Away in a manor," January 12). Reading this article warmed my soul.

CLARE NEUFELD

CM MILESTONES

Deaths

Braun-Janzen—Rick, 62 (b. Feb. 1, 1961; d. Jan. 8, 2024), Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Dyck—Frank Benjamin (Ben), 85 (b. Sept. 19, 1939; d. Jan. 6, 2024), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man.

Gingrich—Glen, 74 (b. April 4, 1949; d. Jan. 4, 2024), First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont.

Heinrichs—Elsie (nee Sawatzky), 90 (b. April 16, 1933; d. Dec. 27, 2023) Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask.

Kuepfer—Katie (Ropp), 85 (b. Sept. 10, 1938; d. Dec. 26, 2024), Poole Mennonite Church, Poole, Ont.

Schellenberg—Marjorie (Dyck), 95 (b. March 12, 1928; d. Jan. 3, 2024), Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Wiebe—Bernard G., 98 (b. March 6, 1925; d. Dec. 28, 2023), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man.

Zehr—Melvin, 90 (b. 1932; d. July 11, 2023), First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont.

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.

A prayer for IMPOSSIBLE PEACE

As flames of violence spread, can we turn our face toward the other?

By Will Braun

The gulf appears impossible to bridge. As bombs continue to fall onto Gaza and rockets somehow continue to fly out of Gaza, a conflict nearly as old as time and as entrenched as the Jordan River spirals to depths unthinkable. To listen to people on either side is to hear vastly different narratives about the same reality.

The war of hashtags doesn't help. Vitriol and vilification careen around the globe and our hearts.

Israel appears intent on making Gaza quite unlivable, and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has ruled out any form of Palestinian sovereignty or statehood. Evidence suggests that Hamas would do the same to Israel, or worse, if it could.

According to polls, the tolerance for vengeance and violence in Israel and Palestine is robust, though polls can mislead, and some reports indicate increasing numbers of Israelis now more concerned about the return of hostages than the obliteration of Hamas.

Still, peace could hardly be more distant. That gulf is reflected in our country and our denomination.

I have talked with two respected people in MC Canada churches who expressed deep dismay that the coverage in this magazine fails to adequately acknowledge Jewish realities and deep-rooted Mennonite antisemitism. Fair points.

One questioned the integrity of Mennonites perhaps jumping on a pro-Palestinian bandwagon while ignoring equally urgent concerns elsewhere.

An online commenter said that if Mennonites care so much about people being pushed from their lands, we should actively and tangibly address land concerns of Indigenous people in Canada first. Again, fair point.

How deep and consistent is our commitment to fairness? Are we most vocal when it is most convenient?

Since the Hamas attack of October 7, this magazine has highlighted Palestinian perspectives. Three-plus months in, the more I listen to Palestinians—in my case, most notably pastors from the West Bank—and the more I read and listen to material sent to me by readers disgruntled with our Palestinian emphasis, the more compelled I am to take both sides more seriously.

Specifically, I am haunted by the direct challenge of two Palestinian pastors during a December 18 call convened by Mennonite Central Committee. They plead for more than words (see page 15 of this feature section).

Entirely differently—perhaps impossibly, unthinkably differently—I also feel that for the sake of intellectual and spiritual integrity, I must turn my face toward people who hold narratives I have shied away from. See the interviews on pages 10-11 with Gustavo Zentner and Richard Marceau of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs.

Also part of this feature section is an article by Madalene Arias about the sobering failure of programs that have brought together Palestinian and Israeli youth over the years (page 13). Tea and dialogue are not enough.

To round out the section, Raja Khouri and Jeffrey Wilkinson, writing from a joint Palestinian and Jewish perspective, speak of how absolutist views and absolutist loyalties blunt empathy and justify violence (page 12). They talk about how “those of us watching the war unfold from afar tend to be drawn to simple stories that reflect tribal loyalties and communal trauma.”

I suggest that all but the most saintly among us are

prone to not only settle too deeply into one narrative or the other, but to allow the taint of vilification into our hearts. I am not immune.

Here lies a tension between holding resolutely to what one believes—as surely we must—and truly seeking the humanity of all. That is, not letting “truth” make us nasty.

When I say I grieve all deaths equally, how true is that?

Would it not be a monumental accomplishment of God’s work in one’s soul to be able to say in full truth that one values all lives equally? That one feels absolutely no hint of satisfaction when one’s foes are dealt a blow?

The path to that goal is long and steep. Each time I turn my face toward the other, I take a step closer. It is a great challenge to open one’s heart to uncomfortable narratives, believing that truth may arise even if one does not agree with the entirety of a

particular narrative and that that truth might be more profound than the geo-political arguments of one side or the other.

I am inclined to push the point made by Chimamanda Adichie, the Nigerian novelist and essayist, in her much-watched 2014 Ted Talk, “The danger of the single story.” Her point is simple: no one perspective contains the full truth; we need to do the hard, rewarding work of listening to multiple perspectives.

How far does that extend? Do the stories of a Palestinian pastor who decries Israeli “genocide” and a Jewish person who says the loss of life in Gaza is regrettable in any way complement each other? It feels doubly heretical to even ask the question.

I return, over and over, to the words of Russian novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, someone whose Gulag prison camp experience brought him in touch

with brutality. He wrote: “Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart.”

It’s cliché and annoying to say peace starts within, but if I look at the people who have done much for peace in the world, they are people who have done much inner work.

The great moral leaders denounce and decry, but they do more. Is there not also, always, something in ourselves that we must denounce and resist? Are there not fires within to put out?

Is the work of peace not always the work of nurturing in ourselves and those around us the uncommon capacity to truly see everyone as a child of God? Is that not part of what it means to wrestle with principalities and powers (Ephesians 6)? Can true peacemaking come from any other place? ☞



*Emergency response personnel in the Sheikh Radwan area north of Gaza City on October 23, 2023.
Photo by Mohammed Zaanoun/ActiveStills.*

Jewish perspectives

An interview with Gustavo Zentner

By Will Braun

Gustavo Zentner will never forget visiting areas attacked by Hamas.

“We walked into the homes where you can still smell the smell of burned flesh,” he recalled. “That smell will always accompany me.”

Zentner travelled to Israel last November as part of a solidarity mission comprised of about 60 Canadians, including five MPs. Zentner, who now works for the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) as vice president for Manitoba and Saskatchewan, saw bloodstains, remnants of a crib and bullet holes from shots taken at people who were hiding.

“It was shocking, walking into an area where such a barbaric attack was perpetrated against civilians,” he said during a video call from his Winnipeg office. “It broke my heart to pieces, families broken forever.”

Zentner served as president of the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg at the time, prior to assuming his new role with CIJA, the primary Jewish lobby group in Canada.

Jewish people around the world will remember October 7 as Black Saturday “for generations to come,” he said.

Addressing hate

The new CIJA office for Manitoba and Saskatchewan is a response to increased antisemitism in Canada since October

7. “In my role with CIJA, we stand against all forms of hate and discrimination,” Zentner said.

His aim is to build partnerships and open dialogue with various organizations, including faith-based organizations, ethnic groups and community groups. The goal, he said, is “to ensure that we all look after each other and to ensure that we denounce all forms of hate.”

He noted the significant amount of Islamophobia as well.

Given the spread of hate online, Zentner sees the need for a strategy to increase online literacy among youth and find ways to protect them from hate online. He will also focus on universities, where he says there is “a significant level of antisemitism and Islamophobia.”

Zentner’s work is guided by the Jewish teaching of *Tikun Olam*, a Hebrew term which means “repairing the world—making the world a better place, one deed, one action at a time.”

Gaza

The Gaza war shapes much of the context of Zentner’s work. He critiques media narratives that fail to acknowledge the “barbaric” and “horrific” nature of the October 7 attack. He also said few media reports clearly articulate and

emphasize the fact that Hamas started this war. “We had a ceasefire on October 6,” he stated.

Zentner wants Canadians to understand that, throughout its existence, “Israel has been under direct attack. . . . Most of us in the rest of the world don’t know what it is like to be under constant bombardment.”

He noted that, unlike in Canada, where basements are common, in Israel, homes, schools, community centres and other buildings have bomb shelters in case of rocket attacks. It is part of the construction code.

The goal of the current military campaign is to “retrieve Israeli hostages,” Zentner said, adding that the high value placed on human life in the Jewish tradition has helped the Jewish people remain focused on the primary task of bringing home the hostages.

Zentner said that in the Jewish faith, if you save one human life it is as if you have saved all of humanity, and the loss of a single life is like losing all of humanity. “It is core to our Jewish identity, the preservation of any human life.”

It is “incumbent upon the government of any nation to defend its citizens,” he said.

He acknowledged the damage that has resulted from the Gaza war. “The suffering is not just in Israel,” he said, “[there is] a lot of suffering in Gaza, which I acknowledge, which I feel for,” noting again that Israelis were the “first victims” in the current conflict.

