

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

February 23, 2024 Volume 28 Number 4

# THE SECRET TREATY

A lost story of Ojibwe and  
Mennonite neighbours



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# Do I see a hand ?

WILL BRAUN

I was sitting on Dave Scott's porch on the Swan Lake First Nation a few years back when he started talking about a handshake treaty between his Ojibwe ancestors and Mennonites.

I had never heard of this. Later, I discovered no Mennonite historians had either.

Last year, a group of southern Manitoba Mennonites went to Swan Lake, located 160 kilometres southwest of Winnipeg, for an afternoon to hear Dave—an historian, language expert and unofficial ambassador—tell the story in more detail.

The feature, starting on page 13, flows from those conversations. The story captures a moment of possibility and neighbourly respect, and then its passing.

Why publish such a story?

To make us feel good that our people got it right at one point? Or, conversely, to wallow in the guilt of relations gone sour, as if endless deconstruction of our history, worldview and identity will somehow absolve us? To fill pages?

The story of treaty is the story of land, and land touches something deep and inescapable within us, even for urbanites. We all need somewhere to belong.

For white Mennonites, our land stories are usually tainted by us benefitting—always unwittingly—at the expense of others. But let's move past beating ourselves up over that.

Activist rhetoric sometimes implies that we are simply cogs in an inherently white supremacist colonial machine—that we don't belong.

Is that who God made us?

Menno Wiebe, the late elder

statesman of Mennonite-Indigenous relations, said this: "If we can accept the history of Mennonite migration to this country as God-willed, then our coming also presents the opportunity to treat our neighbours with justice." Otherwise, he writes, we would become something like what Adrian Jacobs calls "chaplains of empire" (page 26).

Can we claim a divine calling in this land?

Too often, our efforts toward reconciliation do little more than make us feel like we are on the right side. We get mad. We point fingers at governments. We draft intricate acknowledgements. We listen to stories.

Or we quietly reap the benefits of fertile soil.

What we don't do is sacrifice, even though Jesus' sacrifice is at the core of our faith.

If we're committed to change, there is so much more we can do (including grappling with the real concerns of skeptics).

Fifty years ago, this magazine reported on Mennonites having displaced Indigenous people in southern Manitoba (see page 4). What substantive change has happened since?

In 2007, Six Nations proposed a new covenant with churches (page 24). One Ontario church is now moving on it.

The programs and relationships of the last decades count, but they are limited, without sacrificial-level change.

We have much to lose. That's scary. But we stand to gain in proportion to what we lose. It's the paradox of sacrifice.

We are the beloved of God, here in

this land as heirs of infinite love.

Menno Wiebe would sometimes punctuate his impromptu sermonettes by invoking the genre of the altar call, saying: "Do I see a hand?"

Who is willing to step forward? To lay their heart bare at the altar? To repent?

Who is willing to commit and be transformed?

I pray the feature story plants seeds of transformation and that 50 years from now our neighbours will tell new stories.

## More magazine changes

With this issue, we complete our transition to new columnists.

Thanks to Randy Haluza-DeLay (page 12), whose column wins the prize for eliciting the most reader response. Randy's easy style, approachable tone and choice of topics have resonated with readers.

On page 9, you will find the first installment of "Te'let'/Woven Threads," a joint column by Barbara Nkala and Tigist Tesfaye.

Barbara is a Zimbabwean writer, teacher and elder who served as Southern Africa area representative for Mennonite World Conference (MWC) from 2016-2022. Tigist serves as secretary of the MWC Deacons Commission. She also runs an NGO in Ethiopia, her home country.

We are honoured that these two church leaders have agreed to share with us.

Te'let' is an Amharic word that refers to beautifully woven threads of traditional Ethiopian cloth. ☸



Funded by the  
Government  
of Canada

ISSN 1480-042X

Canada

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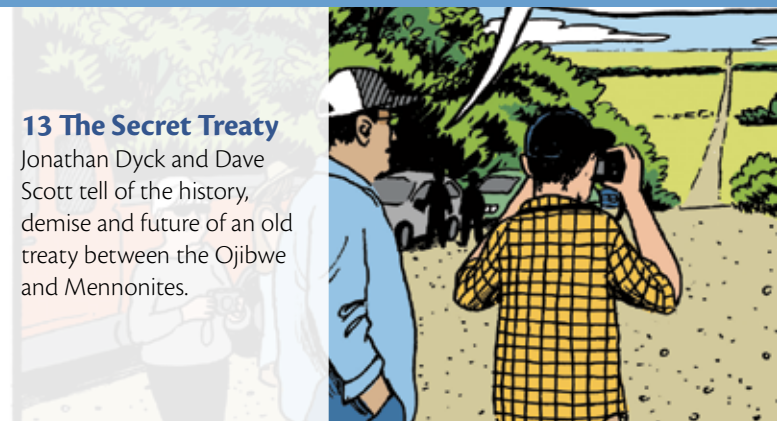
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### One-year Subscriptions

Canada: \$49+tax / U.S.: \$65 / International: \$80

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

### Send general submissions to:

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

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

Published by **Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service**.

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Mennonite Church Canada and Regional Churches appoint directors and provide about one third of *Canadian Mennonite's* budget.

**Mission:** To educate, inspire, inform and foster dialogue on issues facing Mennonites in Canada.

Publications mail agreement no. 40063104 Registration no. 09613

**Return undeliverable items to:** Canadian Mennonite, 490 Dutton Drive, Unit C5, Waterloo, ON, N2L 6H7



# What in the World



## Amish emergency

An Ohio company is making an emergency warning system for Amish communities that do not use cellphones or radio. The need for such a system was highlighted in April 2020 when four Amish children were swept away by flood waters and killed. A prototype radio uses solar power with a hand crank and battery backup.

Source: Anabaptist World  
Photo: Chris Mauney/Pexels



## Toy reverence

For US\$229, LEGO enthusiasts and/or committed Catholics can buy 4,300 pieces of plastic that turn into a replica of the famous Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The set, part of a LEGO series that includes the Taj Mahal and the White House, comes out June 1.

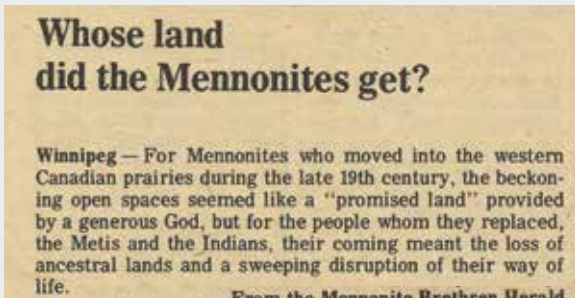
Source: Fox  
Photo: Ingo Bramigk/Wikimedia



## Canadians divided on Gaza

A third of Canadians say their sympathies lie “about equally” with Israelis and Palestinians. Another 19 percent are not sure. That leaves 25 percent who side with Israelis and 23 percent with Palestinians. Half of Canadians want a “full and lasting cessation of the conflict.”

Source: Angus Reid  
Photo: Activestills.org



**50**  
**YEARS AGO**  
MENNONITE REPORTER, FEBRUARY 4, 1974





### Shooter shot at megachurch

On February 11, a woman in a trench coat, with a 5-year-old boy at her side, walked into the Houston megachurch pastored by Joel Osteen and opened fire with a long gun. Two off-duty police officers at the service shot and killed the woman. A man and the boy sustained non-fatal injuries. About 45,000 people attend Lakewood Church weekly.

Source: AP

Photo: ToBeDaniel/Wikimedia



### Jesus at the Super Bowl

For a second year, the organization He Gets Us ran an ad during the Super Bowl. It showed people washing the feet of others, many of them marginalized. “Jesus didn’t teach hate. He washed feet,” it said. Some commenters said it was the perfect antidote to division, some said it recast the gospel as a political ad, others wondered “why all the feet?” and some just reached for another beer.



**Jesus loved the people we hate.”**

– Punch line of the He Gets Us ad from the 2023 Super Bowl.



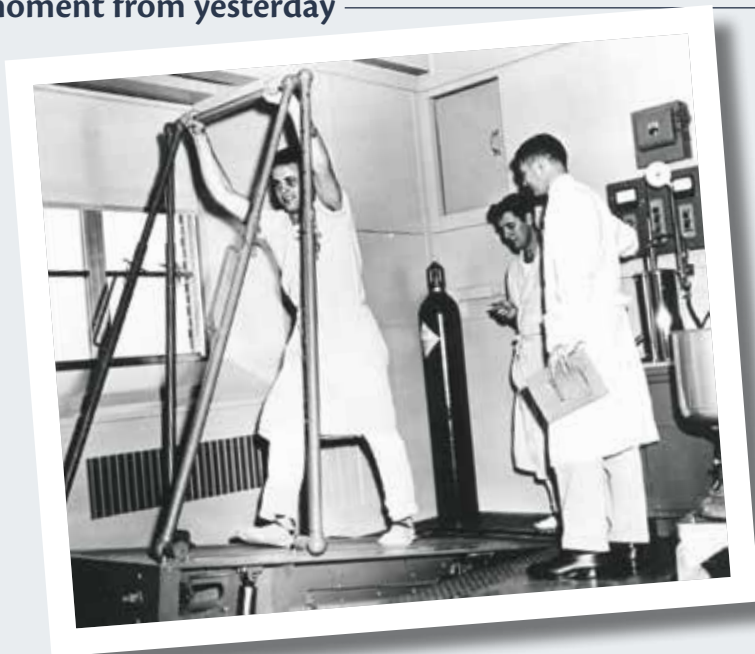
### Courts support Amish women

The Pennsylvania court system now provides certified Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking interpreters. The intent is to support Amish and Old Order Mennonite women and children testifying in abuse cases.

Source: Anabaptist World

Photo: Shinya Suzuki/flickr

### A moment from yesterday



A conscientious objector performs medical tests under supervision by scientists at the National Institutes of Health in Maryland, 1958. As an alternative to conscription in the United States, the I-W program (1951-1973) saw approximately 15,000 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ young men participate in work terms in government and nonprofit organizations.

Text: Lauren Harder-Gissing with statistics from gameo.org

Photo: The Canadian Mennonite/ Mennonite Archives of Ontario



✉ Review the confession of faith

In response to “Jewish perspectives” (January 26), I note that Article 22 of the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective states:

“We believe that peace is the will of God. God created the world in peace, and God’s peace is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ, who is our peace and the peace of the whole world. Led by the Holy Spirit, we follow Christ in the way of peace, doing justice, bringing reconciliation, and practicing nonresistance even in the face of violence and warfare.”

Yet you devote two pages to allow representatives of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) to push grotesque claims that mosques, schools and hospitals are “legitimate targets” for the Israeli military, despite those sites being protected under international humanitarian law.

They don’t mention the churches in Gaza that have been bombed while housing refugees. Perhaps you could have asked whether they would consider these legitimate targets as well.

In a December 15, 2023, column in the *Jerusalem Post*, David Weinberg, who serves as director of CIJA’s Israel office, wrote that the war on Hamas “requires application of maximum, maximum, maximum military force against Hamas in every hideaway corner and under every school, mosque and UNRWA facility in which Hamas terrorists are rottenly taking sanctuary. . . . With cold, calculated, crushing military force. With all tools at Israel’s disposal.”

That you allow CIJA a platform speaks to your lack of commitment to Article 22. You owe your readers better than to publish excuses and justifications for war crimes.

JOEL MACDONALD, REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN

✉ Additional voices for peace

Following a recent passionate post-sermon discussion concerning the current conflict in Israel and Palestine, a group of us at Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship in Vancouver want to join others who have written letters to the editor of *Canadian Mennonite* expressing their concern that, as Anabaptists and people of peace, we need to voice our profound dismay with the incredible violence, deaths, attacks and military escalation in Palestine and Israel and beyond.

To be silent or pretend ignorance, as many Christians did during the Holocaust, is not an option. Fortunately, with our history as a peace church, there are many Anabaptist resources available to assist us in responding. These include the new group Mennonite Action.

VERONICA DYCK, FRIEDA EPP, LOIS FUNK, STEPHANIE JEONG, JANICE KREIDER, REG QUIRING, WALTER QUIRING AND PAUL THIESSEN

*Editor’s Note: Twenty-one people from Point Grey signed this letter. For a full list of the signers, visit [canadianmennonite.org](http://canadianmennonite.org).*

CM ONLINE COMMENTS

✉ New vision needed

Thanks for this article (“A prayer for impossible peace,” January 26), and the other articles trying to help Mennonites learn.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) moved directly from working with the Nazi regime in the 1940s to supporting Palestinians.

While it is essential for us to continue advocacy in support of Palestinian lives and land, we cannot do that when we don’t see how antisemitism has tainted Mennonite peace witness in the region for 70 years.

When we ignore, erase or belittle Jewish trauma and safety, this is hateful and perpetuates the cycle of violence, just as it is hateful when Israelis belittle Palestinian trauma and safety.

Mennonite institutions have funded hundreds of church leaders to take one-sided delegations to Palestine. These tours erase Jewish voices and fail to offer a critical role in how Palestinian leaders have fueled the cycle of violence and contributed to the violence. This does not aid the struggle for a just peace.

The Mennonite Church and MCC need a new vision for supporting the dignity and humanity of all people in the region.

LISA SCHIRCH

✉ The land must be shared

Richard Marceau speaks of the “ancestral lands of the Jewish people,” and Gustavo Zentner describes the “Jewish people’s indigenous connections to the land of Israel” (“Jewish perspectives,” January 26). Canadians might well understand the terms “ancestral lands” and “indigenous connections” as they apply to Indigenous peoples here, and the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs messaging is likely crafted with that in mind.

Indigenous peoples were here for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. But in what is now Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, Jewish people did not have the land to themselves.

In the book *Whose Land is Palestine?* a Mennonite historian wrote that no one group can claim any part of that land based on unbroken habitation. He listed 30 “peoples or powers” who occupied and controlled Palestine between

*Correction*  
In our January 26 issue, we said Margaret Balzer attended the Bergthaler Mennonite Church while growing up near Didsbury, Alberta (“Life in the 80s”). It should have said the Bergthal Mennonite Church.

3,000 BC and 1970.

It is worth recalling that when the state of Israel was proclaimed in 1948, more than 700,000 Palestinians were forced to flee. That land had been “ancestral” for them as well. The inescapable conclusion is that, somehow, these lands and their administration must be shared, even if that now appears a distant prospect.

DENNIS GRUENDING, OTTAWA

### Be in Touch

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

## CM MILESTONES

### Births/Adoptions

**Cressman**—Fiona Shalom (b. Jan. 30, 2024), to Shannon and Mark Cressman, Wellesley Mennonite Church, Wellesley Ont.

**McLean**—Carter Bradley (b. Jan. 25, 2024), to Ashley and Justin McLean, Wellesley Mennonite Church, Wellesley, Ont.

### Deaths

**Epp**—Mary (Maria) (nee Wall), 95 (b. July 24, 1928; d. Jan. 23, 2024), Niagara United Mennonite Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

**Funk**—Eleonore (nee Tjahrt), 96 (b. Oct. 3, 1927; d. Jan. 13, 2024), Niagara United Mennonite Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

**Kipfer**—Reverend Reynold, 89 (b. June 17, 1934; d. Jan. 26, 2024), Kitchener, Ont.

**Kitchen**—Harvey, 84 (b. Oct. 23, 1939; d. Nov. 7, 2023), Brussels Mennonite Fellowship, Brussels, Ont.

**Loewen**—Mary (Maria) (nee Guenther), 94 (b. Sept. 16, 1929; d. Dec. 10, 2023), First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Neufeld**—Anne H. (nee Hiebert), 89 (b. Nov. 28, 1934; d. Feb. 10, 2024), First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Sawatzky**—Marie (Hilde) (nee Friesen), 94 (b. June 23, 1929; d. Jan. 25, 2024), North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

Please send Milestone announcements, including congregation and location, within four months of the event. Send to [milestones@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:milestones@canadianmennonite.org). For deaths, please include birth date and last name at birth when applicable.