“It’s devastating to see people, especially innocent civilians, die when there is a military campaign. In the case of Gaza, it happens when . . . Hamas hides among civilian populations.”

“There’s no possible way of justifying any loss of any human life. . . . Of course,



Gustavo Zentner. Supplied photo.

we would want to see no casualties,” he added. “We didn’t need this war. We didn’t start it.”

Zentner said that peaceful resolution would probably involve a two-state solution, but first Hamas would need to return the hostages and surrender

themselves. “My prayers are for a prompt, peaceful resolution, which starts with the safe return of the hostages,” he said.

People don’t have to agree with the government of Israel, but they should not “deny people’s identity to their homeland and to their right to self-determination

and self-defense,” Zentner said.

“You can be pro-Palestinian, . . . you can stand up for your own beliefs without having to threaten Jewish people, without having to deny the Jewish people’s ancestry and indigenous connections to the land of Israel.” ❧

Q&A with Richard Marceau

By Madalene Arias

Richard Marceau serves as vice president, external affairs and general counsel at the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs. He previously served as a Member of Parliament with the Bloc Québécois. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Can you explain Zionism?

A: Zionism is the belief that Jews are a nation. Like all nations, they have a right to self-determination. In this case, the right to the ancestral lands of the Jewish people. To me, that is what Zionism is. It has nothing to do with where the border should be, whether it should be here or there. It’s simply a right, simply a belief of the Jewish people to have self-determination in their ancestral lands.

Q: Can you describe the concerns that protests in Canada since October 7 have created for the Jewish community?

A: Freedom of expression is a central tenet of any liberal democracy, so it is something that we support. But there are limits. One is, of course, hate speech; and two, is where it leads to trying to intimidate the Jewish community. For example, if there’s a demonstration in front of Parliament or in front of the

Israeli consulate in Toronto or Montreal, that is fair game.

If you are demonstrating in front [of], or close to, the Jewish community, where there is no Israeli presence, or if it’s by a



Richard Marceau. Supplied photo.

Jewish restaurant, that’s something completely different.

Where there has been violence and crime has been quite worrisome. You saw the use of bomb scares in Jewish schools in Toronto; you saw Jewish schools shot at in Montreal; you saw the molotov cocktails thrown at Jewish institutions and Jewish synagogues.

There has been a terrorist plot that was stopped in Ottawa, in my own community, because of the work of the RCMP and other law enforcement agencies. So the Jewish community is very afraid.

Q: What do people misunderstand about Israel and its supporters?

A: I think there is a group of people who will try to tar as evil anybody who supports the right of Israel to exist in peace and to defend itself. So all this talk about apartheid state, inherently racist, or inherently evil Israel, is very troubling. Some of it comes from the far right, some of it comes from the far left.

Some of it comes from members of different religious communities. The Mennonite church has not been immune to those types of problematic statements in the past.

There is a double standard that is applied to Israel that is not applied to any other country.

Q: What is the double standard?

A: What is expected of Israel is not expected of any other country. I’ll give you a very quick example; there were 400,000 people who died in the civil war in Syria—thousands of refugees. I don’t remember the streets of Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver being filled with people saying, “Let’s protect the Syrians.”

Q: What would you say to members of the public who just can’t tolerate the destruction and human suffering in Gaza?

A: One, I share that. Two, I wish to see that stop, but there will be conflict again if Hamas is left standing. Let’s say it stops tomorrow. That means Hamas, as it said itself, will try to redo it again. Is that what we want? Do we leave Hamas in power when it openly says, “We will attack Israel again”? A ceasefire now with Hamas in power means more death, more destruction or more conflict.

The other thing is that the level of destruction, when Hamas built tunnels, is a side effect, where it uses mosques, and schools, and hospitals as military bases—under international humanitarian law, that makes those buildings legitimate targets. That’s unfortunate. You don’t do this. ❧

Understanding absolutist views

By Raja G. Khouri and Jeffrey J. Wilkinson

On October 1, we launched our book, *The Wall Between: What Jews and Palestinians Don't Want to Know about Each Other*, at the Charles Pachter Museum in Toronto. Guests included Jews, Palestinians and others who are interested in overcoming the enmity between the two sides that for so long have been in conflict. There was music and poetry. There were words of support and encouragement from the audience as we—a Jew and a Palestinian—spoke about our plan to tour the book across Canada and the U.S. in an attempt to break down barriers that usually prevent our two camps from humanizing each other.

And then, less than a week later, horrific violence broke out as Hamas launched a brutal attack on Israel and Israel responded with massive military force, cutting off access to power, water, fuel, supplies and more for Palestinians in Gaza. As we prepared to set off for the U.S. for some of our first tour stops, we watched as Jews and Palestinians in Canada imported the conflict, not

Let us not judge
whose violence
is justified.

through rockets and guns but with ever-increasingly violent rhetoric and absolute narratives that expunge the very existence of the other's perspective and life experience.

There are student groups that have blamed Israel for Hamas's attacks, while many politicians—including

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau—and other public figures have declared that they stand by Israel and support its right to defend itself. These unequivocal statements inflame tensions by resorting to the narrowest definition of good guys and bad guys. In both these cases, the other side is dismissed. Those of us watching the war unfold from afar tend to be drawn to simple stories that reflect tribal loyalties and communal trauma—which is how we become part of the problem instead of its resolution.

We have observed in our interactions with many Jewish friends and colleagues that some advocacy groups have reduced their collective pain to a simple choice that is reminiscent of George W. Bush's declaration after 9/11: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Their responses to Hamas's incursion into Israel have reflected this binary. Many perceive Palestinian resistance as terrorism driven by antisemitism, seeking only to destroy Israel.

Similarly, in conversations with Palestinians, we see that their collective pain has coalesced behind one fundamental principle: resistance to oppression, in any form, is sacred. It's a necessary means of pushing back against Israel's occupation, its violations of international law, and what many describe as its settler-colonial and apartheid

policies. The widespread outpouring of grief and sorrow for Israelis after Hamas's attack left many Palestinians exasperated as to why their own suffering does not receive the same kind of empathy. Many Palestinians we have spoken to also feel pressured by Western societies to unequivocally



condemn Hamas or be deemed supporters of terrorism. They see this demand as an attempt to obfuscate the underlying causes of Palestinian resistance, including the misery caused by 56 years of occupation and the devastating sixteen-year siege of Gaza. Yet for many in the West, talking about the root causes of Hamas's attack is seen as a way to minimize its brutality.

The end result is that for many Jews and Palestinians, there is no in-between, no shades of grey, no nuance.

These absolutist views prevent each side from expressing empathy for the other's pain out of fear of disloyalty to their own community. Acknowledging the other's suffering may be perceived as minimizing their own. This is a struggle where neither side is able to demonstrate grief for the other.

Our book focuses on how trauma acts like a force field that repels narratives that appear threatening to our own perspectives. The respective traumas—incurred by Jews through

millennia of exile, culminating in the Holocaust, and by Palestinians through mass displacement during the Nakba—have kept us each in our camps, resistant to viewing the other and the other’s pain. Trauma is formed not just from the loss and grief of the present but also reflects past grief and fears of future grief. It is a very real obstacle to reaching out beyond our own painful stories and to grasping the depths of the other’s pain. Seeing trauma as being unique to one group is a trap that perpetuates the status quo: each community remains siloed, indifferent, antipathetic and dismissive of the other. Seeing outside one’s own trauma is more difficult in this moment, which is also what makes it so necessary.

It is possible to grieve the victims of Hamas’s brutal attacks as well as the ongoing suffering of Palestinians under siege in Gaza. One can condemn the violence against civilians in Israel—and the daily violence and humiliation experienced by Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation. Let us not judge whose suffering is worse and whose violence is justified.

Even after having written a book on mutual understanding, we, too, feel the pull between our tribal loyalties and our moral compasses that are appalled at the suffering endured by both Jews and Palestinians. What is happening in Israel and in Gaza is clearly highly painful and dislocating to us in the diasporas—even without the two sides resorting to trading blame and accusations. The emotional exhaustion we feel need not drive us into hostility and hatred toward fellow Canadians. Our role should be to express mutual compassion and a willingness to work together to create a vision for a just future. 卐

Raja G. Khouri and Jeffrey Wilkinson are co-authors of The Wall Between: What Jews and Palestinians Don’t Want to Know about Each Other, available at thewallbetween.org. The above article first appeared in The Walrus on October 26, 2023. Reprinted with permission.

Mideast dialogue programs fall short

By Madalene Arias
Eastern Canada Correspondent

“**D**eeply rooted in our Mennonite psyche is this idea that peace-making is as simple as sitting across the table from someone and hearing their story,” says Joanna Hiebert Bergen, chair of the Mennonite Church Manitoba Palestine-Israel Network. But Hiebert Bergen, along with a significant number of Palestinian academics and other former civil society workers in the region, say dialogue can further entrench systems of oppression through a phenomenon often called normalization.