## CM LET US PRAY

### Myanmar Mennonites ask for prayer as new conscription law is announced

In a February 14 message to Mennonite Church Canada leaders, Amos Chin said the civil war in Myanmar is “intensifying and spreading across the country.” Citing UN information, he noted that a third of the population—18 million people—are in need of food and not receiving international aid.

Chin is the president of Bible Missionary Church, Mennonite. He also serves on the Executive Committee of Mennonite World Conference.

Chin wrote that inflation, unemployment and disruption of trade routes due to fighting all contribute to food shortages.

Among those suffering, Chin said more than 200 Mennonite families “are in dire straits.”

The war is between the Myanmar military and “revolutionaries.” Chin said the latter, who now occupy about half the country, are winning. In response, the military junta announced a conscription law on February 12. The law applies to every citizen aged 18 to 35, regardless of gender. Those who refuse to serve face the threat of five years in prison.

“That law will cause suffering for all citizens,” Chin wrote. “Not all young people are willing to serve in the military, so many flee and go abroad,” though young people are banned from leaving the country. Some “seek refuge in the revolutionary groups.”

Chin said, “Unrest is growing in the country as the junta arrests young people and forces them into service.”

“The conscription law poses a special challenge for our Mennonite youth,” Chin wrote. “They are also afraid to attend church and venture outside.”

Chin asked for our prayers. “Our country faces many problems, but on the other hand, God is also opening a great door for the spread of the gospel and peace movement.” In this regard, Chin says the church is “doing great . . . by the presence of the Holy Spirit.”

“Please pray for us,” he writes. “We hope that you will pray for the more than 200 Mennonite families who are starving for food; pray for our youth and peace in Myanmar.”

— Staff



Amos Chin heads the Mennonite church in Myanmar. Photo from Facebook.

# Lessons from the medicine wheel

Suzanne Gross

Each year, A Common Word Alberta brings Muslims and Christians together in Edmonton to plan an annual interfaith dialogue.

As the facilitator of Mennonite Church Alberta's Bridge Building network (a re-imagined role that continues the good work of Donna Entz, who retired in 2022), I have played a significant part in planning the last two events.

In the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the recent trauma of identifying the unmarked graves of Indigenous children, the committee explored ways to connect to the Indigenous community.

In October 2023, we collaborated with Father Susai, Father Mark, Cree Elder Fernie and Knowledge Keeper Candida from the Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples.

We called our dialogue, "Help Me Be Teachable Today." This is the prayer Elder Fernie, in whose care we were planning our dialogue, prays every day.

The tool used for our learning together was the Cree version of the medicine wheel.

The medicine wheel is a circle with four quadrants that reflects cycles of the natural world and of our human life identities and experiences.

In a report about the 2023 dialogue that I co-authored with Naz Qureshi, a Muslim member of the planning committee, we summarized what we learned as follows:

*The medicine wheel can help to heal us and the world.*

*As Elder Fernie taught, we engage each day with the cycle of life in the medicine wheel.*

*The four directions help bring*

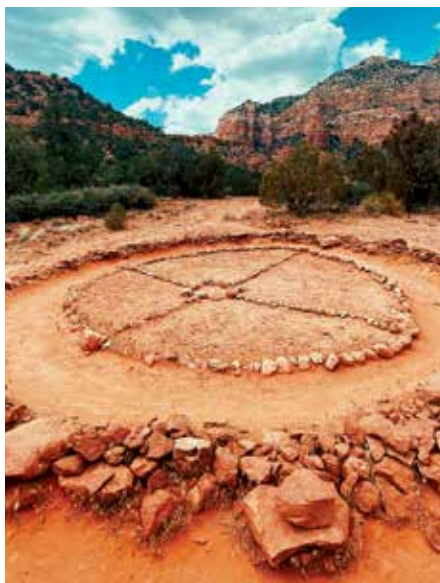


Photo by Alexander Andrews/Unsplash.

*awareness to the four aspects of our human life experience that contribute to our wellbeing: our mental health, our physical health, our emotional health and our spiritual health.*

*Our awareness is the first step to helping us rebalance these when one or more is out of synergy.*

*For the Sacred Heart Catholic Church of the First Peoples, the cross, in the context of Christ's great love or "sacred heart," is at the centre of the medicine wheel.*

*All of our attention to experiencing the cycles of life, the cycles of planting, growing, harvesting and resting, contributes to our ability to rebalance our mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health. And all of this comes from and goes out from the centre which is our One God—our Creator.*

*The medicine wheel is a way to balance our inner and outer world. When we reflect on the medicine wheel,*

*we are invited to consider many moving parts of the cycle and the circle—things happening all at once, all the time.*

*The medicine wheel helps us leave the temptations that pull us out of the centre of the circle.*

As we considered together our responsibility to engage with the harm of settler colonialism, we were invited to place the 94 Calls to Action (the policy recommendations of the TRC) in the different quadrants of our wellbeing: our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellness.

This exercise then guided our understanding of our connection with supporting the healing needed in the Indigenous community, and our opportunity and responsibility to engage in the changes required of us as a society to correct past harm.

More importantly, this exercise shaped how we think about contributing to the healing required so that harmony might be restored for all of us on this shared land.

As a tool for reflection, the medicine wheel can be used in so many contexts.

I hear our Indigenous siblings inviting us to come alongside them to learn together and be teachable together.

When we do this, we are gifted with different ways of seeing the world, and with that comes new tools and approaches to considering healing from harm—healing for ourselves, healing for our community and healing for all creation. ❧



Suzanne Gross facilitates Mennonite Church Alberta's Bridge Building network.





**'Te'let'**



**Woven Threads**

# Nothing new under the sun

Barbara Nkala

In Ndebele, my language, we have a proverb that says, *Inala kayihambi, kuhamba indlala*. It says that times of abundant harvest are not reported, but times of hunger and famine make good news. Too true.

All news worth reporting, in worldly standards, is that of horrendous happenings, such as wars and all forms of affliction on the human race. Very little that is good and peaceable takes precedence. That has been the case since time immemorial. A teacher full of wisdom once said, “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

I am from Zimbabwe and I know that some of our countryfolk in the diaspora hide the fact that they are Zimbabwean because they fear the backlash of being associated with the devastating oppression that makes the news. People are sometimes surprised when they visit my country and see people chatting away and laughing.

Indeed, some of my countryfolk are good cartoonists and creators of comedy that keep us laughing at ourselves.

For years, we have kept hoping to emerge from desolation and frolic into our Canaan, but, ironically, the desert journey is an unending abyss. So, rather than wallow in endless pity parties, people still sing, dance and make merry.

I was recently flipping through old magazines, including the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Courier. I was pondering stories I had read and

enjoyed. I came across Tigist Tesfaye’s presentation at the MWC 2022 Assembly in Indonesia. The following statement jumped out at me: “In the middle of this turmoil around me, around the globe, how can I celebrate in a situation like this?”

This reminded me of the Israelites who showed their bitter memory of the horrible cruelty they suffered in exile. When their captors asked to be entertained with songs, they said, “How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137:4).

Similar questions are posed all the time because people are plagued by numerous scourges in my country. The church is not exempt. What affects the general population affects those who practise Christianity or any other faith. Some people in my country are continually afflicted by hunger, unemployment, poverty, injustices, corruption in high places. There is no respite.

Trials or no trials, life goes on. Not all hope is lost.

I know a Christian family who, at the height of devastation and great suffering in my country, testified that they cried before the Lord asking that he create a Goshen—the fertile, comfortable and plague-free land set apart for the Israelites in Egypt—for them despite the ongoing scourges. And God did just that.

They are a humble family who seem to have their feet firmly on the solid Rock that is Jesus Christ. God does

rescue those who wait upon him even in poverty-stricken third world countries like mine. Such people try all they can to help kith and kin and others.

As we hear in the daily news, the whole world seems to suffer its own peculiar calamities. There are numerous scourges plaguing the rich and the poor, the elite and the uneducated, those within the church and outside. There are power issues, sin and a variety of fears. COVID devastation was not selective.

The wise teacher who proclaimed that there was nothing new under the sun also said, “I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favour to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

So, what does this say to me? It says the good shepherd cares for us all despite the numerous and different challenges we face. If we embrace God and his statutes, he can keep us in Goshen, while plagues devastate the evil around. Trials and tribulations will always be there, but faith kindles hope all the time. Hallelujah! ❧

*Barbara Nkala is a writer, teacher, speaker and former Southern Africa regional representative for Mennonite World Conference (2016-2022). She is a member of the Brethren in Christ Church, Mount Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe.*

# DEEPER COMMUNION

## Circling back to simplicity

CINDY  
WALLACE

I've been thinking about simplicity. Are today's Canadian Mennonites committed to faith-motivated simple living? Am I?

I first encountered the spiritual discipline of simplicity 20 years ago when I read Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*. I had grown up in fundamentalist Baptist churches that were legalistic about what our minds needed to believe and what our bodies needed to avoid. Reading Foster freed me to imagine a different way of understanding discipline—not as a series of rules but as a set of practices that engender flourishing and freedom.

In his chapter on simplicity, Foster writes about a non-anxious relationship to possessions. He writes about sharing generously, refusing to be motivated by status and seeking first the kingdom of God. I'd never heard church folk talk like this about Jesus's teachings on wealth, but when my partner Josh and I stumbled into a Mennonite congregation in Chicago in 2006, I was delighted to find Anabaptists who *did*.

We spent five years exploring the

intersections of Mennonite and New Monastic disciplines of living with joyful simplicity so that others may simply live, to borrow Gandhi's apt words.

Over the years, simple living has become for us a spiritual discipline bound up with ethics. Reduced overconsumption benefits the planet, opts out of sweatshops, allows us to engage in mutual aid and makes room for other things in our lives.

We have learned to wear clothes until they wear out, then mend them and wear them some more. We have learned to avoid disposable items, to slipcover ancient couches with painters' drop cloths, to cook lentils, to lend out our car.

Our mentors have modeled non-attachment to wealth. They have showed us how to share what comes to us with unselfconscious openness and filter purchase decisions through our values. (Our values include books, so we buy a lot of those. But we share them!)

Of course, we do all of this imperfectly, and different seasons of life introduce new challenges. For example, life can get so busy that ordering items online with next-day shipping feels like the only answer. What does it mean for a life to be so full that it seems my only choice is to support a corporation I consider unjust?

Perhaps even more to the point, I've been thinking about the fact that I can have minimalist closets and make admirably few purchases while still overscheduling and overconsuming—news, entertainment, social media, distraction upon distraction, worry upon worry.

A lot has changed in my life and in the world since I first read *Celebration of Discipline* in 2004—which also happens to be the year Facebook was invented. Now, I'm a full-time working parent, not a blissfully single-minded undergrad. Social media and smartphones and 24-hour news cycles have infiltrated our lives. Our very attention has become a commodity, and we're conditioned even by our entertainment to believe the answer is always *more*. Simplicity, especially a *spiritual discipline* of simplicity, feels more countercultural than ever.

Are other people wrestling with this? Are you, dear fellow columnists and readers?

Foster's book was first published in 1978. Picking it up again, I didn't expect him to address these challenges, but he does: "Any of the media that you find you cannot do without, get rid of." He means TV and newspapers, but the message feels just as relevant now. More broadly, he advocates for a life that prioritizes slowness, stillness,

relationship and rest against a culture of hurry and worry.

I keep thinking about how to get from here to there, not just alone but in community. What would it look like to re-examine our Anabaptist commitments to simplicity together, here and now? How might it shape our finances,

our smartphone use, our schedules, our wardrobes, the very structures of our individual and corporate faith practice? Might it open up more time and space to really see and hear each other? Might it open up more time and space to hear the One Who calls each of us by name? ☸

*Cindy Wallace serves as associate professor of English at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan. She is part of Backyard Church, an MC Saskatchewan house church in Saskatoon.*



### Elusive

I'm glad to hear of Cindy's experience with *Celebration of Discipline* because I also read it, as an undergrad. It was a gamechanger.

I am challenged by Cindy's extrapolation to include attention. Though I have attempted to live simpler, in material terms, since encountering Anabaptism, inward reflection on my part reveals that my attention has gone the opposite direction. My mind is busier than ever.

In this, I am glad for people like my former professor Gareth Brandt, who introduced me to Foster's book and who, to me, embodies the heart of many spiritual disciplines. In him, I am privileged to have a living model.

I also wonder whether simplicity evades many not due to lack of personal discipline but because of wider pressures beyond individual control. In my context, I see many struggling with simplicity not due to shortage in conviction or awareness but because our communities and economies are competitive by nature and necessitate complex manoeuvring.

Simplicity is elusive when great forces burden people to secure their futures. How does simplicity look for those under the omnipresent 9-to-5 strain? It's a never-resolving catch-22 of 21<sup>st</sup> century life. ☸

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



### Longing

As I read Cindy's reflection, I recalled recent moments when I've felt anxiety rise in my body, provoked by a full schedule and a seemingly endless to-do list. In the hurry and worry, I long for spaciousness that would allow me to give my attention to the stories and people for whom I care deeply. This longing feels so simple and yet so often out of reach.

Cindy is wise in calling us toward deeper communal discernment of simplicity as a spiritual discipline. I am learning, slowly, that it is only possible to touch these longings, and to hold space for them, in the company of friends. This feels risky.

I fear that naming my anxiety will expose my inability to hold the pieces of my life together. But this is the trap. I can't do everything alone. When I voice anxiety, I find myself surrounded not by judgment but by care. In community, we practice reminding one another that the answer is not to try harder or to do more.

Rather, the simple things of life—walks, shared food, generosity of time—disrupt the endless doing and invite moments of joyful being. I am grateful for this reminder. ☸

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



### Hunger

Are other people wrestling with the commodification of attention? Um, yes.

I feel like I've been wrestling with this for at least the last decade and a half. Cindy says, ironically, that she first read *Celebration of Discipline* the year Facebook was invented. It seems like Facebook and all it has spawned has been steadily distracting and dividing and depressing us ever since.

I joined Facebook late and deleted my account in 2020 for precisely the reasons Cindy articulates in her piece. To borrow the words of Catholic theologian Ronald Rolheiser, I recognized I was in danger of, "distracting myself into spiritual oblivion."

I hunger for the simplicity Cindy speaks of. For a decluttering of my life and my mind. For the discipline to cultivate the habits of the heart and mind that are necessary to live well in the digital age. For the grace to attend more patiently and deliberately to the relationships God has given me. To be more attuned to the voice of God.

Pulling the plug on social media might be a start, but it's certainly not the end. I have much to learn and put into practice here. ☸

– Ryan Dueck, pastor at Lethbridge Mennonite Church, Lethbridge, Alberta

# See all of us

Randy Haluza-DeLay

Grace has increasingly become my lens for reading both scripture and other people. I have come to think grace—the wildly undeserved favour dispensed by God—is the most important feature of the gospel.

Grace helps me ponder alternative understandings of biblical stories. It reminds me that I may not know someone else’s reasoning or the experiences that map the world they navigate.

That is why we need to listen to as many diverse voices as we can.

This is my last column for Canadian Mennonite. It has been a wonderful several years, longer than I expected.

There will be new writers. Seeing the world through different eyes, cultural lenses, neurodiversities, politics and positions in church and society makes us more grace-ious (grace-full?), and thereby more compassionate—maybe even more able to take on the mind of Christ.

The story of the 10 lepers haunts me (Luke 17:11-19). Ten were healed and one came back to thank Jesus. The narrative seems to denigrate the other nine.

Before this incident, the lepers kept their distance from other people. They knew the social rules and did not infringe on the space given to “clean” people.

Jesus sent them off, not telling them that they were healed but that they should go to the priests—the social arbitrators of the rules of that society—to be checked out and be certified as free of this awful and contagious disease.

“And as they went, they were made clean” (Luke 17:14). One turned back toward Jesus even before reaching the priests: a Samaritan, an outcast in the social hierarchy of the land.

An obvious lesson: Don’t discount the socially outcast, racialized, oppressed, immigrant, or anyone else who is “normally” denigrated.

The principle is that you cannot assess a society except by looking from the perspective of those who occupy less-than-central positions of power, privilege and status.