Hiebert Bergen observed this while living in Palestine and Israel from 2012 to 2015, where she and her husband Dan led Mennonite Central Committee’s work in the region. She recalls how the Oslo Accords of 1993 brought a new sense of hope for Palestinian communities. There was a general feeling that things could change for the better if it was possible to connect across dividing lines, she says.

Many people around the world were buoyed by the historic moment when the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Yassir Arafat, and former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin met in Washington, D.C. to sign the 1993 peace agreement.

In the wake of that optimism, millions of dollars poured in from the United States, Canada and Europe to fund various dialogue programs to bring Palestinian and Israeli youth

together.

The initiatives failed to produce a lasting peace.

“It didn’t matter how many conversations people were having over tea and hummus,” says Hiebert Bergen. Israel’s vision was never to end the occupation, she adds.

Within the next five years, Israel succeeded in expanding its control of the occupied West Bank. In 1995, an Israeli right-wing extremist assassinated Rabin for his decision to sign the Oslo Accords. Benjamin Netanyahu would become prime minister for the first time in 1996.

“I am not saying that (dialogue) doesn’t work in some contexts,” says Bergen. “I think it does. But in this context, it

really is about the imbalance of power.”

Tarek Al-Zoughbi knows how this imbalance of power can look and feel. He is a Christian Palestinian-American who grew up in Bethlehem. He has worked for many years as a conflict mediator, including as project and youth coordinator at Wi’am: The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center.

Currently, he is completing a master’s degree at George Mason University in Virginia.

In 2007, at age 14, he was part of a dialogue program. He will always remember the first words a Jewish Israeli youth spoke to him.

“I can’t believe we’ve lived together



*Tarek Al-Zoughbi.
Supplied photo.*

for three days, and you still haven't tried killing me," Al-Zoughbi says the youth told him.

The boys would spend the next three weeks getting to know one another. They became friends and connected on Facebook to stay in touch.

Years later, Al-Zoughbi was in the West Bank heading to Jerusalem to visit his aunt. He had a valid permit to cross the checkpoint.

When his turn at the checkpoint window came, he and the soldier on duty immediately recognized one another. It was his old friend from the dialogue program, now armed, on the other side of the window. He asked how Al-Zoughbi had been.

Although Al-Zoughbi had come prepared with the required travel permit, his friend denied him entry on grounds of "security," before asking

again how he'd been.

In that moment, Al-Zoughbi says he wanted to get out any way he could and cover his face.

"The programming was ineffective in its ability to incentivize this person to fight against the system or to question the system," he says.

Al-Zoughbi notes that the dialogue programs function within a context of very strong inherited narratives. Palestinians live the ongoing reality of the Nakba (Catastrophe) of 1948, while Israelis have many holidays commemorating events from the Exodus to the Holocaust to the War of Independence.

Al-Zoughbi says an Israeli kid can easily walk away from a dialogue program with Palestinian kids believing that the one friend they made is an exception and not representative of Palestinians generally.

Al-Zoughbi says there is a place for dialogue programs, but that would be after the end of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

These programs could help build trust and confidence in the future, he says.

In the meantime, he says, people should remember that terms like terrorist, settler, or Israeli vs. Palestinians arise from an oppressive system.

Al-Zoughbi upholds the idea that all people are made in the image of God. This image is still present, regardless of how people frame the situation.

"I think the Mennonites are usually pretty good at standing up against war," he says.

However, he adds, it's important for them to ensure they are not contributing to a negative peace. ❧

Mennonite Action: Arrests at peaceful protest

By A. S. Compton

On January 16, approximately 350 Mennonites from across the U.S. met in Washington, D.C. to protest the violence in Gaza. Organized by Mennonite Action, a new grassroots group, they took a petition calling for "an immediate, permanent ceasefire in Gaza, an end to weapons funding, a release of all hostages and liberation for Palestine," with 5,000 signatures, to members of Congress.

After 135 members of the group legally entered the Cannon House Building, they gathered in the rotunda,

singing from a "Hymns for a Ceasefire" handbook printed for the occasion, and were arrested. They have been charged with "crowding, obstructing or incommoding" under the D.C. Code, according to the *Washington Post*. All were released by end of day.

Mennonite Action calls for Canadians to join in, with an upcoming ecumenical peace vigil planned in Ottawa on February 9. ❧ See MennoniteAction.org. Source: Mennonite Action, *Washington Post*



David C. Cramer being arrested in Washington, D.C. on January 16. Photo by Katie Misz.

A modest proposal

By Will Braun

The question was how churches in North America could directly communicate their support to Palestinian churches. It came during a December 18 call that Mennonite Central Committee convened with four Palestinian pastors and several dozen North Americans.

Pastor Ashraf Tannous unmuted, then muted again; he hesitated and hedged, eventually responding with uncommon candour.

“Honestly speaking, this would be lovely,” he said of such church-to-church communication, “but again, it’s about feeling . . . we are feeling that everything is only talking, talking, talking. It’s without action.”

He spoke gently.

“I’m sorry,” he continued. “I’m being very honest. It hurts, you know it hurts. It is not enough; it’s not enough just to write. We need the action. . . . I don’t want to say this. I am saying this because we are suffocating.”

Pastor Tannous then spoke about talking to people in Gaza by phone earlier that day. They spoke about houses completely destroyed.

Then he asked those of us on the call: “How can I take this message to the people of Gaza, and say, ‘Listen to this message we got from Canada, they are thinking of us.’”

He spoke about how he also feels inadequate in his ability to respond in meaningful ways, beyond prayer. “I am shy to speak to people of Gaza,” Tannous admitted.

The bottom line was simple: “We need action.”

In 1984, during a landmark address to the Mennonite World Conference in France, Ron Sider said:

What would happen if we in the Christian church developed a new nonviolent peacekeeping force of 100,000 persons ready to move into

violent conflicts and stand peacefully between warring parties? . . . [E]veryone assumes that for the sake of peace it is moral and just for soldiers to get killed by the hundreds of thousands, even millions. Do we not have as much courage and faith as soldiers?

Our statements, letters, protests, indignation, strained adjectives pale.

Where there is violence in the world, the church ought to be present, invoking the power of the Beatitudes.

Often, church action in the realm of peace advocacy borrows messaging, tactics and hashtags from secular initiatives. Often, we follow. There is a place for this. But the words of Ashraf Tannous and Ron Sider call us to more.

How can one dare to suggest a course of action in light of Sider’s impossibly bold call? How can one not?

Could Mennonites not send a delegation to the West Bank and Israel? These people—chosen for their

capacity for love and willingness to sacrifice—would pray with Pastor Tannous and others for the ability to truly see the humanity of all and the courage to make the sacrifices required to stand up for that humanity. This would be step one. Ideally, they would also meet Israelis directly affected by the Hamas attack.

The group could then lead us to further action.

Bethlehem Bible College, a partner of Mennonite Church Canada, is scheduled to host the “Christ at the Checkpoint” conference in May. If circumstances allow the event to proceed, it might be a good time—subject to local capacity—to offer to show up.

Which churches, schools or organizations would be willing to send someone?

Canadian Mennonite has a staff person eager to report in-person on such a delegation. ☞

CM FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you agree that we tend to listen to one side of a conflict and close our minds to other narratives? If so, why might this be?
2. Tarek Al-Zoughbi says the dialogue program for Palestinian and Israeli youth that he was part of was unsuccessful because it did not address systemic issues. How are systemic issues addressed? In what situations would dialogue work better?
3. How deep and consistent is the Mennonite commitment to peace and justice? Do we choose popular or convenient causes over more costly or hidden ones?
4. Do you think Mennonites have been unfairly critical of Israel and its policies?
5. Which voices do you think *Canadian Mennonite* should present in relation to Gaza? Do you value hearing different perspectives?

– CM staff

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Seek the blessing of your city

Norm Dyck

That's great!" That is my usual response when I speak with individuals and churches who name a desire to engage their neighbourhoods more actively, or to be a mission presence in their community.

And yet, at some point in every one of these conversations, I need to ask the question, "Why?"

Why do you want to engage your neighbours more actively? Why do you want to be a mission presence in your community?

What is motivating you?

In Jeremiah 29:7, the prophet presents a profound, conversation-altering challenge to the people of Judah: Pray to the Lord and ask the Lord to bless your city (or neighbourhood, community or nation).

Seek the peace of the place where you live, the prophet says. Actively work to make it even better.

For the exiles in the land of their enemies, this invitation would have been as difficult to swallow as Jesus's command to his disciples to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Many of us likely have no idea what it's like to live in the land of our enemies. However, this invitation can present a similar challenge to us.

If we're honest with ourselves, we would rather read Jeremiah 29:11 — "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" — and wonder what awesome thing God might have planned for us.