In the early years of my faith commitment, I focused on the one who came back to Jesus. In these later years, I wonder more about the other nine. What if Jesus asked about those who didn’t return to get us to think about them instead of judging them?

What if three were ecstatic to reconnect with family? Or another three wanted to feel the water and wind on fresh skin and exult in being fully alive and unimpaired again?

Perhaps one knew he was already wanted by the authorities, who had left him alone as long as he was considered “diseased.” Another knew she would be terribly judged as a woman hanging out with disreputable men.

It could be that two preferred life on the margins. Yes, they actually did. No, they were not delusional.

One was run over by a Roman chariot.

Several were grateful but didn’t know how or where to find the wandering healer again.

Two were so mired in depression that even healing could not shake them loose.

Maybe a couple others did not comprehend what had happened and glorified the mystery in their home congregation.

Perhaps two more didn’t know how to label what they felt, so expressing “thanks” never crossed minds unfamiliar with the feeling.

At this point, dear reader, do the math: The story says nine failed to return, but I’ve listed more than nine possible reasons here.

I distrust my ability to “read” others. Experience has taught me that my interpretations of subtle body language, facial cues and outright action may often be in error.

The reverse has been true, too.

A supervisor once told me that I was “unfriendly.” He saw someone wave (at me?) as I strode down a long hallway. I was deep in thought, plus, the heavy glasses correcting my poor eyesight bounce as I walk. I never saw the person wave.

The supervisor ordered me to “try harder.” I still don’t think that was really the issue.

There is an implicit judgmentalism usually implied in the story of the 10 lepers. But what if we take this story to mean we simply don’t know what is going on in the minds and actions of other persons?

The human condition is a sort of solidarity, but with hefty elements of uncertainty. Therefore, be full of grace! ☼



Randy Haluza-DeLay lives in Toronto and can be reached at [haluzadelay@gmail.com](mailto:haluzadelay@gmail.com).

# THE SECRET TREATY

As told by Dave Scott

Recorded and drawn by Jonathan Dyck

**M**ennonite historical records say nothing about an agreement between early Mennonite settlers in Manitoba and the original inhabitants, but the Ojibwe oral tradition does.

During a June 2023 tour of the "Mennonite West Reserve"—an area set aside for Mennonites by government in 1875—Dave Scott of Swan Lake First Nation told of a "handshake treaty" between the bearded newcomers and his people. He spoke of its history, demise and future.

Dave Scott

Dave also spoke about how his ancestors lived on those lands before the days of plows and reserves.

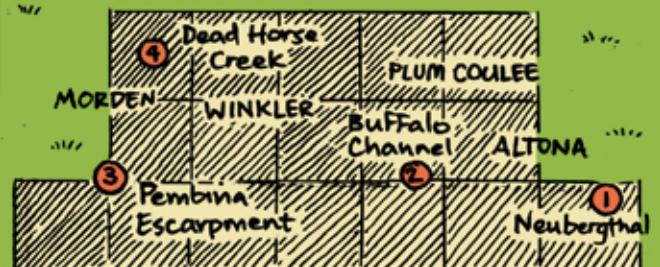
The tour included four stops:  
 1) the intersection of two mile roads northeast of the village of Neuberghthal;  
 2) Buffalo Channel, west of Altona;  
 3) a hilltop in the Pembina Escarpment;  
 and 4) an old gathering place on the banks of the Dead Horse Creek, as it is called in English.

I joined Dave in his Ford pickup truck for the day, serving as the designated recorder.

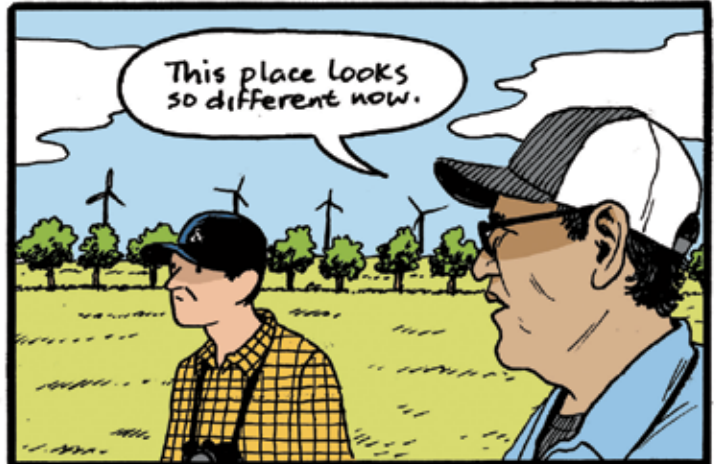
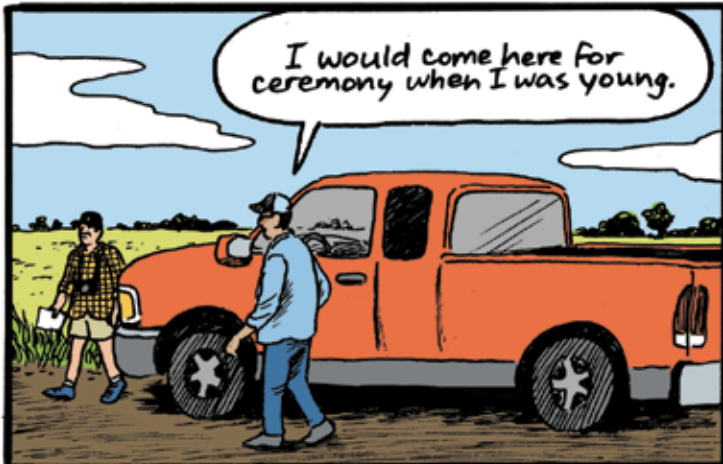
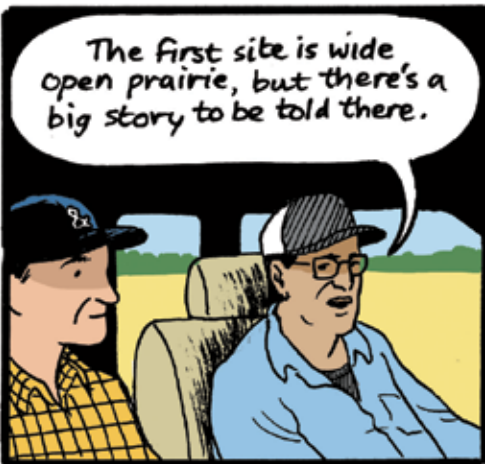
Jonathan Dyck

← Swan Lake Ojibwe First Nation Reserve ... Winnipeg →

## MENNONITE WEST RESERVE



Canada-United States border

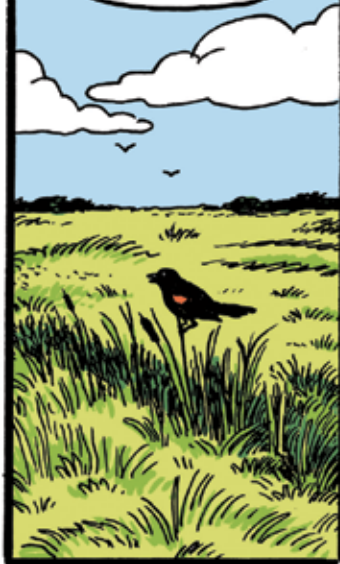


# 1. Neubergthal

We're standing here because a culture was destroyed by these lines on the ground.

All of this area down to Gretna and the United States is where the Grass Dance Society lived.

My great-grandfather's camp was in this area.



His name was Big Goose (Kii-chin-ika) and this is where he first saw the Mennonites.



We would have called them "the bearded ones" (Mee-shee-doon). That was our name for all German-speaking settlers. But we had other names for the Mennonites too, such as "the barefoot ones" or "the persecuted ones."

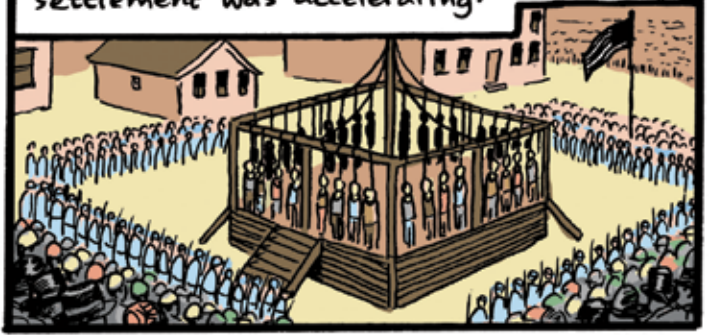
Before the Mennonites arrived here, our people held a council in 1867-68, near Snowflake, west of here. They discussed the advance of settlers into Ojibwe territories without making treaty.



At this council, an Ojibwe warrior named Blue Cloud shared about the U.S. army's treatment of Indigenous people. He encouraged the Ojibwe people here to start killing off the white settler population.



European settlement had brought with it the slaughter of his people, so Blue Cloud brought this message north where white settlement was accelerating.



However, Kii-chin-ika (Big Goose) understood that killing settlers would violate Anishinaabe law.



To maintain peace and prevent Blue Cloud's view from spreading, Big Goose assassinated Blue Cloud in what is now the Grassy Lake area.



But the problem of settler encroachment remained.



So on June 14, 1871, Kii-chin-ika posted a picture of himself in war regalia at Portage la Prairie, warning settlers to stay off Ojibwe lands until treaty was signed.



He said...

When we speak now we will speak softly; when we speak again we will speak louder.

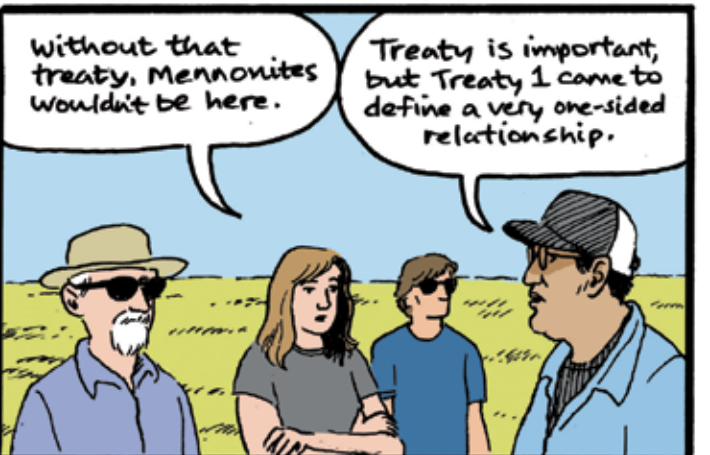


Then on August 3, 1871, the first of the numbered treaties was signed at the Stone Fort, covering most of what is now southern Manitoba.



Without that treaty, Mennonites wouldn't be here.

Treaty is important, but Treaty 1 came to define a very one-sided relationship.





One of the stories from my great-grandfather, kii-chiw-ika, is that the Mennonites were terrified when they ran into us.



We had to chase down whoever it was to tell them "we aren't going to kill you."



Sign language – gestures – are probably what we used.



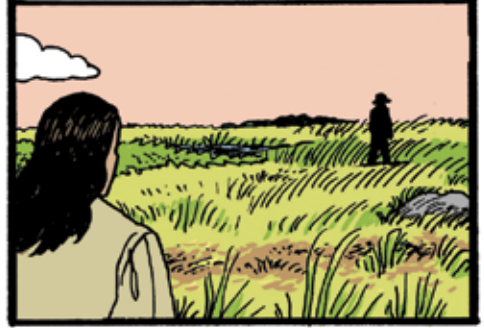
When you finally calmed down, we just found out about each other.



That's when we learned the Mennonites were a pacifist community.



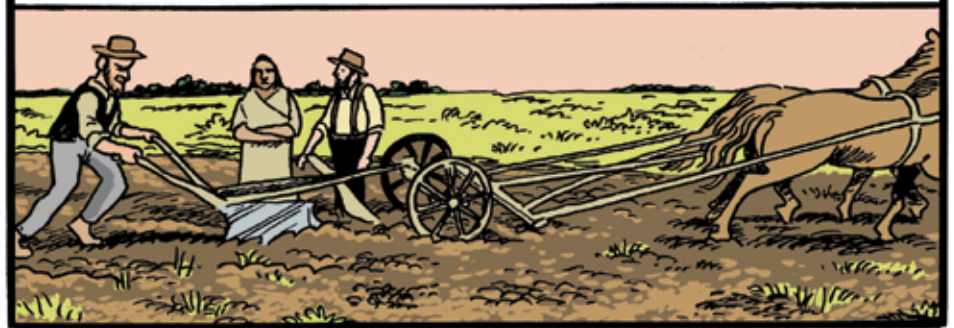
When we made the treaty here with the Mennonites it was for peace.



It meant we were allies



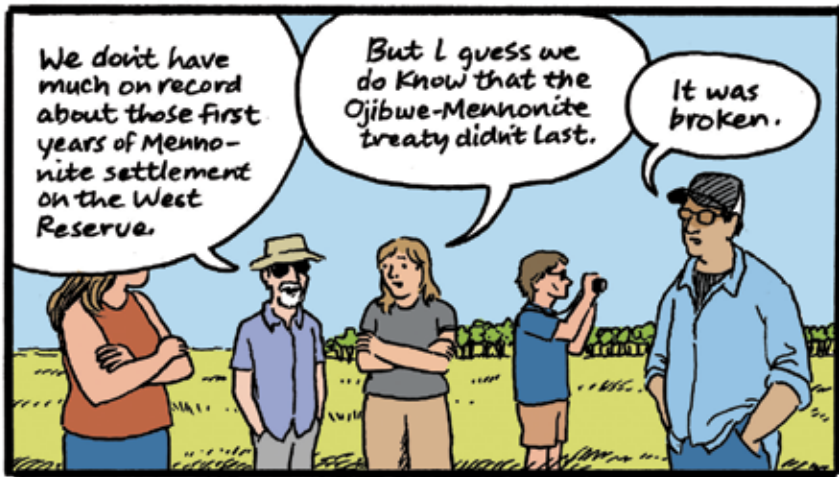
Once it was established that Mennonites were peaceful people, then we started talking with them about how to farm, because we didn't farm in straight lines.



And we've always held on to the treaty promises – promises of sharing land and sharing knowledge.

That's what our treaty with the Mennonites was all about.

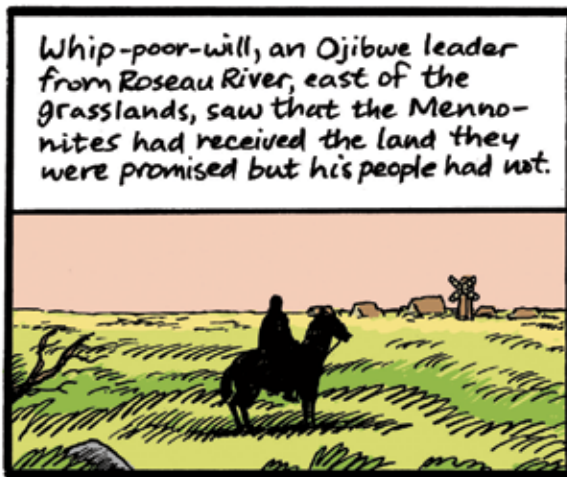




We don't have much on record about those first years of Mennonite settlement on the West Reserve.

But I guess we do know that the Ojibwe-Mennonite treaty didn't last.

It was broken.



Whip-poor-will, an Ojibwe leader from Roseau River, east of the Grasslands, saw that the Mennonites had received the land they were promised but his people had not.



He saw that the situation was unbalanced, so he petitioned the Indian Agent.

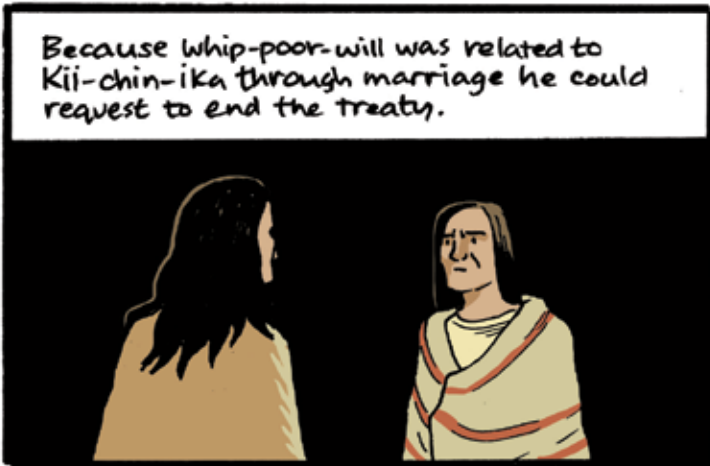
Shut up! And stay in your reserve.



Having made treaty with the Mennonites, the Ojibwe expected the Mennonites to advocate on their behalf.



But it didn't happen. The honour was lost. And that's when the treaty was broken.



Because Whip-poor-will was related to Kii-chin-ika through marriage he could request to end the treaty.



From that point on, handshake treaties were no longer acceptable among Ojibwe people.



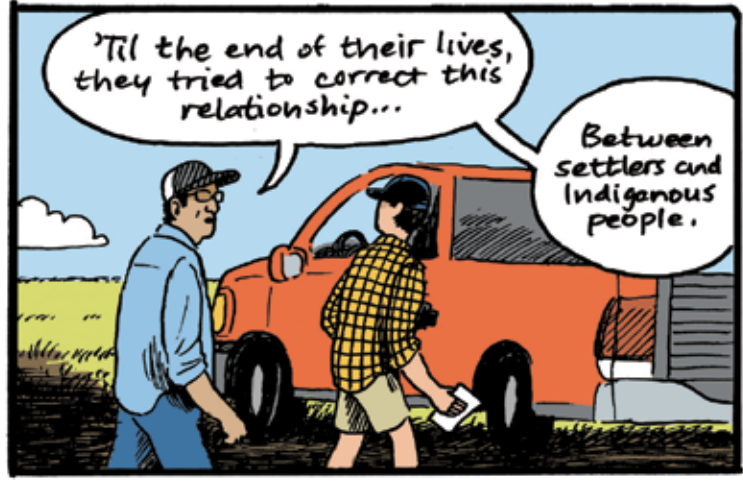
If the Mennonites needed help, we would have been there to help them.



But the expectation of the treaty was that if we needed help, they would do the same, and that never happened.



When I come to this spot, I put tobacco on the ground and remember my grandfather and great-grandfather, and what they tried to do.



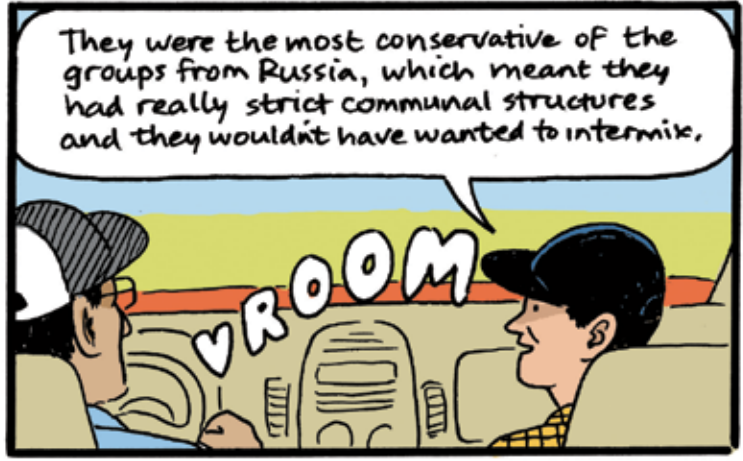
'Til the end of their lives, they tried to correct this relationship...

Between settlers and Indigenous people.



So, the first Germans here — they would have been Mennonites?

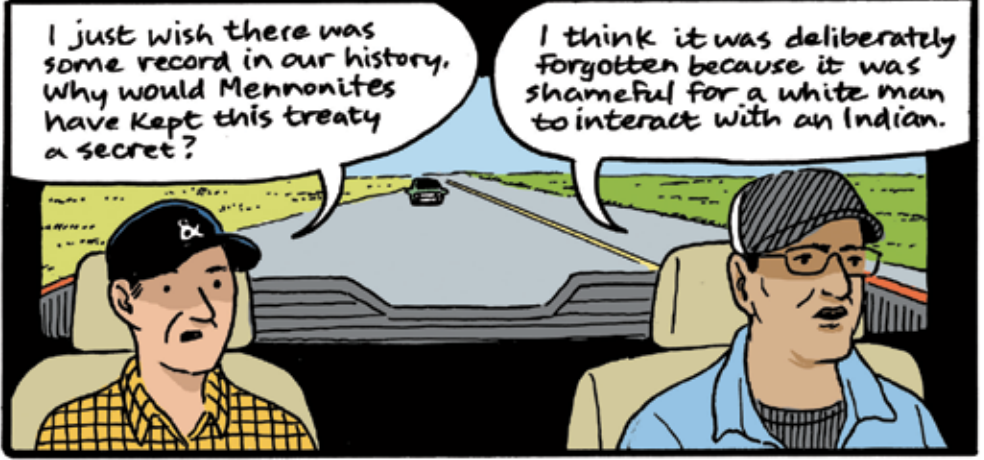
Oh yeah, they would have been Old Colony.



They were the most conservative of the groups from Russia, which meant they had really strict communal structures and they wouldn't have wanted to intermix.



Well, that would make sense because that's what our story says.



I just wish there was some record in our history. Why would Mennonites have kept this treaty a secret?

I think it was deliberately forgotten because it was shameful for a white man to interact with an Indian.



One of the historians we talked to said Russian Mennonites at that time wouldn't have had beards.

Well, Kii-chin-ika used that word, mee-shee-doon, the bearded ones.

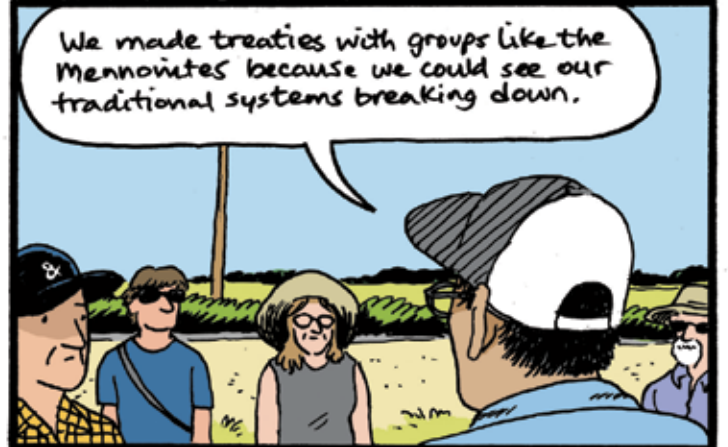
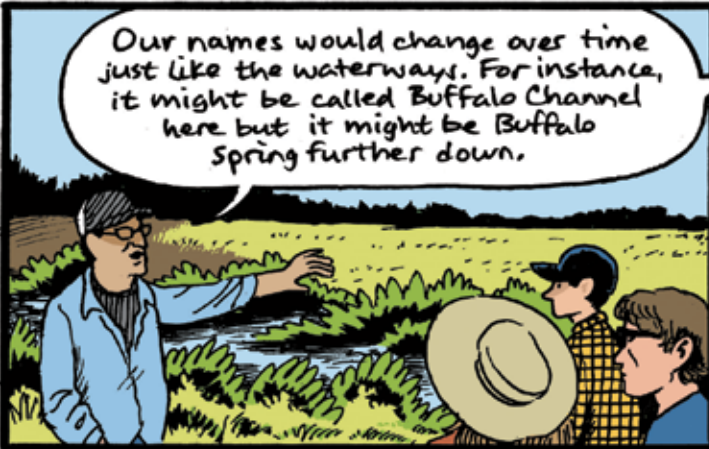
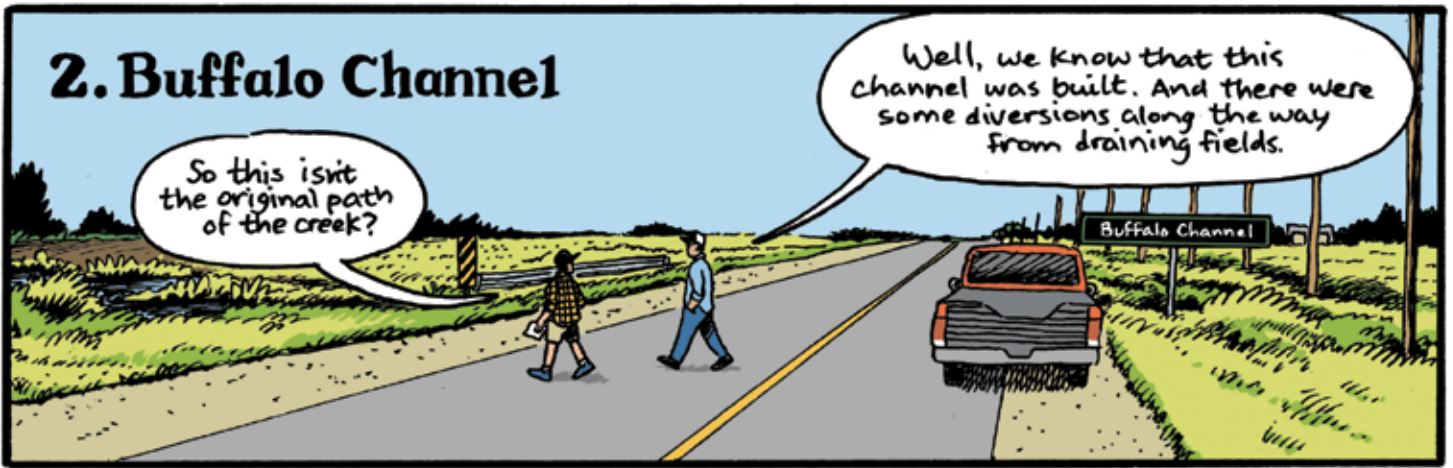


We lumped all you German-speaking people together.



We still call the Hutterites Mee-shee-doon, but now you Mennonites look like everybody else.

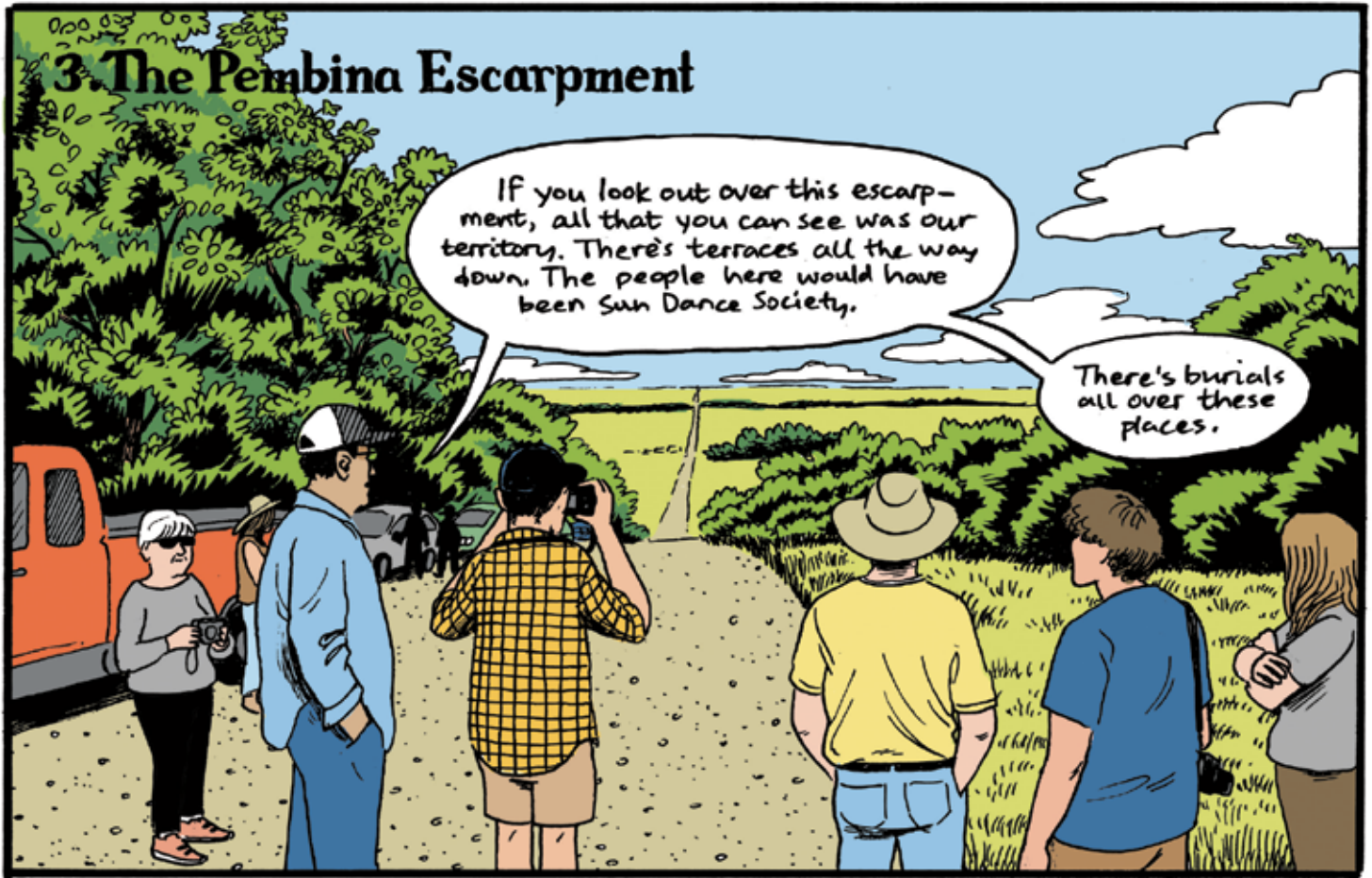
## 2. Buffalo Channel



### 3. The Pembina Escarpment

If you look out over this escarpment, all that you can see was our territory. There's terraces all the way down. The people here would have been Sun Dance Society.

There's burials all over these places.



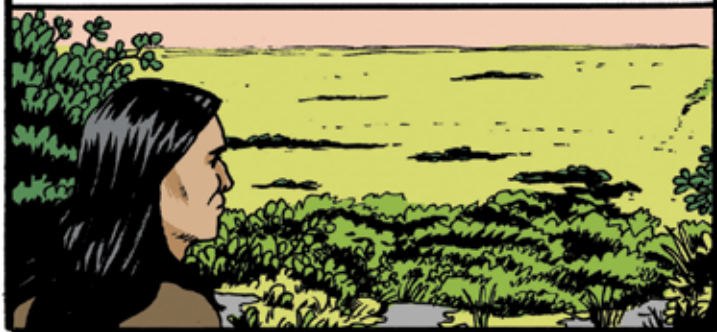
The free movement of our people was essential for survival. The only time we were static would have been in this area during the winters.



We'd stay around these bur oak trees because they're so strong. Good shelter from the storms for us and for the animals.



Somewhere in those trees there's a cliff that would have been a lookout to see people coming from that eastern direction.