Don't get me wrong: I love the promise of that verse, but I'm also concerned about the distortion of this blessing in a society that praises and



Photo by Andre Ouellet/Unsplash

prizes individual success and gain above all else.

There is deep missional significance in the challenge Jeremiah gives the exiles.

At the beginning of a new year, it's a challenge I need to hear for my own journey as a husband, father, leader and neighbour.

Ivan Illich, an Austrian priest and philosopher, was once asked about the most revolutionary way to change society. He answered the question this way:

"Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society, rather you must tell a new powerful tale, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story, one so inclusive that it gathers all the bits of our past and our present into a coherent whole, one that even shines some light into our future so that we can take the next step . . . If you want to

change a society, then you have to tell an alternative story."

What are the stories we are telling in our neighbourhoods?

How active are we in seeking the blessing of our neighbours?

How often do we give thanks for the prosperity and blessing our neighbours experience?

Jeremiah's invitation in 29:7 challenges the dominant individualism of our society: "Pray to the Lord [for your neighbours], because if [they prosper], you too will prosper."

Jeremiah challenges me to consider that my success, my blessing, my plans/hope/future are tied up with the blessing of my neighbours and my community.

Jesus invites us to grow disciples to the ends of the earth, so that the ends of the earth will know the goodness, blessing, promise and hope of the Kingdom of God.

Jeremiah challenges us to see that the prosperity and blessing of the Kingdom begins when we set foundations, and plant and produce for the welfare of our community.

We do this when we raise our children in the community and become part of its fabric, and we do this when we pray for (and give thanks for) our neighbours and seek their blessing.

As 2024 unfolds, with all its promise and opportunity, turn your gaze outward and give thanks for the community that creates the space within which your household can grow and flourish.

Then pray that God will prosper the people next door. ☿



Norm Dyck is the mission minister at Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

On loneliness and lifelines

Randy Haluza-DeLay

This most recent December terrified me.

Moving to Toronto in the first year of the pandemic and certain events since mean I haven't made many social connections in this city.

My few good friends here all had major life changes recently. Family and most friends live elsewhere, and persistent health issues have reduced my resilience. I expected to feel very lonely this Christmas.

Loneliness has reached epic proportions, according to social scientists and health professionals. The World Health Organization recently initiated a Commission on Social Connection. Loneliness is a global issue, not just a "first world problem."

Last year, the United States Surgeon General released a report on loneliness. In the United Kingdom, the prime minister appointed a federal minister with responsibility for the issue in 2018, with the intention that it remain a parliamentary priority.

Loneliness can be defined as social disconnection. It is not the same as being alone or in solitude. It can be isolation, deliberate exclusion (such as racism), simple failure to be included, or even fearing to, or not allowing oneself to, engage with others, even though one wants to.

Knowing the travail of the holidays was coming, I put in place some things that I hoped would help: events to attend, the shared lament of "Blue Christmas" services, and a deal with a friend who also struggles with the season that we would support each other.

It felt like scattering life preservers.

A couple things happened that made the period harder. Fortunately, on at least three occasions, it seemed like



Photo by *навел гавриков/Pexels*

God tossed me an extra lifeline.

Every one of those lifelines involved other people and being included by them. One example was the simple invitation to an online birthday party, which happened to come right on one of the darker days.

Loneliness can have immense impact on one's health. It increases heart disease, strokes and mortality by 30 percent. Dementia is 40 percent more likely among those who describe themselves as lonely, and Type 2 diabetes is 50 percent more prevalent.

Men might be at greater risk for loneliness. Research has shown that for about 50 percent of men, their only significant relationship is with a spouse or partner.

The U.S. report concluded that loneliness has health effects comparable to smoking approximately 15 cigarettes a day.

There are many reasons why

loneliness is on the rise in society. Some blame social media for facilitating superficial rather than "authentic" connections. That is hasty.

Social media was one of those lifelines I alluded to. Seeing other's posts provoked remembrances of times with them. Then, in one of my deepest moments of loneliness, I scrolled my Facebook contacts and managed to connect with someone.

The next day, I posted to Facebook about the difficulties I was having. The number of people who responded was astonishing, even from casual friends. Too often, social media consists mostly of happy posts. Maybe we need greater honesty about the genuine ups and downs of life.

As someone who is generally outgoing, most people probably don't suspect that I have these inner struggles. There is a stigma attached to things like loneliness and mental health. There are many ways to be marginal.

Sociologically, faith communities have the potential for significant social interaction, hopefully of the kind that includes people on the fringes.

But I believe the church is unlike other forms of social association. I believe there is a mystical body of Christ, and we are knitted together by the Holy Spirit.

As the saying goes, God's hands are our hands.

Nowhere would God working directly through other people be clearer than in addressing the epidemic of loneliness. ❧



Randy Haluza-DeLay lives in Toronto and can be reached at haluzadelay@gmail.com.

DEEPER COMMUNION

In this new joint column, the four writers will take turns writing the primary column, with the other three offering replies on the opposite page.

God on the line

**RYAN
DUECK**

I recently became the owner of an orange rotary telephone. This artifact came to me via a Christmas gift exchange for which guests were instructed to repurpose something from their homes.

People chuckled as I unwrapped it. I placed my finger in the clear hole and tested the rotor, admiring the tight plastic curls of the cord.

The next day, I faced a conundrum. What does one actually do with a rotary phone in this age? In the end, I put it in the upstairs guest room. Perhaps it would contribute to a vaguely cool antique aesthetic. I even plugged it in, thinking that it might be interesting to hear that clanging ringtone occasionally.

As I was about to leave the house later that day, a strange sound rang down the stairwell.

I smiled, nostalgia kicking into high gear. But this was interrupted by the cold realism of our times. It would almost certainly be a telemarketer. Who else would call a landline? Should I answer? I paused at the bottom of the stairs, then bounded up, picked the receiver off the cradle and stretched the cord up to my ear.

"Hello?" I said, optimistically.

A pause.

Then, a robotic voice told me my banking information had been compromised and immediate action was required.

Sigh.

A bit anticlimactic, right? It wasn't a long-lost friend or some heroic resister of mobile phones.

What made me run up the stairs like an expectant fool? Was this the analog equivalent of panting after the endless notifications that pop up on our smartphones?

We hear a ping, and even though we know it's quite likely something trivial or stupid, we can't resist checking.

Yeah, maybe.

But I think it goes beyond this. I think each one of us has a hunger to be addressed. Personally.

Our phones ping, and while we know it's probably some algorithmically generated piece of disposable communication designed to harness our attention for profit, there's a chance that it might be someone reaching out to us, personally, for connection. And it's this chance, however minuscule, that keeps us checking.

I've been listening to a podcast called "The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God." It focuses on how "The New Atheism" kind of fizzled out and how a surprising number of atheists or agnostics or public intellectuals are reconsidering the value of religion or faith or God. An underlying, recurring question is whether one can have "fruits without roots."

Many people are seeing that the cultural legacy of Christianity is something worth cherishing and preserving, even as it rapidly fades. They would prefer that it not disappear but still can't quite bring themselves to believe in God. They see an ugly and

merciless culture emerging and feel increasingly wistful about the values and institutions produced, however imperfectly, by the Christian West: human rights, tolerance, liberalism, freedom of conscience and speech, the possibility of forgiveness.

But God? They're not so sure. They'll take the fruits, but not the roots.

And yet, I'm not sure you can subtract God from the equation and imagine that the culture, the values and the ethic will carry on. It would be somewhat analogous to appreciating the aesthetic and the reminiscence of my orange rotary telephone but ruling out the possibility that you could be personally addressed through it.

For me, the critical question is as simple as it is profound. It is addressed to atheists, agnostics, believers and everyone whose story winds through those categories. It is addressed to the faithless and the faithful. It is addressed to those who are seeking and those who are stagnating, those beginning to doubt their doubts and those whose faith is frayed at the edges. It is a question that perhaps rings differently at different points in our lives, in response to different pressures, different sorrows, different relations, different anxieties.

The question is this: Is someone trying to get through to us? Are we, against all odds, being personally addressed? ☿

Ryan Dueck is pastor of Lethbridge Mennonite Church and can be reached at ryanduecklmc@gmail.com.

CINDY WALLACE

Attention

The French philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943) famously wrote in her notebooks that “attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.” As I read Ryan’s musings on our longing to be addressed, I can’t help thinking of Weil’s claim that the kind of attention that truly sees and listens is one of our deepest needs.

Weil asserts that, rather than acting directly, God usually deputizes us to address each other in this way. She also argues that when people have been harmed by religion, atheism may be the most holy stance. If such people live with true integrity, God is still implicitly present in and with them. Is this fruit without roots? I’m not sure.

But Weil also turned to Christianity because she felt unexpectedly overtaken with the love of Christ in several mystical encounters. She experienced God’s personal address. Like Hagar in Genesis 16, she understood God as El Roi, “the God who sees me.”