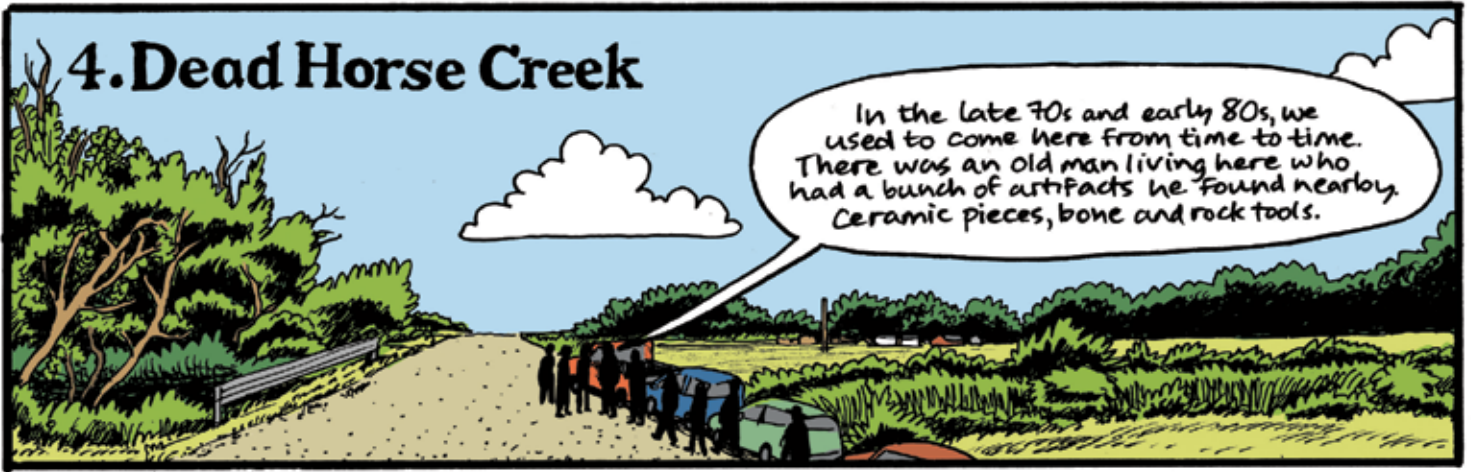


They would have seen the Mennonites moving into their territory along that southern trail.

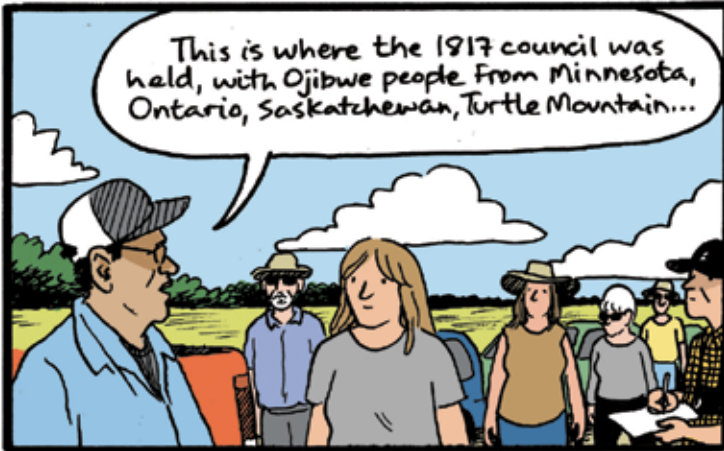
The Post Road.



# 4. Dead Horse Creek



In the late 70s and early 80s, we used to come here from time to time. There was an old man living here who had a bunch of artifacts he found nearby. Ceramic pieces, bone and rock tools.



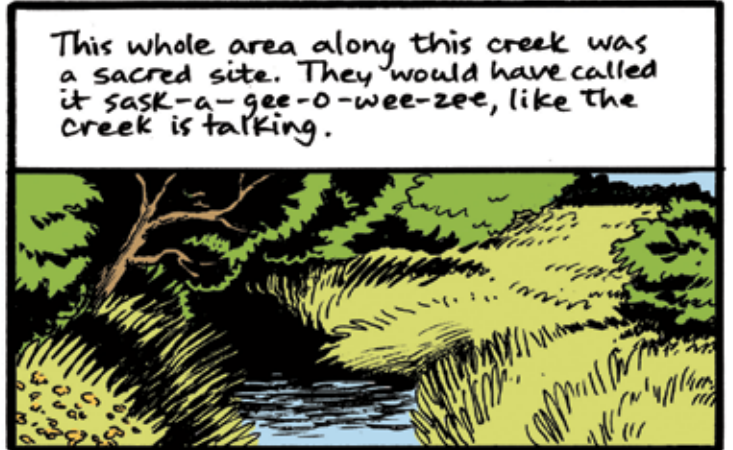
This is where the 1917 council was held, with Ojibwe people from Minnesota, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Turtle Mountain...



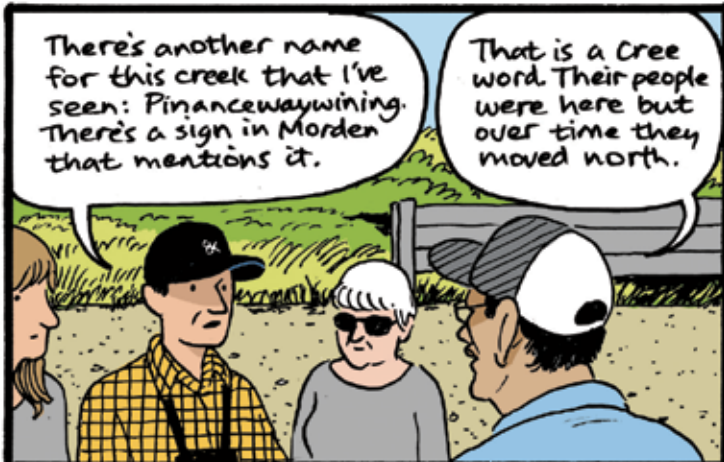
They all came here to discuss the U.S. border, and they talked about it as lines you can't see.



They said, these lines will imprison us—not just Indigenous people, all of us.

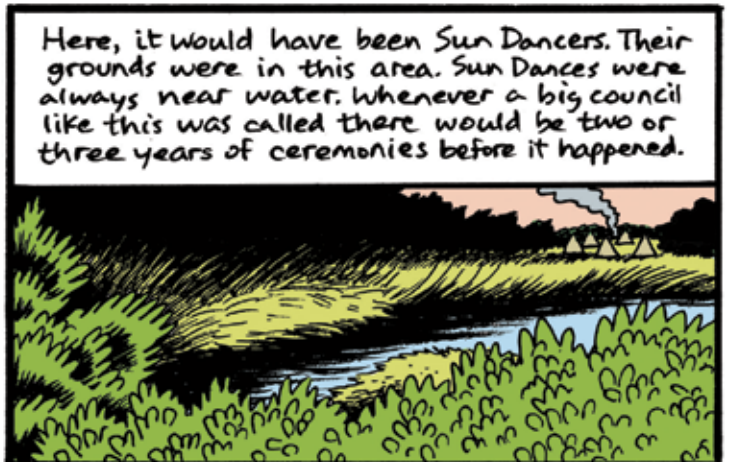


This whole area along this creek was a sacred site. They would have called it sask-a-gee-o-wee-zee, like the creek is talking.

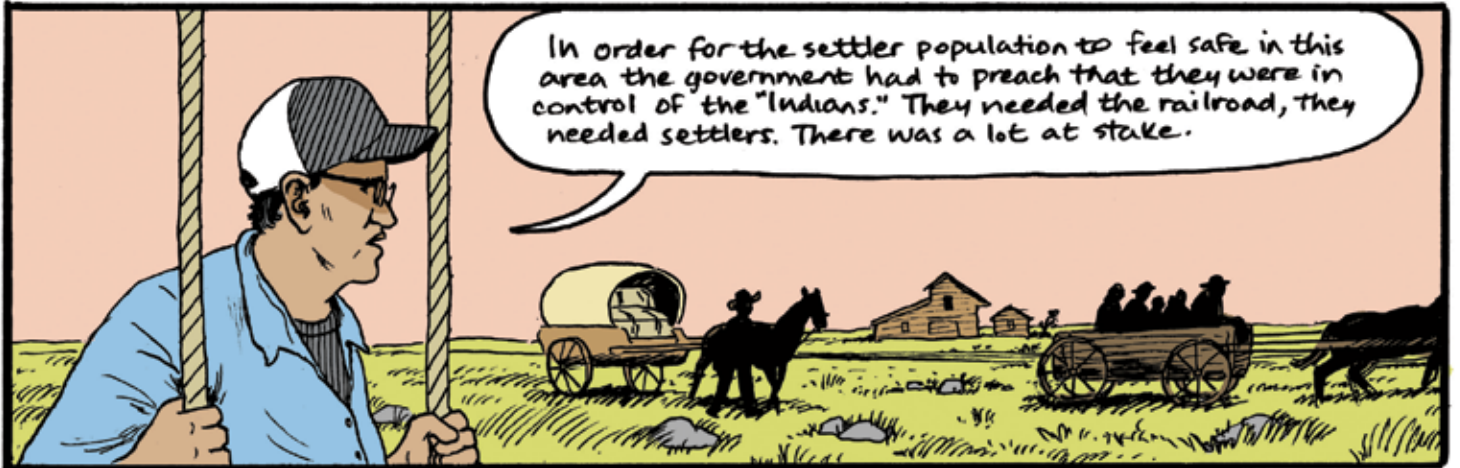
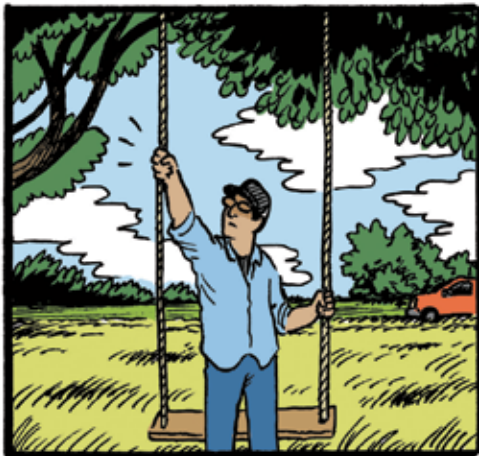
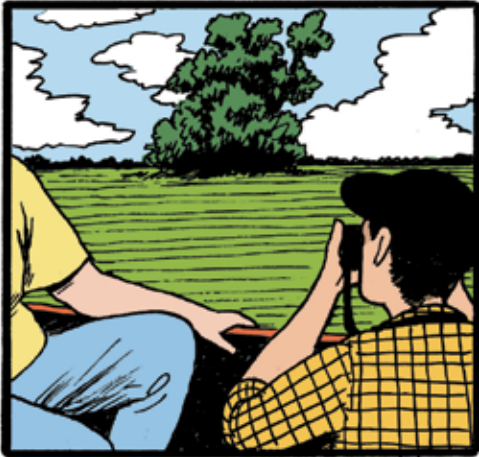
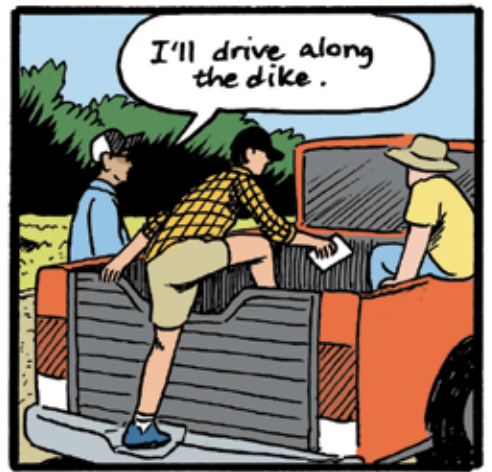


There's another name for this creek that I've seen: Pinancewaywining. There's a sign in Morden that mentions it.

That is a Cree word. Their people were here but over time they moved north.



Here, it would have been Sun Dancers. Their grounds were in this area. Sun Dances were always near water. Whenever a big council like this was called there would be two or three years of ceremonies before it happened.





# Small steps toward reparations

By Madalene Arias  
Eastern Canada Correspondent

Ten years ago, Adrian Jacobs of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy proposed a Spiritual Covenant with Mennonite churches located on the Haldimand Tract. One Kitchener church is now looking closely at that challenge.

The Haldimand Tract includes the land six miles (9.7 kilometres) to either side of the Grand River, from Dundalk, Ontario, to Lake Erie. This includes the Kitchener-Waterloo area. In 1874, Governor Frederick Haldimand drafted a proclamation stating that “His Majesty” would grant Six Nations this land—384,000 hectares (950,000 acres)—in exchange for serving on the British side during the

American Revolution.

Six Nations was to receive lease payments from those who came to reside on the land.

Among those who immigrated to the land were Mennonites who settled in the Grand River Valley. The Canadian government was to hold these payments in trust, but that’s not what happened.

As Jacobs stated in his proposal, “our Six Nations trust accounts should contain trillions of dollars.”

The Spiritual Covenant (in the next article) proposes that churches offer a token 99-year lease payment annually to Six Nations, which, in turn, would

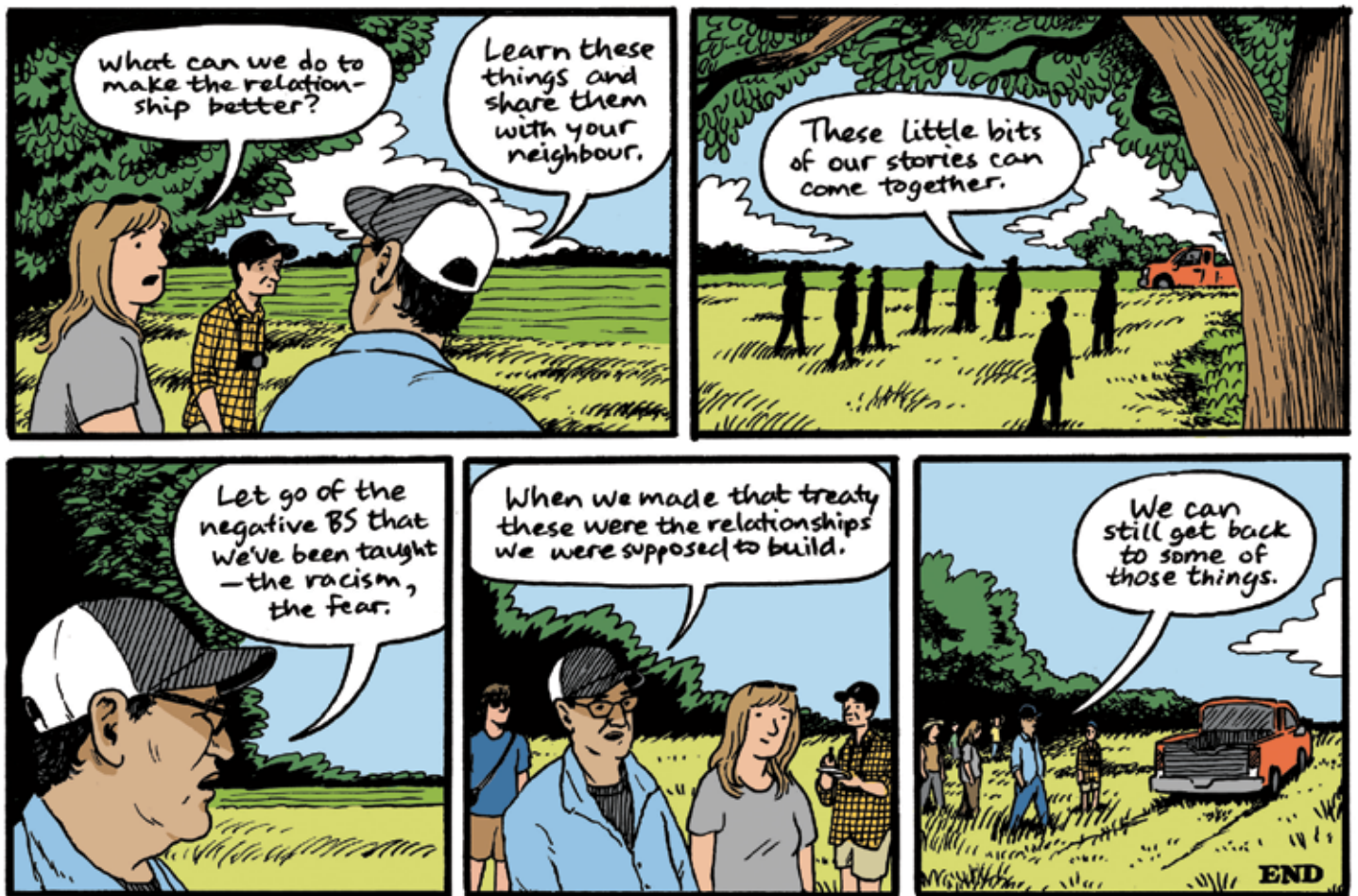
permit the churches to continue using the lands in question. The covenant may be renewed at the expiration of the original 99-year term.