Weil reminds me that there are good reasons to doubt—hypocrisies and harms and sufferings abound—and still, these stories of God’s loving voice on the line keep cropping up in the least expected places. I’m left pondering both truths in my heart. ✎
– Cindy Wallace, professor of English at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan

JUSTIN SUN

Evolution

Some of my earliest memories include a rotary phone. It sat in the basement of my cousin’s house, where I spent endless hours as a kid. I remember being enamoured with how it contrasted with any phone I knew (that is, my parents’ Nokias). I also remember wondering how anything could come through such a relic. Didn’t phones need screens? How could you tell who was calling? Why was this still around?

To push the metaphor, I wonder what the evolution of the phone might tell us about the need for evolution in our faith. Phones have changed drastically, not only enabling new ways to connect but also playing a major role in defining that connection. Imagine telling someone a century ago phones would one day enable people to see the other side of the world in real time—wild, right?

In this spirit, how might Christians approach these important questions—“Is someone reaching out? Are we being addressed?”—in new ways that further the good things the Christian West has done while also dismantling its many destructive legacies.

In other words, what new forms are necessary? Sometimes, you just need a new phone; sometimes, you need to plant something new. ✎

– Justin Sun, youth pastor at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond, B.C.

ANIKA REYNAR

Loneliness

I want to believe in a God who loves and addresses people in their intimate particularities and who draws people together into a deep sense of connection and belonging. I also struggle to recognize this image of God in the cultural legacy of Christianity.

There are many cultural legacies of Christianity, to be sure. But the fruit produced by the Christian West often feels to me like it lacks nutrition. This fruit promises freedom realized through self-sufficiency, defined by the ability to choose and control one’s own life. This freedom creates the conditions for the flourishing of some at the expense of many others.

I wonder if buying into this promise of freedom contributes to the hunger to be addressed that Ryan helpfully names. We may be promised freedom, but in the pursuit of self-sufficiency, we may end up just feeling alone.

In spaces of loneliness, I find it more helpful to pay attention to who is already around me, rather than waiting for a call. I’m drawn to the image of roots, and the microbial networks of nutrient exchange within the soil that nourish the possibility of good fruit. These networks remind me of the broader communities to which I belong. We are always being drawn into relationship, but it’s up to us to pay attention. Might attention to these connections be God’s invitation and address? ✎

– Anika Reynar, student of religion and environmental management at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut



LIFE IN THE 80s

‘We’re capable of lots of things’

An interview with Margaret Balzer

By Emily Summach
Saskatchewan Correspondent

Margaret Balzer (nee Epp), 82, grew up on a farm near Didsbury, Alberta, and attended Bergthaler Mennonite Church. Following graduation from Rosthern Junior College, she attended nursing school in Calgary. Balzer served with Mennonite Central Committee in Kentucky. She married Elmer Balzer in 1967, and they raised their family on a farm near Langham, Saskatchewan. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What is your earliest memory of church?

Going to church in a horse-drawn sleigh with Mom and Dad. I remember being all bundled up in the back of the sleigh, riding over two miles to get there. I was all bundled in blankets and there was plenty of straw.

What is your best memory of church?

Young Peoples. Our group was active, with lots of kids; there were about 30 of us. You had to be 14 or 15 to join. It was a social outlet. We did socials, like parties, circle games, skating on Fishers Lake and bonfires.

What is your most difficult memory of church?

Turmoil in the church. My dad was a Russlander. He was a very solid individual, and spoke his mind. There were two opposing dynamics when I was young: the theology from Three Hills and from [Canadian Mennonite Bible College]. My uncles were our pastors—my mom’s brothers—and they had very big



Margaret Balzer of Langham, Saskatchewan. Supplied photo.

differences of opinion with my dad. Dad believed in higher education, and some didn’t. He had come [to Canada] with [Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)], so was in favor of taking care of the less fortunate. He was always bringing bags of flour to neighbours in need. In spite of all that, it didn’t darken my view of church. I always found a church wherever I went.

Tell us about the people who have influenced you the most.

Who’s my measuring stick? [Laughter.] My sister. She’s 12 years older than I am. I admire her steadfastness. She was with MCC in India for 11 years. She was doing

something positive for someone who needed help; she was symbolic. I look up to my brother Ernie, too. I stick with my family. I know there’s a lot of people that I admire in a lot of different areas of my life.



Margaret and her late husband, Elmer, on the night they were engaged in May 1966. Supplied photo.

Can you share a favourite book, passage, poem or song?

“Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). That’s been my motto for years. I still believe, again, it stems from my dad. He was helped in Russia, and he could do something for others. Doesn’t have to be big, whatever needs doing.



Arli Klassen meets with church leaders in the Dominican Republic last November. Supplied photo.

What do young people not understand about old age?

We're capable of lots of things! "Oh, she's old, she doesn't know what she's talking about!" Don't take that credit away from us.

What is the hardest thing about getting old?

Do I find it hard? You slow down. You can't do the things that you once did. I do things at a different pace. It's not a bad thing, though.

What is best?

Not having to get up to go to work at 5:30 in the morning! I worked until I was 70.

What do you wish someone would have told you about aging earlier in life?

I worked with seniors for so long. [Balzer served as the director of care and administration at a seniors care home for 28 years.] I saw aging happening in real time. It grew on me; I didn't see it as a bad thing. I saw it all and knew what could happen.

If you had one chance at a sermon, what would it be about?

Walk each day, each moment, in the Jesus walk. In the little things and the big things. It should just be part of life. I love when a sermon is given and there's something to follow through on the following week; to practice it. ☸

Caribbean churches seek connection

Mennonite World Conference release

"We are here to walk together as churches so we can help each other follow Jesus," says Arli Klassen, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) regional representatives coordinator.

She gave that message as she visited the five Caribbean countries with MWC member churches in November 2023. An in-person visit creates space to develop a real relationship, with time for the conversations over coffee which don't occur in a Zoom meeting, she says.

Since Mariano Ramirez stepped down from the work due to health concerns, there has been no regional representative for the Caribbean. Shortly after Klassen's visit, William George Broughton, long-time pastor and church leader from Jamaica, was appointed the new MWC representative for the region.

Local congregations graciously hosted the MWC coordinator from Canada. One memorable moment was lunch at a Chinese restaurant in Jamaica with 12 church leaders around a large round table, Klassen says. Conversations stretched over four hours as each person shared about their life and ministry.

"To be able to connect is quite profound," she says. To do it in the context of a Chinese restaurant in Jamaica is "part of our multicultural flavour," she says with a smile.

The MWC member churches on the islands of Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba range in size from three congregations with a total of 100 members to almost 100 congregations with nearly 5,000 members. Many continue to look to North America for training and support from the mission agency that helped birth them, says Klassen.

Although the cultural factors on each island are significantly different (e.g., some are English-speaking, others Spanish-speaking), she observes that island living provides a shared perspective based on isolation and small economies.

There is a shared need for Anabaptist-Mennonite training for pastors across the islands, although churches in Cuba have made connections with SEMILLA seminary in Guatemala. Several of the islands have older pastors and overall lack of opportunity for young leaders. All are aware of their vulnerability in the face of the climate crisis.

"We try to encourage these MWC member churches to connect with each other and the wider MWC family so they feel less isolated," says Klassen. "We have so much to learn from each other about deepening our understanding of who God is through different cultures." ☸

New church launches in Kelowna

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

The new year has brought a new church to the Glenmore area of Kelowna, and it has given an old church building new life. Valley Road Church, a ministry of Mennonite Church B.C., held its first worship service on January 7 with Jordan Pilgrim as pastor.

Pilgrim relates a remarkable story of how this new congregation came to be. He and his wife, Elisabeth, ministered together in England, Ontario and Kamloops before moving to Kelowna seven years ago. In Kelowna, Pilgrim served as youth pastor at the Valley Road campus of Willow Park Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation.

Three years into the pandemic, that campus shut down and the church had to break the lease on the building. It was hard to leave, Pilgrim says, as he had a heart for the Glenmore area of the city. "I felt in my spirit we were going to be back there one day," he recalls. "I didn't want to let the dream die." At the same time, he felt the Spirit saying, "I have something else for you."

He took on a role as an assistant pastor at the Willow Park main campus, but he and Elisabeth still felt a desire to plant a church. Then this past year, Pilgrim felt it was time to move on, prompted to leave but not knowing where they were going.

"Our trajectory in ministry wasn't lining up with the MBs anymore," he says. "Our call was starting to shift. We said to each other, 'even if it's just me and you and our kids, we are going to make our own church.'"

One day last year, Pilgrim was driving by the old building on Valley Road and felt God saying, "You should go in there." It seemed like an improbable idea because at the time another congregation was renting the space, but when Pilgrim inquired, he learned the group was moving out. He was uncertain how to proceed because he didn't have financial backing, and several other groups were



Valley Road Church.
Supplied photo.

interested in the building as well.