Should the church cease to exist, the land would revert to the possession of Six Nations to be used for spiritual, cultural, social or community purposes.

Josie Winterfeld of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener says that, over the last two years, the church has been considering the actions it will take to live into reconciliation with Indigenous people; specifically, how it will respond to the Spiritual Covenant proposal.

Currently, the congregation is





Support for production of this comic was provided by the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation.

Dave Scott acknowledges the following people as sources of the story of the handshake treaty between the Ojibwe and Mennonites: John Swain, who heard it from his father Mike Swain; Marie Gordon, who heard it from Joe Walker; Don Daniels, who heard it from Sam Cameron; and Dave's father, who heard it from his grandfather Walter Scott.

**CM FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Does discussion of land trouble you? If so, explain.
2. Do you ever wonder about the Indigenous people who once walked the place you call home?
3. What would honourable, neighbourly sharing of land and knowledge look like today?

–Staff

See related resources at [commonword.ca/go/1533](http://commonword.ca/go/1533)

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considering the first step of making reparation payments or symbolic lease payments directly to Six Nations.

“We understand that injustices have happened, and that we have been beneficiaries,” says Winterfeld.

More clarity may result from Stirling’s annual meeting in March.

In Winnipeg, Home Street Mennonite Church decided this February that it

would provide some funds to two Indigenous-led organizations over the next three years.

At its annual meeting, the congregation decided to designate one percent of its budget—approximately \$3,400—for this purpose.

Esther Epp-Thiessen of Home Street says they’d been discussing their decision for almost three years, so it felt like a

significant decision.

Within the last month, Home Street has also begun to offer its basement for the Indigenous cultural programming of 1JustCity. Epp-Thiessen says the church has offered the space at no cost, something they consider “reparations in kind.”

# A spiritual covenant with churches and First Nations

By Adrian Jacobs

**A**most promising possibility for a tangible response by churches to past injustice in the Six Nations Grand River lands conflict came from a conversation I had after the monthly meeting of the Haudenosaunee Council at Onondaga Longhouse on Saturday, March 3, 2007. At this meeting, Mennonite Central Committee Ontario introduced me as Community Liaison for the Aboriginal Neighbours South Program. I explained to the Council my plans to educate the churches about our Six Nations lands.

After this meeting, I sat across the dining hall table from Rick Hill, a Tuscarora, artist and Haudenosaunee knowledge keeper. Rick asked me, “Do the churches pay taxes?” I knew

he was referring to property taxes, and I said, “No.” He replied, “Good. Then they are not part of the system.” He then surprised me by saying, “Wouldn’t it be great if Six Nations could have a spiritual covenant with the churches? [The churches] could acknowledge Six Nations jurisdiction over their lands and pay a token lease payment. They could continue their spiritual work and if they ever de-commissioned, the land could revert back to Six Nations.”

This conversation was burned into my memory, and I have tried to foster this dialogue ever since.

This spiritual covenant could be made in the same spirit as the original treaties recorded in wampum belts by the Haudenosaunee traditional community. Six Nations’ original intention to lease their excess lands in the Haldimand Tract could also be fulfilled and the historic land injustice could be partially corrected.

The church could lead the way in a courageous act of justice, and be the conscience of Canada to pressure the government to follow suit for more comprehensive reparations.

Discussions began about this matter, and there is real interest on the part of the individual pastors and church members and Christian organization leaders. The challenge will be for the churches and organizations to build consensus.

Homeowners have also responded to this proposal by asking, “What if a thousand (or a hundred) of us homeowners had a spiritual covenant with Six Nations and paid a lease payment to Six Nations?”

The deep problem is with the willingness of the powers-that-be to allow or make this happen. Six Nations stands ready to receive a just recompense. The colonial land title system, on the other hand, is resilient against the changes Indigenous justice demands. Church lawyers are reticent as well. The call to the churches is to be the conscience of Canada and not the chaplains of empire.

When I shared this Spiritual Covenant with Churches in cities across Canada, people have come up to me asking, “How can we do this here?” My response has always been, “Find the closest Indigenous community to your church and begin dialogue.” Indigenous people want more than “land acknowledgements” that mean nothing tangible to them.

## A paradigmatic story

The story is told of a Mennonite farmer who came to the Six Nations people near Brantford in the early years after Mennonites moved to the Grand River Valley land of Six Nations. He brought with him his lease payment for his lands in the Waterloo area. The Six Nations representative asked the farmer how the season was, and the farmer replied that it had been difficult. He was asked if he had seed for next year and grain



An 1821 survey showing part of the Haldimand Tract area in southern Ontario (Wikicommons).

for bread. The farmer said, “No. All I have is this lease payment of grain.” Mennonites are remembered by Six Nations as hard-working people of their word. The Six Nations representative said, “Take this back for bread for your family and seed for next year. You can make it up when you have a better harvest.”

When I told this story recently to a Six Nations person who had learned of the Mennonite concern for justice, he said, “Are they coming to settle-up?” ❧

*Adrian Jacobs currently serves as senior leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation for the Christian*

*Reformed Church. He is a member of the Cayuga First Nation of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy of the Grand River Territory. The above is excerpted and adapted from an article that appeared in the NAITTS Journal, volume 19, 2021. Used with permission.*

# Giving back to the land

By David Driedger

**O**ur farmyard opened from its treelines to the south and southwest. A mile south, I could see the shelterbelts surrounding my paternal grandmother’s 1870s homestead. A few farmyards were dotted out in the horizon in the southwest, but looking that direction was mostly for watching weather systems develop, dissipate or roll in.

Truth be told, I never wanted to farm. I found Jesus in Grade 12, quit hockey and followed a nudge that led to a calling in ministry.

I volunteered with Mennonite Disaster Service in Northern California after high school and ventured into downtown San Francisco with a friend one weekend.

I had rarely been in downtown Winnipeg, never mind a big city. On one street, I remember seeing people lining the sidewalks with ragged blankets and cardboard. Then, as though to punctuate the scene, I saw someone squatting on the sidewalk having a bowel movement.

There was a strange resonance and dissonance that occurred which took me years to sift through. In that moment I saw something about human experience that was out of place, yet it unconsciously reminded me of the farm—these people corralled in rough and dirty spaces.

I learned early from Matthew 25 that if I hoped to encounter Jesus, I needed to be in the places where people were imprisoned or denied food, clothing, shelter and health care.

Since leaving the farm in the late ’90s, I have been drawn to core area of cities.

While we have mostly cleaned up our individual language about prejudices

against poor or Indigenous folks, structurally it remains a fact that if you are Indigenous or live in the core areas of Winnipeg, on average, you can expect to knock a decade or two off your life compared to those who live in wealthier neighbourhoods.

Our society has the means but not the will to care for the basic needs of people, and so urban centres produce feedlots of people on riverbanks, in slum apartments and in rooming houses.

If we consider this reality at all, it is often met with a sigh and accepted as bad luck, bad choices or just the way of the world.

While my theology has kept me in the city, my spirit and imagination have been drawing me back to the land.

Recently, I spent a weekend alone on the farmyard where I grew up. Walking around outside, I felt the sheer space. I thought about what and who it could all hold, in terms of food, housing and cultural or spiritual practices.

The world and its economic structure can produce massive profits, but it is not designed to provide collective care. The world’s system does not have the capacity for collective care, but the land still does.

I stand to inherit some of this land. It’s land that was designed to be the base of the Canadian project, which was the British Imperial project, which was the Christendom project.

That project required people and land to be colonized—that is, disciplined and assimilated for a specific goal that has passed on into the integrated global system of capitalism.

For all its might, this system has proved unable to care for people and land, or to allow land and people to care for each other. It is a system that demands we become increasingly invested in its promises and payouts as opposed to investing in each other.

I need to be clear, most of all to myself, that I remain a part of this system and its investments.

It would be nice to end with an idealized statement about what I will do in the future, but I don’t know.

I have slowly built relationships with those who see the harm of this system and those who already suffer under it—relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, Christians and non-Christians. I am praying for a form of justice and healing in which we give land back its opportunity and ability to care for us.

For Christians, this is a Sabbath practice. Live in right relationship with the land and, even when you rest, it will provide.

When I walked my farm and field, the power of what the land offers was palpable. I could feel the space and what it could carry and who it could hold.

I pray for the faith to give land back its opportunity to do just that. ❧

*David Driedger grew up on a mixed farm between Altona and Gretna, Manitoba. He currently lives and works in the West End of Winnipeg, where he is leading minister of First Mennonite Church.*

# Saskatchewan sidesteps First Nations in selling Crown land

By Emily Summach  
Saskatchewan Correspondent

**F**irst Nations in Saskatchewan are in conflict with the provincial government regarding the sale of Crown land.

Indigenous peoples in the province have treaty rights to use government-owned land for hunting, fishing and gathering. They also purchase Crown land to fulfill outstanding treaty land obligations.

As early as 2007, the provincial government started auctioning off Crown land to private owners, meaning that the land was no longer accessible to First Nations to use or purchase. First Nations were not given first right of refusal and sometimes they were not made aware of the auctions before the sales happened.

When Treaty Four and Treaty Six were signed in the 1870s, First Nations were guaranteed a certain amount of land based on the population of their band. Many band populations were improperly counted, and the bands were therefore given less land than they were legally owed.

Resulting land entitlement claims remain a live issue in Saskatchewan and elsewhere.

While First Nations made treaty with the federal government, the Natural Resources Transfer Act (NRTA) of 1930 transferred broad land responsibilities to the provincial government.

Passage of the NRTA was “an illegitimate move,” said Randy Klassen, Indigenous Neighbours coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan.

The federal government was responsible for maintaining the treaties, but they gave broad jurisdiction over the land and resources—critical for treaty relations—to the province.

In 1992, the federal and provincial governments signed a historic land claims agreement with Saskatchewan First Nations. This was an attempt to make good on the land entitlement that First Nations were cheated of during the initial allotment in the 1870s.

“Based on the initial survey, our people had been shorted 30,000 acres,” said Doug Cuthand, a journalist, filmmaker and member of Little Pine First Nation.

“When the agreement was signed in 1992, our population had grown, so we were now entitled to 50,000 additional acres of land. Crown land played a huge role in terms of what was available for us to purchase.”

First Nations were awarded significant sums of money by the federal government to allow them to purchase the land to which they were entitled at fair market value. Many First Nations purchased land for economic development, ranching and cultural purposes.

But today, nearly all Saskatchewan First Nations’ land holdings fall short of their 1992 entitlement.

Over the past decade, Saskatchewan’s government has moved increasingly and rapidly toward the privatization of land.

Since the death of Colten Boushie, an Indigenous man who was fatally shot on a rural Saskatchewan farm by its owner in August 2016, the provincial government has passed legislation on trespassing and the Saskatchewan First Act, reinforcing the regime of provincial sovereignty over the land, Klassen said. “Saskatchewan has sold off the greatest amount of Crown land of all the provinces.”

For Cuthand, the conflict goes deeper than land rights; it’s about a fundamentally

different understanding of land.

“This government has a very narrow understanding of economic development. You can’t build an economy in this day and age on just natural resource mining and agriculture,” he said. “As First Nations, we can bring a lot to the table. One of the big things happening in Indian Country is this cultural revitalization, resurrecting the culture.”

Cuthand added that this revitalization is good for the land, the environment and the economy, but First Nations need to be included in the decision-making process.

Still, there are signs of hope.

In summer 2023, the provincial government implemented a two-year pause on all land sale and lease auctions in order to update its First Nation and Métis Consultation Policy Framework (CPF).

A representative from the Ministry of Government Relations told *Canadian Mennonite* in an email that changes were made to the CPF, “which aims to support the Government of Saskatchewan’s objectives to advance reconciliation, drive economic activity for the benefit of all in Saskatchewan, and build meaningful and productive relationships between First Nation and Métis communities, government and proponents.”

Changes to the framework include a new duty-to-consult assessment chart to improve clarity for all parties.

“Timelines for government response have been shortened and consultation timelines for communities have been increased to support participation and reduce the need for extensions,” the representative said. ❧

# ‘What do you do with an unjust benefit?’

*When John Stoesz received an inheritance, it was an opportunity to act for Indigenous justice*

By Aaron Epp  
Associate Editor

**F**or John Stoesz, making land reparations to Indigenous communities is a way to follow Jesus.

In 2012, Stoesz’s family sold his grandparents’ farm near Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Stoesz returned half the proceeds of his share of the inheritance to Indigenous groups working for land justice.

Mountain Lake is in the southwestern part of the state. Many of the early settlers in the area were German Mennonites, including Stoesz’s paternal great-grandparents. These settlers were attracted by the offer of “free land,” made available through the Homestead Act of 1862 after almost all the Dakota people of Minnesota were killed or forced out.

“I don’t believe that my ancestors directly participated in the wrongdoing, but [they] benefited from it,” Stoesz says during a video call. “So the question is: What do you do with an unjust benefit?”

When he received the inheritance, Stoesz was the executive director of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Central States. At that point, he and his colleagues were five years into a journey of following Indigenous leadership on justice issues.

That journey included the formation of a visioning circle made up of three or four Indigenous people and three or four non-Indigenous people, whose purpose was “to identify and resource Indigenous strength and genius while staying on the path of decolonization and relationship.”

As he was about to collect his inheritance, Stoesz spoke about it with the visioning circle. One of the circle’s members was Harley Eagle, a Dakota/Ojibway man whose paternal ancestors fled Minnesota when the Dakota peoples were removed from the land according

to state policy.

Eagle put Stoesz in touch with Waziya-tawin, executive director of Makoce Ikikcupi, a nonprofit focused on land recovery.

Eagle also suggested that Stoesz give some of the inheritance to Sarah Augustine, a Pueblo (Tewa) descendant who was working to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. (Augustine has since co-founded, and become the executive director of, the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery.)

Stoesz divided the money between Makoce Ikikcupi and Augustine.

The former appealed to him because it is creating a place in Minnesota where Dakota people can re-establish their spiritual and physical relationship with their homeland, and ensure the ongoing existence of their people.

The latter appealed to him because Augustine does work on a national level to replace unjust structures with just structures.

“I think you have to do both [local and national work] in order to resolve some of these issues,” Stoesz says.

## Inspired by Zacchaeus

Stoesz’s decision to return half of his inheritance was inspired by the biblical story of Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector who decided that following Jesus meant making a big change.

Zacchaeus returned half his wealth to the poor and repaid those he defrauded fourfold.

“If you benefit from an oppressive system and you decide to follow the love ethic of Jesus, you must make amends to those oppressed by that system,” Stoesz says.

Today, he continues to work with

Makoce Ikikcupi.

The organization has two villages: Zani Otunwe (Village of Wellness) is a 21-acre parcel located in Granite Falls, Minnesota, and Hohwoju Otunwe (Village of Vibrant Growth) is a 20-acre parcel in Mountain Lake.



*John Stoesz and his wife, Marcia, pictured during a Makoce Ikikcupi work day in June 2022. A group of 36 volunteers planted more than 200 trees and bushes. Supplied photo.*

Stoesz is also involved with the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery and its repair network, which supports church communities in education, solidarity and reparative action alongside Indigenous peoples.

Doing work related to land reparations has deepened Stoesz’s faith.

“In returning a part of my land inheritance I discovered healing for myself,” he

says. “This is a growing awareness that the meaning of life is not found in accumulation of material wealth, but in right relationships with others, including the original people of this land; with nature; and with the Creator.”

### Revitalization

Because non-Indigenous society was responsible for taking the land, destroying Indigenous cultures (especially through boarding schools) and polluting the environment, Stoesz says that the goal of land reparations is returning land to Indigenous groups, revitalization of Indigenous cultures and renewal of the environment.

Stoesz notes that the General Conference Mennonite Church (a predecessor to Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA) supported two Indian boarding schools in the U.S. while at the same time establishing postsecondary institutions like Bethel College, Tabor

College and Hesston College.

“I don’t know that anyone at that time saw the irony between starting educational institutions to preserve German Mennonite culture and at the same time operating Indian boarding schools to forcibly take away the language and the culture of Indigenous children,” he says.

“My German Mennonite ancestors came to Minnesota largely because they wanted to practice their own culture, speak their own language and practice their own spirituality, their own religion,” he adds. “Now we who have benefited from the taking of Indigenous lands and languages and cultures have a responsibility to see to it that there can be a revitalization of Indigenous language and culture. And of course, to make that happen, there has to be a land base for these Indigenous groups to do that.”

Stoesz has an intensity and drive while at the same time remaining invitational, says Jonathan Neufeld, Indigenous

relations coordinator at Mennonite Church Canada.

“He’s convinced of what is right and what is needed from the church and from settler communities to right the wrongs of [our] colonial past, but he comes alongside people who are exploring that with deep listening and profound challenge,” says Neufeld, who has known Stoesz for a decade.

“He’s inviting people into healing, and he has a way of calling people in that I think is beautiful.”

Stoesz has given many presentations about Indigenous justice over the years, and one thing he stresses is that the work of land reparation is not an all-or-nothing proposition.

“It may be unrealistic to return all the land,” he says, “but it is unjust to return none.”

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## The meaning of seeds

*Groups seek mutual wellbeing amid Maya-Mennonite tensions*

By Lars Åkerson, Tina Fehr Kehler and Anika Reynar

At 9 a.m., it was already hot and humid in Hopelchén, a small city in the Yucatán peninsula. A collective of Maya farmers had gathered in the shaded courtyard outside the home where we were staying. We could hear laughter and chatter over the wall as we returned from our morning walk. As we stepped through the gate, the group welcomed us into their circle, offering plates of food made from corn, beans and chaya.

We were there as members of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, a group of Mennonites from the U.S. and Canada who work to repair the harms of colonization and promote Indigenous self-determination.

Five years ago, the Maya collective invited the coalition to join them in

addressing concerns related to their colony Mennonite neighbours. They wanted to identify shared interests and seek mutual wellbeing. A series of campaigns has followed.

As the meeting began, the Maya gave thanks to the land, water and seeds that have sustained their lives for millennia.

They reflected on a question fundamental to their existence: What do seeds mean? They said seeds are culture and spirituality, life and death. Seeds are memory, medicine and resistance. Seeds, like land and water, are not property nor commodities, but a sacred community to which the Maya belong.

The name of the collective—Colectivo In Laak Le Ixiimó—means “our sibling, corn.”

They gather because of their commitment to saving native seeds. “I’m saving seeds for life, for my children,” one person said.

The group is concerned because Maya ancestral territory is threatened by the agricultural practices of neighbouring Mennonite colonies. Since the 1980s, the spread of Mennonite colonies across Campeche state in southwestern Mexico has increased deforestation and contributed to the contamination and depletion of groundwater. The widespread use of hybrid corn and genetically modified soy is compromising the continuance of native seed varieties.

The collective members worry about their people’s future in the land.

Yet, they were clear they’re not fighting



*A Mennonite colony in Campeche state, Mexico. Photo by Anika Reynar.*

against the Mennonites but against extractive economic systems. These systems harm everyone, whether Maya or Mennonite. They hope for the shared flourishing of all who live in the land.

They asked us to help them clarify the interests, values and concerns of their Mennonite neighbours, in hopes of opening possibilities for conversations.

Anika joined the delegation as a student of Mennonite theology and environmental management, Lars as chair of the coalition's Maya-Mennonite Solidarity Working Group. Tina is a fluent Low German speaker who facilitated connections with colonies.

Over six weeks in July and August of 2023, we listened to the stories of dozens of Maya and Mennonite farmers as we walked through fields and shared meals.

Don Eduardo and Doña Elena walked with us in fields where they have cultivated native corn, beans and squash for over 40 years. (Names have been changed in accordance with the agreed protocol between the coalition and the collective.) The forest to the east and west funneled a strong, hot wind that tugged at our hats

and drew sweat off our skin. The summer had been unusually dry. The corn on their 12 hectares (30 acres) barely peeked through the soil.

On the northern horizon, pivot-irrigation systems stood over green, knee-high corn on 1,200 hectares (3,000 acres) owned by an absentee landholder. The corn was being grown for hybrid seed by the multinational crop science and pharmaceutical company Bayer. Mennonite farmers, including the one who rents the field south of Don Eduardo and Doña Elena's land, buy this seed.

Last year, the couple lost a portion of their crop when the Mennonite farmer's agrochemicals drifted across property lines.

Standing in Don Eduardo and Doña Elena's field, the friction between histories, ecologies and political and economic forces was palpable. The market for domestic corn collapsed in the late 20th century with the arrival of imported U.S. and Canadian corn under NAFTA. The negotiations of this trade agreement also precipitated a series of major land reforms in Mexico.

As a result, many Maya farmers left their fields, and the region, in search of other work. Now, they rent or sell their land to other farmers, mostly Mennonites. The same trade liberalization and land reform policies that have pushed Maya from the land have made Campeche



*Lars Åkerson, Tina Fehr Kehler and Anika Reynar in Campeche state. Supplied photo.*

an attractive home for Mennonites from northern Mexico.

Starting in the 1920s, Mennonites who chafed at Canadian public schooling obligations moved to northern Mexico under a deal with a Mexican government eager to resettle a country destabilized by a recent revolution. These migrants' grandparents had settled on Ojibway, Métis and Cree territory at the invitation of the Canadian government. Before that, fearing conscription and education reform, their ancestors had left Russia, the land to which earlier generations had migrated from Central and Western Europe at the promise of land and freedom.

In each Mennonite migration, the particular history of the land that received them was less important to them than what they believed God was doing through them. Clearing the land and its history, they set the stage for the drama of their faith: bearing witness to God's faithfulness through productive, fruitful lives on the land, set apart from the world.

Showing us a chest his family brought from Russia, one Mennonite farmer recalled the process of clearing the land he now farms. "We wouldn't be here if it wasn't God's will," he said.

In Campeche, there are 17 Mennonite colonies, with at least two more in formation. Most of these colonies are structured around the church and the colony corporation. The corporation serves as gatekeeper of finance, seeds and agrochemical inputs. Because colony corporations only offer credit for the production of soy, sorghum and corn, few households can afford to experiment with other crops.

Mennonite farmers we spoke with said this system favours large landholders. Speaking in his farmhouse over fropa (a light evening meal), one farmer described the economic burdens he carried due to consecutive seasons of little rain. His debt was compounded by the cost related to his wife's medical issues.

To manage these debts, he had rented

an additional 81 hectares (200 acres)—an hour away by tractor—tripling his holdings. The risk was immense, but he felt compelled to take it.

Economic pressures had pushed him to set aside his experiments with alternative



*A Mennonite farm in Campeche state, Mexico. Photo by Lars Åkerson.*

agricultural practices. Five years earlier, Maya activists had visited the colony to make a case for organic crops. Intrigued, he worked with them to design and build a machine that speeds the composting process for producing organic fertilizer on a large scale. He showed us how this fertilizer grew better corn and healthier fruit trees around his house.

Pest pressure had led most families to abandon home gardens long ago, but his family relished the beauty and flavour of their garden tomatoes. Better than anything they could buy, he said.

But the compost machine had sat unused for three years. He was deterred from continuing due to rising debt, the intensive labour required to produce the

fertilizer and the lack of buy-in from other farmers.

He told us some farmers are interested in organic production but lack capital. "They'd have to go into debt to make it work, and they're afraid," he said.

This farmer remembers his Maya collaborators fondly. Though the composter sits idle, the attempt encourages our Maya partners.

"It's not about Mennonites adopting Maya agroecological practices," one member of the collective told us. They imagine a future in which Mennonites adapt their own practices to become more connected with the lives around them, while still reflecting their own particular social and theological context.

As we listened, we wondered whether accepting this invitation would require fundamental changes to Mennonite theological and social imagination. What would it take for each of us—Mennonites in many places—to hear this invitation from God through our scriptures and in our contexts: to see land, water and all life as part of a sacred community to which we belong?

How, we wondered, might we describe our relationship with seeds?

Back in the courtyard with the collective members, their discussion of all that seeds mean to them wound down. An elder spoke up: "We're missing one important thing—fiestas!" Everyone laughed.

As the meeting ended, Doña Elena and another native seed guardian returned home to warm up the mill to grind corn. They would be throwing a quinceañera party soon, and there were tortillas to make. ❧

*A delegation from the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery will return to Campeche in May 2024. To learn more, or support the work, see <https://bit.ly/seeds2024>.*



# The way we were ‘the other’

*A personal story of Metis-Mennonite relations*

By Emma LaRocque

**M**y sojourn with Mennonites is a story of deep and lifelong human attachments. At some points, it was also one of pain and alienation that came with crossing cultures, borders, languages and socio-economic locations.

Below, I highlight a number of very special Mennonite people who made a difference in my life and who will always remain close to my heart.

I first met Mennonites in the 1960s, when I was in my early teens. They were volunteers who staffed the Anzac Dorm in northeastern Alberta. The dorm was a place where Indigenous children (mostly Métis) who lived along the rail line but had no access to schools could stay while attending a local public school. I was one of those Métis children.

By the late 1870s, about 83 percent of the Métis population in Manitoba had left due to various forms of injustice and mistreatment. Many moved west, where they eked out a living. Most Métis lived in dire poverty.

Masses were dying from diseases such as influenza

and tuberculosis. Many of my relatives were among them.

The Métis survived by living off the land as well as working as labourers for farmers, forestry, railroads and so forth. This is where the Mennonite-operated Anzac Dorm comes in.

My dad worked on the Northern Alberta Railway line. Every 30 kilometres or so along the line, there were small Métis hamlets. Most of the men worked on the railroad, and hunted and trapped seasonally. We were one of those families. We lived seasonally by the railroad tracks

in a company community called Chard, about 80 kilometres south of Anzac and 120 kilometres south of Fort McMurray.

Since there were no schools in these hamlets, the Northland School Division set up the Anzac Dorm. It was funded by the division and run by Mennonite volunteers.

Children would take the train to Anzac, stay at the dorm for two weeks, then come home on alternate weekends. This came at a critical time in my life. When I realized I could go to a school other than the one I had been forced to go to in Lac La Biche, I begged my parents to let me and my younger brother go to Anzac.

I had no idea it meant we had to abandon our parents for two weeks at a time. All I cared about was getting away from the racialized town school of Lac La Biche, which had been a personal purgatory for a number of years.

Only much later did I come to realize how emotionally devastating our stay at the Anzac Dorm was for my parents, especially my mother.

The first sighting I had of a Mennonite came in the form of a blue-eyed, blonde-haired woman who greeted us as we boarded the special Anzac Dorm train car. The woman greeted us with the warmest and kindest white smile I may have ever seen. I instantly adopted Mennonites. I absolutely idealized them. I loved their warmth, their apparent joy, their food (for the most part), their singing, their prayers, and their apparent peaceful ways. I even enjoyed their regulations at first, since I was so relieved to get away from that oppressive town school.

This was the beginning of a new life and a new future for me. At Anzac, I met Ted Walter, or “Mr. Walter” as we always addressed him. He was the principal and teacher of grades 7-9.

Mr. Walter was the greatest teacher I ever had. He virtually saved my life.

When I first arrived at Anzac school, I was a frightened, extremely shy, socially awkward 14-year-old. With his perceptive kindness and support, I not only successfully passed those grades, but I left with greater confidence than when I arrived.

Mr. Walter was one of those rare souls who knew how to respect a scared child’s dignity. He not only nurtured my love of knowledge, but he also taught me how to play baseball during recess so that I could gain confidence in making friends.

Not everything went well at Anzac Dorm. At times, there were misunderstandings, cultural conflicts and power struggles between children and staff. Most of the staff were young and knew next to nothing about who we were, especially that we were diverse in our cultures and languages.

Being mandated to missionize, they were eager to indoctrinate us. Given the white American mass-produced and ideologically-based stereotypes about “the Indian,” I suspect they came with pre-conceived notions. They surely suffered culture shock. Years later I read a report that one of the staff had written. It consisted of the classic colonial gaze at “the natives.”

Nonetheless, the Anzac Dorm Mennonites proved to be the nicest white people I had met up to that point in my life. I hung onto that, and their values, for dear life.

Having suffered the trauma of the

I instantly adopted Mennonites.

brutal racist environment of the Lac La Biche school and town, I was indeed easy pickings for kindness and indoctrination.

The kindest of all the dorm staff were Harold and Erma Lauber from Tofield, Alberta. I adopted them and their faith. When school was out, I visited them at their farm near Tofield, east of Edmonton. When I later attended Prairie Bible Institute, I would stay at their place during holidays as I could not afford to go home to see my parents.

At Harold and Erma's, I always felt welcomed, safe and well-fed. I didn't mind working with and for them. Gardening was not strange to me as my parents had gardens whenever possible. Hard work was not alien to me as I grew up watching my parents model a very strong work ethic. People of the land know how to integrate work with life. I also went to Salem Mennonite Church with the Laubers and got to know a host of wonderful people.

My bond with the Laubers was extraordinary even though there were vast differences between us in age, culture, belief systems and economic standing.

Due to my educational pursuits, I had to leave my parents long before any child should have to. Those were very difficult things to go through. What made it tolerable for me was having people like Harold and Erma. They were my stability zone in my teenage years. That sort of gift is immeasurable and it is forever.

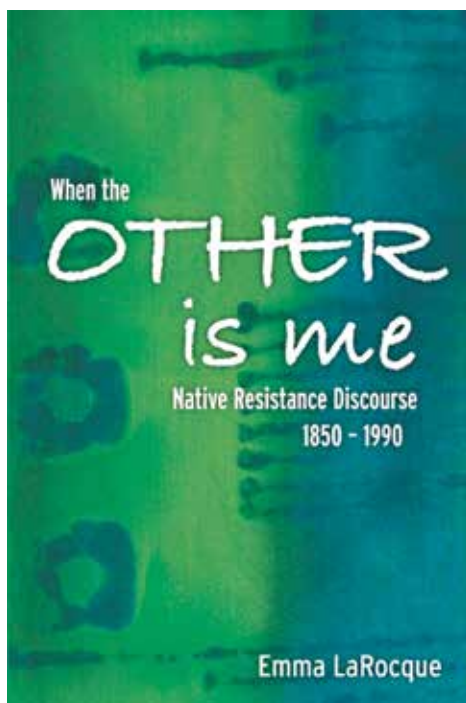
In the early 1970s, I attended Goshen College in Indiana. I had always wanted to go there because that was where my hero, Mr. Walter, had earned a degree. I figured it must be a special place. An anonymous donor paid my tuition costs. I earned a bachelor of arts degree there in 1973.

My world was expanded at Goshen College, not only from my classes but by my friendships, including friendships with international students as well as Black and Latino students.

One day in poetry class, Professor Nick Lindsay prayed that Black and white peoples would be in harmony, "like the black and white keyboard of the piano,"

to which I chimed in: "and brown."

I was very surprised to receive a Rockefeller Fellowship based on a recommendation from Professor Marlin Jeschke. The fellowship was for pursuing a masters in theology. While the Rockefeller Foundation would have preferred that I attend Princeton, they graciously allowed me to go to the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (now, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) in Elkhart, Indiana, instead. I was too



intimidated to go to Princeton.

I was at AMBS from 1974-76. I think ever so fondly of Professor Clarence Bauman and his wife Alice. I was drawn to them because they were warm and inviting; they exuded spirituality with an unassuming yet enormous intelligence. In classes, Professor Bauman was engaging, respectful and intellectually inspiring.

I also remember Marlin Miller who, as a professor, appeared distant but was also ethically conscious and highly intelligent. These two professors made a big impression on my young searching intellect.

But my review of my life among Mennonites would be skewed were I to just relate positive things. I had my share of negative experiences. I share the following incidents because of how deeply

they affected me.

During one painful encounter in an AMBS class, the professor took pains to denigrate Métis people who, according to Mennonite records, had obstructed Mennonite travelers in Manitoba in the 1870s. When I tried to explain the possible context of Métis behaviour, namely that southern Manitoba was their land, this professor became visibly angry and insulting, leaving me feeling humiliated and angry.