Meanwhile, the Pilgrims met Shel Boese, MC B.C.'s executive minister, at the Jesus Collective, a group of people who promote Jesus-centred Christianity. The Pilgrims learned that MC B.C. was interested in a church plant in Kelowna.

A small MC B.C. congregation—First Mennonite—sold its building to Willow Park Church last spring and is now meeting in a retirement centre.

Even though several other groups were offering more money to rent the church building on Valley Road, the property was granted to the new church initiative because they were the first to ask.

According to Boese, Valley Road Church is now an "official developing congregation of MC B.C." A core team is being formed with start-up funding from MC B.C. With blessings from Willow Park, the Mennonite Brethren conference, and MC B.C., the new congregation held its first meeting last Dec. 12 and settled on the simple name Valley Road Church. Their first worship service was held January 7, with 55 people attending.

"A lot of people coming haven't gone back to church since COVID," says Pilgrim. "For one reason or another they want to see something genuine, raw



Jordan and Elisabeth Pilgrim with their kids. *Supplied photo.*

and vulnerable. We want to be real with people, a place where questions can be asked."

To the question some ask as to why another church is needed in Kelowna, Pilgrim responds, "Why not? If we want to be a real missional church, just serve those God puts in front of us. I'll just love them. We don't all have to be megachurches. We can impact those within two square kilometres."

Pilgrim is also excited that many residential buildings are going up in the area, as he sees potential for a growing congregation. "I love the idea of worshiping and celebrating together as we preach the gospel of love and peace. We're excited to have this church in Kelowna." ❧



Mary Oyer at the piano. Photo by Howard Zehr. (Photos courtesy of AMBS.)

Music legend Mary Oyer dies

Mary K. Oyer, a great influence on Mennonite music, passed away on January 11, 2024, in Goshen, Indiana, at the age of 100. She was a professor of music at Goshen College from 1945-1987, and professor of church music at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary from 1989-1998. As the first woman to serve on the Mennonite Church hymnal committee, she greatly impacted the direction of the

Mennonite church's music, broadening perspective and understanding by incorporating international music. Throughout her life, she found exploration of the arts of other cultures to be the most meaningful pathway to understanding those cultures. She is remembered by students and worship leaders as an acclaimed musician, a gracious mentor and an affirming teacher. *Source: AMBS*



Mary Oyer (right) embraces Rebecca Slough. Photo by Mary Klassen.

Scholarships awarded to music students



Elliot Sloss and Joel Woods are the 2023 recipients of the Abner Martin Music Scholarships. Sloss is a third year student in cello performance studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is affiliated with Toronto United Mennonite Church.



Woods is studying mathematics, with a music minor, at the University of Waterloo in Waterloo, Ontario. He is affiliated with Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church.

The scholarships are awarded annually to students in a graduate or undergraduate music program and affiliated with a Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregation.

Source: Menno Singers

Mennonite Disaster Service joint home elevation project

In Crisfield, Maryland, 106 home elevations will be undertaken to put residents out of the way of flooding. The mitigation project is being led by a new task force of people representing faith-based partners, universities, environmental groups, the federal government and foundations. Volunteers from MDS will provide labour to prepare the houses for raising. Two local contractors will raise the homes and MDS volunteers will re-apply siding and make repairs so that families can move back in. There is hope the model can be replicated by other communities. *Source: MDS*

The power of the pencil

New exhibit celebrates the career of Winnipeg artist Alvin Pauls

By Aaron Epp

'From Here to There' includes full-scale reproductions of some of Pauls' large mural pieces. Supplied photo.

When it comes to making art, Alvin Pauls isn't concerned with the outcome.

"It's all in the doing," the Winnipeg artist says. "The end result is not important."

Dressed in a black sweater over a brown turtleneck, jeans and blue slip-on shoes, Pauls is walking around "From Here to There," a retrospective exhibit of his work at MHC Gallery. His energy belies his 81 years.

On display until February 24, the exhibit showcases Pauls' diverse artistic skills in painting, clay and glass. It features pottery and paintings as well as full-scale reproductions of some of his large mural pieces.

In keeping with his philosophy that art is not about the product, some of the pieces are accompanied by behind-the-scenes images of the artist at work.

One series of photos, hung above a ceramic piece, depicts Pauls and students he taught at the University of Manitoba building the kiln he used to create the piece.

A video playing on a screen above other ceramic works shows the artist at his potter's wheel.

The exhibit takes its name from the title of the memoir Pauls wrote for his grandchildren. Published last year, the coffee table book chronicles Pauls' life, with an emphasis on high-quality photos of his art.

"I've got four grandchildren and thought, at least they'll know who I am," he says.

Discussions between Pauls and MHC Gallery staff started after he donated

a copy of the book to the Mennonite Heritage Archives, which shares a building with the gallery.

Pauls was raised near Morden,



Alvin Pauls stands next to a reproduction of a mural he created with students at Hastings School in Winnipeg.

Photo by Aaron Epp.

Manitoba, the youngest of seven children born to a Mennonite pastor and a homemaker who once had artistic ambitions of her own. When he was young, Pauls' mother taught him knitting, embroidery and drawing to keep him busy while his siblings were at school.

"From there on you realize the power of the pencil," he says. "Some guys' hands become their voice through the written word and some guys' hands become their

voice through their art."

After completing a fine arts degree at the University of Manitoba in the late 1960s, Pauls spent the early part of his career as a high school art teacher and leading painting lessons in the evening.

His interest in working with clay continued to grow, leading him to start the Sounding Stone, a pottery supplier, school and giftshop, in 1972.

Pauls' passion for teaching art and for pottery, combined with his wife Judith's gift for business and retail, grew the Sounding Stone into a successful enterprise.

With additional staff coming on board to support the family business, Pauls took on new artistic projects and commissions in the 1970s and '80s.

Represented in the exhibit is the artwork he's created for his church, Bethel Mennonite. These include photos of the three earthen vessels, referred to as "time jars," that he created in the late '80s for the church's 50th anniversary.

There's also a replica of the 5.5-by-4-metre mural that hangs in Bethel's foyer. Inspired by an early 1300s painting of the Last Supper by Italian artist Giotto, the mural is made up of 12 clay platters symbolizing Jesus's apostles.

The exhibit also features a replica of the stained-glass windows Pauls created for the church.

Seven people helped him create the windows and seven people helped him install them. While describing the project, Pauls returns to his philosophy of art.

"The windows are just the end product, but the value was getting to work with

these guys,” he says. “The process was much more valuable than the product itself.”

Seeing “From Here to There” come together was exciting for Sarah Hodges-Kolisnyk, curator at the gallery. She notes that the exhibit includes a body of work that spans nearly six decades.

“MHC Gallery has been thrilled to work with Alvin, who has been a pivotal figure in the Winnipeg art scene for almost 60 years,” she says.

“It’s such a unique exhibit, with large-scale reproductions of these large murals [and] these large stained-glass pieces. It

looks really amazing in the space. It’s also an exhibit that’s full of spirit, in every sense of the word.”

As Pauls winds down his tour of the exhibit, he considers what’s next. Between having the artwork photographed, transported to the gallery and put on display, a lot of his time in recent weeks has gone into the exhibit.

Now that it’s open to the public, he is slowly getting back into painting.

“I want to take a day or two of rest,” he says, “and then get back to work.” ❧

Visit cmu.ca/gallery.



Raku pots by Alvin Pauls.
Photo by Graeme Unrau.



The exhibit includes this painting, titled “Dinner.” Supplied photo.



Pauls created this award-winning mural for the Manitoba Mennonite Centennial in 1974. Supplied photo.

A photograph of a hand holding a lit sparkler against a dark background. The sparkler is bright and glowing, with many small sparks flying out. The background is dark with some blurred lights.

Change is happening. . .

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canadianmennonite.org/change

Teenage hippie conversion leads to career in theology and ministry for Grebel grad

By Farhan Saeed, Conrad Grebel University College

This story is part of Conrad Grebel University College's "60 Stories for 60 Years" anniversary project. See uwaterloo.ca/grebel/alumni/60th-anniversary.

The hippie movement was one of the most peculiar periods of western history. Amidst the shift into a post-World War II society, a group of nomadic, eco-friendly, long-haired folks in flashy clothes emerged. Conrad Grebel University College alumnus Ruth (Richardson) Ragovin was no stranger to this movement. Before she arrived at Grebel in 1975, she drove across continents in a Volkswagen van. She started in Germany and made her way well into Asia, along the so-called Hippie Trail, before her trip was cut short in Nepal.

Ragovin did much of her early schooling in Germany, until the age of 15, when she dropped out. With nothing but a bag and boyfriend, she set out to see the world, travelling through Bulgaria, the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and eventually Nepal.

After the couple broke up, Ragovin found herself stranded in Kathmandu, where she became extremely sick. She was rushed to the hospital, but road closures had created a shortage of medical supplies.