On another occasion, at Goshen College, a well-known Mennonite theologian was a guest lecturer in a class. I questioned his notion of "voluntary suffering" in relation to those peoples in the world who suffer involuntarily. Much to my shock, he virtually exploded into a diatribe about how Indians knew nothing about suffering compared to other peoples. I was dumbstruck, and too intimidated to respond. The only thing I could do was leave.

I cannot describe the pure stinging soul-loneliness and hurt I felt. For days. For years.

Then there was the time a fellow student at AMBS called me a liar after hearing me make some culturally evaluative comments about Anzac Dorm staff.

Clearly, there are those in the Mennonite community who take umbrage at others challenging their ideas or their ideological and religiously-bounded notions of how white North Americans got their lands.

There is no question that I, as an Indigenous person, represent an uncomfortable mirror to many whites. But it always surprises me when it comes from the church, perhaps because I had idealized Mennonites for so long.

I struggled through my time at AMBS. I was awakening to the reality that the church was not responsive to political, social, cultural and economic realities of being Native in North America.

I also had to decide about my vocation. I knew I had gone as far as I wanted with my spiritual/theological quest. I had concluded that spirituality is a forever journey; if allowed, it becomes fathomless. Either I was going to make a career

of it, or I had to move on to address social and historical issues concerning Native-white relations in Canada. The fact that the Mennonite Church in the mid-1970s was still largely white and patriarchal, in language and structure, made my decision clear; I chose to come home to my native land.

Again, Mennonite connections influenced my choices. While at AMBS, I had been approached by a guest lecturer of Mennonite background who was the head of the religion department at the University of Manitoba. He invited me to apply for a doctoral program in his department. So, I landed at the University of Manitoba, but in Canadian history, rather than religion.

As one who grew up in a Cree-speaking, land-based culture in an era of devastating marginalization and bleak social conditions, I was not expected, statistically speaking, to finish elementary school, let alone become an author and teach in a university. I teach to make a difference. I believe in the social purpose of knowledge. These values that I exercise in my university life are grounded in my heritage and the marginal socio-economic status of Indigenous peoples in Canada. But they are also based on the kindness and the supportiveness of those Mennonite peoples I have named here—and many more I have not named—who have made it possible for me to keep going.

I have no institutional affiliations with the Mennonite church nor am I a member of any church, though my partner grew up in a Mennonite family and church. I have noticed that invitations to speak at Mennonite events or churches have disappeared. My association and relationships with Mennonites has been more personal than institutional or ideological. While I respect the Anabaptist vision, it is my Métis cultural norms, and my own intellectual preference, to relate on personal terms.

I represent an uncomfortable mirror to many whites.

My relationship with Mennonites continues today in very personal ways. Among my best friends are Ike and Millie Glick of Edmonton. I first met them at the Anzac Dorm. Ike oversaw the Mennonite volunteers in that region. They have become the best friends anyone could dream of. They truly model their Anabaptist faith and values.

Menno and Lydia Wiebe also became close friends. I first met Menno at the Mennonite Youth Conference in Minneapolis in the early 1970s. He was the director of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Native Concerns. Menno had a passion for justice, with a love of wit and poetry to match. We became fast friends, traveling together to give presentations at conferences and in churches. Through him I worked for MCC on several occasions.

Of the people I have mentioned, all but Ike Glick and Lydia Wiebe have died. This has been a huge loss to me.

Because so many special Mennonite individuals made such a difference in my life, I have always tried to make a difference in the world I live in. My hope for the Mennonite Church is that it hold on to its Anabaptist roots and human values, which is what makes it unique and gives it positionality to reach across cultures and nations for service and nonviolence.

The world needs an alternative ethic, an alternative to hatreds born out of implacable leftist and rightwing ideologies. My hope is that the church does not succumb to the fundamentalist movements.

I also hope the Mennonite community will not forget on whose land they stand. I hope they seek to understand and support Indigenous peoples' struggles for justice, land and resource restitution. ❧

*Emma LaRocque teaches half-time in the Native studies department at the University of Manitoba. She is the author of Defeathering the Indian (1975) and When the Other is Me (2010). LaRocque received an Aboriginal Achievement Award in 2005.*



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# Conscientious taxpayer

By A.S. Compton

Editorial Assistant

**M**y grandfather, Norman Weber, used to tell us how excited he had been to begin paying taxes as a young man. Having been raised during the Great Depression, paying tax meant he was making enough money to contribute back to society, to be a citizen not just in name but in financial participation as well. Contributing income for public use fit his Anabaptist theology.

He became a successful egg farmer and entrepreneur in Elmira, Ontario. He was also a Conscientious Objector (CO) during World War II.

I was raised on his stories of being a CO, and I've wondered what it means to be a Conscientious Objector now. In 2024, wars are fought with technology and money, and lives are taken in numbers too large to comprehend.

According to figures from NATO, the budget for the Canadian military in 2023 was \$36.7 billion, about 1.3 percent of the GDP. As a member of NATO, Canada is expected to spend 2 percent of GDP on the military. To reach that mark would require an extra \$20 billion annually.

The Colombian Defense Ministry has a budget of approximately US\$10.4 billion, equivalent to roughly 10 percent of the total Colombian government budget for 2023 and just over 3 percent of GDP.

In 2023, the U.S. government spent US\$816.7 billion on the military, \$45 billion over their budget, and about 3.5 percent of GDP.

Where does that leave us as Anabaptists with a long, committed history of

Conscientious Objection? We're unlikely to be conscripted in person, but, as Conscience Canada's website states, "we will be made complicit in war through our taxes no matter what our beliefs and values might be."

Conscience Canada (CC) is an organization that offers two alternative ideas related to the military portion of federal taxes. The first option is a declaration of conscience, which involves a letter to the Minister of Finance but no change to actual tax payments. The second option includes withholding part or all of the portion of one's taxes that would go to the military.

According to Conscience Canada, 6.5 percent of our net federal income taxes for 2023 will go to the military.

From the start of the organization, those who chose to withhold military taxes could deposit the money owed into the organization's Peace Tax Trust Fund, with the hope that someday there would be an alternative government option that the withheld money could be directed to. In 2022, CC closed the Peace Tax Trust Fund.

Jan Slakov, CC board member said, "after decades of concerted efforts to get our governments to set up a system to enable conscientious objectors to military taxation to redirect the military portion of their taxes towards nonviolent programs, it seemed clear that our government, at least for the time being, is not inclined to act on this."

In the U.S., approximately 43 percent of

federal taxes go to the military. Mennonite Church USA operates a Church Peace Tax Fund to which people or congregations can redirect tax payments withheld for reasons of conscience. The fund has existed since 1983.

Some members of Mennonite Church USA call themselves war tax "redirectors," and, in light of recent wars, they are redoubling their efforts to inform the public about military taxation. Similar to CC, they offer several response options. In addition to legal responses, they suggest redirecting either a token amount of \$10.40 of military taxes, or the entire military portion of income tax.

Veterans of military tax redirection underline that no one goes to prison for withholding this portion of taxes. The consequences are calls and hassles from the IRS.

In either country, one way to avoid contributing income tax dollars to military ends is to keep one's income below the taxable level.

I find that numbers the size of military budgets can lose meaning when I look at my grocery bill, paycheque or my kids' school pizza orders. What do a few hundred dollars count for next to billions? Can they add up to a declaration of objection? Could they signal a non-violent movement?

My grandfather never begrudged paying taxes or doing CO service, but he couldn't stand inactivity. He would always tell us, "Go out and *do* something!" ✎

## CM NEWS BRIEFS

### Ceasefire actions across Canada

On February 9, Mennonites joined with interfaith communities in actions across Canada, praying, singing and calling on elected officials to support a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. Events included an interfaith service in Edmonton, a vigil on Parliament Hill, a delivery of letters and candles to city officials in St. Catharines, Ontario, and a protest outside city hall in Waterloo that drew 100 people.

“The most meaningful part of the service for me was when members from the Jewish community, including Independent Jewish Voices, led us in singing a mourner’s kaddish, accompanied by drumming from an Indigenous leader,” reflected Waterloo organizer Ken Ogasawara. Source: *Mennonite Action*

### Reading the Bible after the Holocaust

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) is offering an online short course titled “Biblical interpretation across the two testaments.” AMBS describes the six-week course as follows: “As Christians reading the Bible after the Holocaust, we will explore the concept of *supersessionism*, the harmful theological claim that the church has replaced Israel as God’s covenant community and the authority of the New Testament ‘supersedes’ that of the Old.”

The course, taught by Mary Schertz and Jackie Wyse-Rhodes, runs from April 10 to May 21. The registration deadline is April 3 (early registration deadline is March 30). See [ambbs.ca/shortcourses](http://ambbs.ca/shortcourses).

### MWC prayer hour

Every two months, Mennonite World Conference convenes an online international prayer hour. After an initial introductory time together, participants then break off into smaller groups where they share concerns and pray together. The next one will be held on Friday, March 15 at 8 a.m. CT. Source: *MWC*

# Witness workers accompany lay leaders

*Christine and Tom Poovong report on work in Thailand*

By Aaron Epp  
Associate Editor

**T**wo Mennonite Church Canada International Witness workers are at the centre of an initiative to train, mentor and support church leaders in Thailand.

Tom and Christine Poovong, together with Thai colleagues, form the leadership of Friends of Grace, a church planting network. The network opened the Friends of Grace Bible School in Roi Et in north-eastern Thailand last month.

Thai pastors who have studied in seminary teach short intensive courses at the school.

“This is something that is very exciting for us,” Tom said during a webinar organized by MC Canada last month.

Courses and curriculum are still being developed. Meanwhile, Friends of Grace is inviting MC Canada to discuss how the nationwide church might support the

development of this school.

Friends of Grace is a network of about 100 worshipping communities, according to Jeanette Hanson, MC Canada’s director of International Witness, who hosted the webinar. Nearly all these worshipping communities are house churches led by laypeople.

“These lay leaders are now wanting to go deeper and learn more,” Hanson said. “It’s really exciting to see.”

During the webinar, the Poovongs reported on a soccer ministry they are involved with near Khon Kaen, the village where they live. They are mentoring a family that started a house church in the area, and the family started the soccer ministry after local leaders yearned for the village’s young people to have a positive outlet.



*Christine and Tom Poovong, pictured with their children, Joseph and Phimchanok, are MC Canada International Witness workers in northeastern Thailand. Supplied photo.*



Tom and Christine Poovong speak with participants in a learning tour in Thailand organized by MC Canada last year. Supplied photo.

They are connecting to other towns in the area to play games and organize tournaments.

“One of the things that all of the house churches are being asked by leadership of Friends of Grace is: ‘What has God given you to serve your communities?’” Hanson said. “[Congregants in Khon Kaen] thought, ‘This is a way we can serve our community, by starting a soccer team.’ They have really been working hard at that.”

Additionally, the Poovongs are translating course material for Journey, a program of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.

The two-and-a-half- to three-year online program is designed to be a place where pastors, those exploring ministry, church planters and other congregational lay leaders can deepen their understanding, test new skills and receive mentorship.

Twenty students from Thailand and Laos started the Journey program last fall. The Poovongs, along with Jonah and Meemie Yang—a couple supported by Mennonite Mission Network—are translating course material into Hmong and Thai, and supporting the 20 students.

The Poovongs, who are members of

Trinity Mennonite Church in Calgary, Alberta, have served with MC Canada Witness for 10 years.

In addition to providing leadership to Friends of Grace, the couple have developed income-generation ministries, including MennoShoes and an Isaan food restaurant.

The Poovongs also connect with leaders of other Thai Mennonite congregations to encourage relationships and fellowship among emerging Mennonite communities across Thailand and Laos.

Mennonites in Western Canada will have an opportunity to learn more about these ministries when the Poovongs visit Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta April 8-29.

Hanson encouraged anyone interested in hosting the couple for an event to contact their regional church.

The churches that make up Friends of Grace have spent a lot of time considering what it means to follow Jesus and be peacemakers, and Hanson is looking forward to Canadian Mennonites getting an opportunity to hear from the Poovongs.

“There’s a lot we can learn from these house churches in Thailand,” she said. ❧



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## CM CALENDAR

### British Columbia

**March 2:** MCC fundraiser dinner, "Vulnerable and Fierce" at South Abbotsford Church, Abbotsford. Information at [mcc.org/abbotsford](http://mcc.org/abbotsford).

**March 7:** MCC fundraiser dinner, "Vulnerable and Fierce" at South Langley Church, Langley at 6 p.m. Information at [mcc.org/langley](http://mcc.org/langley).

**March 8:** MCC fundraiser dinner, "Vulnerable and Fierce" at Willow Park Church, Kelowna at 6 p.m. Information at [mcc.org/kelowna](http://mcc.org/kelowna).

**March 9-10:** "Lenten Vespers" with *Abendmusik Choir* at 7:30 pm. Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, 3386 Mount Lehman Road, Abbotsford (9). St. Philip's Anglican Church, 3737 West 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver (10). Donations to UBC Menno Hall project. Information at [pcda.bc.ca](http://pcda.bc.ca)

**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](http://mennonitecamping.org/mca-bi-national-gathering).

**March 12-13:** Reimagining Church, Land & Community. Public lecture (12) 7 p.m., featuring Adrian Jacobs and Jason McKinney. Full day conference (13) 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

**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

**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.

**March 10:** RJC Songs & Sweets, a fundraising concert and cake auction, 7 p. m. at RJC High School. You are invited to sing in the alumni & friends choir.

### Manitoba

**March 8:** Discover Day at CMU for prospective students, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. or 1-3 p.m. Visit [cmu.ca/discover-days](http://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 [mennonitecommunityorchestra.ca](http://mennonitecommunityorchestra.ca).

**March 29:** Soli Deo Gloria Choir presents "Lobgesang," a symphony-cantata by Mendelssohn on Good Friday at 7 p.m. at First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

**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 [mennochurch.mb.ca/events](http://mennochurch.mb.ca/events).

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

### Ontario

**March 7:** MCEC Spiritual Retreat Day for Pastors.

**March 9:** Menno Singers concert, "At the Foot of the Cross" at 7:30 p.m. at Trillium Lutheran church, Waterloo. Cellist Ben Bolt-Martin and Menno Youth Ensemble join Menno Singers. Information at [mennosingers.com](http://mennosingers.com).

**March 16:** Intercultural intergenerational volleyball tournament at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener, 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Register at [mcec.ca/events](http://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](http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events).

**March 22:** Living History of Low German-Speaking Mennonites at Aylmer-Malahide Museum and Archives in Aylmer at 8:30 a.m. or 12:45 p.m. Register at [mcc.org/events](http://mcc.org/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](http://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](http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/ontario-mennonite-music-camp).

### Online

**March 21:** MCEC Open Forum: Engaging Youth in the Church, 5-6:30 p.m. Sign up for Zoom link.

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

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



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A close-up photograph of a cow's face, showing its eye and ear. The cow has light-colored fur and a yellow ear tag with some markings. The background is blurred.

# MEAT

## An online discussion

Every day, we all make many decisions about what to eat. It's complicated; the shelves are stocked with ethical dilemmas.

We must contend with high prices, a dozen kinds of Cheerios to choose from and ever-evolving appeals to our sensitive consciences: organic, local, grass-fed, plant-based, low-carbon, free range, pasture-raised, farm fresh, natural, etc.

What's a more-with-less Mennonite to do?

On Wednesday, March 20, *Canadian Mennonite* is hosting a live web event to discuss one food question: meat.

The panel for the event will include a young rancher and two seasoned vegans.

Clare Martens raises Charolais beef cattle with her dad, sister and uncle near Boissevain, Manitoba. She studied theology at Canadian Mennonite University and agriculture at the University of Manitoba.

Sandy and Jason Yuen live in Toronto, where they attend Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church. In an article in the March 24, 2021, issue of *Canadian Mennonite*, they invited honest dialogue on the links between a plant-based diet and compassion, peace and care for creation.

The event will be moderated by CM editor Will Braun, a part-time small farmer with mixed feelings about the animals he has killed for meat. ☘

**Wednesday, March 20, 7:30 p.m. CT**

[canadianmennonite.org/events](https://canadianmennonite.org/events)

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