"I was in the hospital for two weeks near death," she said. "I had this near-death experience that changed my life. It was just how people describe it, with the whole tunnel of light, except I also felt surrounded by an overpowering love. It helped me realize my life on this earth was just one small piece of the larger reality of our existence."

At the age of 15, Ragovin thought her life was slipping away. She was stranded alone on a new continent and barely able to communicate. Upon starting recovery, she was introduced to a Christian community known as Dilaram House—affiliated with Youth with a Mission—that acted as a shelter and support group for hippies and travelers in need. Ragovin



Ruth Ragovin with friends in Nepal. Supplied photo.

lived with the Dilaram House community for six months. She said of that time, "[it] helped me make sense of what I had just experienced."

Two weeks before the interview for this article, Ragovin was reminiscing about her teenage days and, on a hunch, looked up Dilaram House online. The house closed in the '80s, but on a Facebook page dedicated to Dilaram House memories she found a photo of herself with the caption, "Whatever happened to Ruth?"

She typed in a response, and "multiple replies started coming in," she said. "Now I'm reconnected with my Dilaram House friends after more than 50 years."

At 16 years of age, Ragovin returned to Canada. Her father, University of Toronto professor Herbert Richardson, suggested she connect with Conrad Grebel College. It was "the perfect decision," said Ragovin.

Grebel's peace and conflict studies

program was one of the first of its kind. "What Grebel was doing was extraordinary," she said. "There were so many amazing ideas and challenges being showered down as we shared meals, worshipped and studied communally." Similar to her time at Dilaram House, Ragovin was involved with the Grebel worship team, where she sang and played the guitar. She was also a part of the college worship committee, where she was baptized.

"The two years I lived at Grebel were some of the most meaningful years of my life because it provided a space to think about my faith, become justice oriented, and be challenged by a number of professors," Ragovin said. She said professor and founding president Winfield Fretz was one of the most important mentors in her life. She especially remembered the trip he planned for their class to travel



Ruth Ragovin. Supplied photo.

to Haiti and a trip to visit the Bruderhof.

“It all inspired me to become a missionary,” said Ragovin. “But to do so, I knew it wasn’t enough to just preach the gospel, but rather I needed a practical skill. So, I double majored in religious studies and health studies.”

Upon graduating in 1978, Ragovin travelled to Jamaica through a program with Mennonite Central Committee, where she worked in maternal and child nutrition. Although the work was

meaningful, it didn’t feel like her calling. Needing a change, she returned to Germany and the University of Munich. A course about scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher proved decisive.

“Schleiermacher was this 19th-century German theologian and philosopher that practically nobody in the English-speaking world knew about,” Ragovin said. “I was so awed by the thought and greatness behind him, I decided to pursue graduate studies in the area of theology.” She enrolled at Drew University, outside New York City where she pursued a master’s and PhD in theological and religious studies.

Ragovin graduated and also married in 1985. She and her husband carried on illustrious careers in theology for the next few decades, travelling back and forth to Berlin, where she was a Fulbright scholar.

While Ragovin published several books and articles on Schleiermacher, she said the most important part of her work was as a minister, ordained with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a progressive Protestant denomination. For most of her career, Ragovin was actively involved in serving churches in New Jersey, Texas, Tennessee, California and Kentucky. She also spent time doing rural ministry in Appalachia and twice on the Mexico

border.

“What I’m most proud of is my work in rural, impoverished areas of Tennessee,” Ragovin said. “I wrote a grant bringing art programs to elementary schools in that area. I helped found, at a grass-roots level, a domestic violence shelter called Gracemoor. I also helped launch a pilot program called Healthy Start that helped to support first-time, at-risk teen mothers.”

“My view is that the Church is the only place where all generations come together,” said Ragovin. “My work has been ecumenical, and it’s been interfaith. . . . For me, ministry is about breaking down barriers to strengthen lives, relationships and communities. Whether that’s sitting with them in a hospital room, helping them fill out food stamp applications, or even writing them a Conrad Grebel College application.”

Today, Ragovin lives in Florida and worships at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Gainesville.

Reflecting on her time at Grebel, she said: “I had no idea I was having so much fun. I had no idea that I was studying with such masters. I had no idea that the conversations and memories I was building were so extraordinary.” ❧

Man found murdered in church parking lot

By A.S. Compton

On December 30, the body of a homicide victim was discovered in the parking lot of Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. Teresa Enns Zehr, pastor of Aberdeen, lives a few blocks from the church. “This is the reality of it,” she said of being in the inner city.

She has seen individuals passed out or unconscious in the parking lot before, and a homicide took place a block from the church in the past.

The congregation still met for their service on December 31. Outside the window, the taped-off area was clearly visible.

“We felt like it was important to be present and to bring light to the community and not hide from it,” Enns

Zehr said about the congregation’s choice to hold an in-person gathering on the 31st. “We didn’t know anything about the victim, but we lit a candle in their honour,” she said. She also read a prayer she had written a few years earlier in response to the violence in the community.

“It’s heartbreaking that in our city there are so many young people struggling like this at this time,” she said. “There were about five or six [homicides] in December.”

The church building is shared with St. Kateri, an Indigenous Roman Catholic parish, and the two congregations have planned a shared vigil in the parking lot. They now know the victim was 20-year-old Brooklyn Elijah Hiebert.

At the time of writing, no information was available about the perpetrator of the murder.

The congregation tried to contact Hiebert’s family, but was unsuccessful.

“When you think about violence around the world, including Gaza and Ukraine, and there’s violence and shooting in your own city, and how do you stop it?” asks Enns Zehr. “This is local; we should have more avenues to do something, and yet here we feel even more bound.”

The church currently serves the community through members working at a neighbourhood foodbank. They are considering how else they might serve. ❧

Alumna explores land, people and faith at Yale

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

Anika Reynar (CMU '17) lives her life with one foot in the library and one foot in the garden—and also the classroom, the church, and around the table.

Reynar is working on a Master of Arts in Religion through Yale Divinity School and a Master of Environmental Management through Yale School of Environment. She's in her third and last year of the joint program in New Haven, Connecticut. "I broadly describe what I'm interested in as being focused around land use and how communities who potentially hold different value sets negotiate how land is used."

It's a clear continuation of the work she started during her undergrad at CMU. Reynar earned a Bachelor of Arts with a major in interdisciplinary studies: social ecology. Her studies at Yale range from environmental ethics and theology to land dispossession and conservation.

This summer, she spent six weeks in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, listening to the stories and experiences of a group of Maya (Indigenous peoples) and Low German Mennonite colonies nearby.

"The migration of Low German Mennonites into this area in the last 40 years has dramatically transformed the area and is creating problems for Maya seed savers who are trying to do the work of maintaining native varieties and creating economies that are sustainable," Reynar says.

The project started seven years ago when this group of Maya seed savers found a coalition of Mennonites working on decolonization initiatives in the US through

an online search, and invited them to help navigate this conflict. Reynar joined the group almost two years ago.

She did background research on Low German Mennonite communities in the region because the Maya wanted to understand who the people were in these insular, isolated communities and how they came to be there.

Reynar and her colleagues rode with Mennonites in horse-drawn buggies and participated with Maya communities in their ceremonies. They did approximately 50 interviews, discussing the struggles of a changing climate, farming practices, relationships with the land, and how they're connected to faith and spirituality.

Reynar will use these conversations in a capstone project for her degree, but shaping her learning into something she can offer to the Maya and Mennonite communities will be most important.

The Maya group invited the coalition back in May to participate in a seed festival, and Reynar hopes this is only the beginning of an ongoing relationship. ☘



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MCI embraces learning outside of the classroom

By Janna Wiebe

Wednesdays looked a little different at Mennonite Collegiate Institute this fall, when the school had the opportunity to offer students co-curricular activity options. Each Wednesday afternoon for six weeks, students waived traditional classes and attended the workshop they signed up for based on their interests.

Students were presented with a variety of workshop options, including photography, agriculture, outdoor education, board game creation, set design and building, and volunteering at the local elementary school. Workshops were led by MCI staff and volunteers including alumni, parents, and guest instructors. Two current students led a workshop in bouldering on their own climbing wall in MCI's gymnasium.

"We know that not all learning takes place in the classroom," says principal Jennifer Klippenstein. "These workshops provide opportunities for students to learn new skills, give back to the community, and dive deeper into interests that they already have a passion for."

Workshop Wednesdays also gave opportunities for MCI to connect with the wider community. Students in the set design



MCI students build a set they designed for a local drama production.

Photo by Janna Wiebe.

workshop designed, built and took down sets for a local theatre group's production in Buhler Hall. Students in the agriculture workshop visited local farms to learn from their different areas of expertise. The outdoor education group put their learning into practice, and after five weeks of trip planning, risk management, and skill development embarked on a student-planned hike in the Pembina Valley with a local adventure tour agency.

After the success of the fall term, MCI will offer another block of co-curricular workshops in the second semester. ☘



MKC launches peace project in Southern Ethiopia

Meserete Kristos Church Quarterly Newsletter

The Meserete Kristos Church Development Commission (MKC-DC), with the financial support of Mennonite Central Committee-Ethiopia, launched a peacebuilding project in the four zones of southern Ethiopia regional state at the end of 2023. The project aims to heal the traumatic experiences of the people and restore peace through training on peace, forgiveness and reconciliation of people and groups affected by the violent conflicts that occurred in the past three

decades.

In December 2023, the first phase of peacebuilding training was given to community elders, faith leaders, women and youth representatives, local government officials, schoolteachers and influencers in the community. A total of 210 people participated in the training in four zones.

After the training, some community leaders commented, “We would not have killed each other if we had such peace

training before. Our ignorance led us to kill each other.”

The communities trusted MKC to help them deal with their problems and to help them restore and sustain peace in the areas. ☸

This article is reprinted, with permission, from the Meserete Kristos Church Quarterly Newsletter #49, December 2023.

Jesus in jail

Meserete Kristos Church Quarterly Newsletter

Habtamu came to Christ while he was in jail. He was sentenced to 20 years for murdering a young man. While he was in prison, he felt abandoned and forgotten. His family, relatives and friends forgot him. No one came to the prison to visit him. He felt guilty for what he had done. He could not undo it.

Because his guilt was too much, he could not bear it. He decided to kill himself. He tried committing suicide several times but was prevented from doing so by guards and fellow inmates. After that, he did not know what to do to get relief.

One day, an inmate who knew Christ observed his condition and told him to go to a chapel in prison to seek advice. Habtamu agreed and went with him to the chapel. In the chapel, he found the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) prison chaplain, who listened to his story, encouraged him by sharing the word of God, and prayed with him. Habtamu said, “That night I slept well and felt peace of mind.”

Habtamu continued attending the



Habtamu working as a tailor.
Supplied photo.

chapel services and believed in Jesus Christ. His life was transformed. After experiencing God’s peace in his life, he realized that there is a purpose for which he should live. Coming to Christ gave him that sense of purpose.

Later, he received vocational training provided by the MKC prison ministry.

While in prison, he started tailoring.

Habtamu also heard about the restorative justice program that the MKC prison ministry facilitated for inmates willing to reconcile with the victims. He expressed his willingness to meet with the victim’s family. The MKC prison ministry arranged for the offender-victim meeting. Habtamu met with the victim’s family and asked them for forgiveness and to reconcile by paying any price that they asked for. The community elders intervened and settled the issue.

After some months, he was released from jail. Now, he is a productive citizen in his community. He became one of the known tailors in the area and is earning a good income. Habtamu is also sharing good news with other people in the community. He is very grateful for the ministry and support of the MKC prison ministry. ☸

This article is reprinted, with permission, from the Meserete Kristos Church Quarterly Newsletter #49, December 2023.

CM CALENDAR

British Columbia

Feb. 23: LEAD Conference at Emmanuel Mennonite Church.

Feb. 24: MCBC AGM at Emmanuel Mennonite Church.

March 11-14: Mennonite Camping Association is hosting its bi-national gathering at Camp Squeah in Hope. Information at mennonitecamping.org/mca-bi-national-gathering.

April 19-21: Youth Impact Retreat at Camp Squeah.

June 7-9: Young Adult (18-35) Anabaptist Conference, "Faith, Activism, and Church: Building an Active Future" at Camp Squeah.

Alberta

Feb. 23-24: Snow Camp for MCA youth at Camp Valaqua, beginning 7 p.m. Friday.

March 15, 16: MC Alberta Annual Delegate Sessions at Holyrood Mennonite Church.

Saskatchewan

March 8-9: MC Saskatchewan Annual Delegate Sessions at North Star Mennonite Church, Drake. Theme: Rekindling Relationships.

Manitoba

Feb. 9: Discover Music Day at CMU, for prospective music students at 8:30 a.m. More information at www.cmu.ca/discover-days.

Feb. 22: Open House at CMU, 6 p.m. for prospective students and their families. More information at www.cmu.ca/openhouse.

Feb. 23-25: MC Manitoba Youth Winter Retreat at Camp Assiniboia. For more information contact Kathy

at kgiesbrecht@mennochurch.mb.ca.

March 1-2: MC Manitoba Annual Gathering at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Winkler. Worship and celebration (1) deliberations (2).

March 8: Discover Day at CMU for prospective students, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. or 1-3 p.m. Visit www.cmu.ca/discover-days to register.

March 17: Mennonite Community Orchestra concert for children and adults including "Peter and the Wolf," at Lutheran Church of the Cross, 560 Arlington St., Winnipeg at 3 p.m. For more information visit www.mennonitecommunityorchestra.ca.

May 4-5: Faith and Life Choirs Spring Concerts. First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg (4); Morden Mennonite Church, Morden (5).

May 10-11: Voices Together in Worship, a gathering to resource worship planners, pastors and musicians, hosted by MC Manitoba, sponsored by CMU. More information at www.mennochurch.mb.ca/events.

June 21-23: 75...Already?! Save the date for Camp Assiniboia's 75th Anniversary. More details to come.

Ontario

Feb. 13-15: MCC's Ontario Livestock Sale (formerly Heifer Sale) at Ontario Livestock Exchange, St. Jacobs. Visit mcc.org/events for more information.

Feb. 29: Sawatzky Lecture at Conrad Grebel, "Is Reconciliation Possible" with Dr. Ray Aldred, director of Indigenous Studies at Vancouver School of Theology, 7:30 p.m. More information at uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events.

March 7: MCEC Spiritual

Retreat Day for Pastors.

March 16: Intercultural intergenerational volleyball tournament at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener, 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Register at mcec.ca/events.

March 21: Bechtel Lecture at Conrad Grebel with John P. Eicher, "A Plot-Driven People: Mennonite Narratives in the Age of Nationalism (1870-1945)" at 7:30 p.m., focusing on two Mennonite groups who settled in Paraguay with very different national and religious identities. More information at uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events.

Apr. 26-27: MCEC Annual Church Gathering, "Transformed, Inspired, Called," at UMEI Christian High School in Leamington.

June 21: Aging and Spirituality seminar at Conrad Grebel. More information at uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events.

Aug. 11-23: Ontario Mennonite Music Camp at Conrad Grebel. A two-week overnight camp for students who have finished grades 6-12 to enrich faith, musicality and leadership. Register before

April 15 for discounted price at uwaterloo.ca/grebel/ontario-mennonite-music-camp.

Online

Tuesdays until Feb. 13: Climate Pollinators, a webinar series on creation care at 2 p.m. UTC. This webinar is jointly organized by the Creation Care Task Force and Anabaptist Climate Collaborative. Register at mwc-cmm.org/en/resources/climate-pollinators-webinar-series.

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.

CM CLASSIFIEDS

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 salary ranges from 70K-95K (plus benefits and pension) for candidates with an MDiv and increases for those with previous pastoral experience.

The position is open until filled. For the full job description, visit hmc.on.ca. Email search@hmc.on.ca or pastoraltransitions@mcec.ca for a link to join in our hybrid worship services.

Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date

February 9

February 23

Ads Due

Jan. 31

Feb. 14

Advertising Information

Contact Ben Thiessen

1-800-378-2524 ext. 3

advert@canadianmennonite.org

A hand in a dark sleeve holds a lit lantern with a warm glow. The background is dark and indistinct, suggesting an outdoor setting at night or dusk.

Dangerous peace

Now is the time to risk everything for our belief that Jesus is the way to peace. If we still believe it, now is the time to live what we have spoken. Do we have the courage to summon the entire church to forsake the way of violence?

In previous centuries, we died for our convictions. But today we have grown soft and comfortable. We cling to our affluence and our respectability.

Unless comfortable North American and European Mennonites and Brethren in Christ are prepared to risk injury and death in nonviolent opposition to the injustice our societies foster and assist in Central America, the Philippines and South Africa, we dare never whisper another word about pacifism to our sisters and brothers in those desperate lands. Unless we are ready to die developing new nonviolent attempts to reduce international conflict, we should confess that we never really meant the cross was an alternative to the sword.

What would happen if we in the Christian church developed a new nonviolent peacekeeping force of 100,000 persons ready to move into violent conflicts and stand peacefully between warring parties in Central America, Northern Ireland, Poland, Southern Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan? Frequently we would get killed by the thousands. But everyone assumes that for the sake of peace it is moral and just for soldiers to get killed by the hundreds of thousands, even millions. Do we not have as much courage and faith as soldiers?

– Excerpts of a speech given by author and theologian Ron Sider at the 1984 Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg, France. Sider died in 2022. Read the full speech at cpt.org/sider.

**CANADIAN
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