

CANADIAN MENNONITE

February 17, 2014

Volume 18 Number 4

I STILL HAVE A LOT
TO LEARN BUT
I THINK THAT'S
WHAT LIFE IS.

Comment by 'Zombie apocalypse'
participant at SMYO annual retreat

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EDITORIAL

On breast-feeding

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

The headline caught my eye: “Breast-feeding on the rise, remains an issue in the pews.”

What? I thought, as intrigue took over and I continued to read the full article from Religion News Service. Of all the issues facing the church in our 21st century, do we really have to divide over one of the most basic and natural functions of human life? Has our conversation really descended to this level of discourse?

“Jesus was breast-fed. It’s a point often made by mothers who want to breast-feed in church,” declared the writer in the lead sentence, “but they know others would prefer that they retreat to the nursery or find an out-of-the-way bench.”

I couldn’t believe how pedestrian this is, how unworthy of one ounce of energy expenditure. I began looking for some deeper meaning.

Then it struck me. This discussion symbolizes, at some level, how our conversation on faith matters is shifting from what has consumed us over the past 50 years to what seems to now demand our attention and serious pursuit. What seemed so important decades ago—right doctrinal statements, separation from the world, the right eschatology, pietistic practices to keep us uniform in our spiritual expressions, to name a few—now seem less important or are approached differently. Indeed, in retrospect, they appear a hindrance to developing a spiritual dynamic as Anabaptist Christians.

In large part, this has been culturally driven. We no longer live mostly in small, rural communities, where it was easier to define and implement our unique religious values. We were ethnically homogeneous—mostly of European



descent. There was little dissent or challenge to what church leaders imposed. Today, younger generations have moved to urban centres which, in most of Canada, are highly multicultural. We encounter, every day, persons

who are not like us, who do not share our cultural heritage.

Most of us are no longer agrarians in our workplaces. We have successful businesses; occupy some of the leading centres of higher learning; have our own high schools and universities; are generally more educated than our forebears; are successful in the arenas of law, finance, art and literature as poets and writers; and in growing numbers have influence as government officials.

All of this is bound to change our worldview, our perceptions of where we fit into a society in which we have been integrated and are now intertwined, how we view both ourselves and our neighbours. No longer the “quiet in the land,” we struggle to be “in this world, but not of it.”

Which brings us back to breast-feeding as an issue. Does it occur to you, as it does to me, what seems to be a confluence of issues coming together around the issue of our sexuality? Presently it

is occupying much of our conversation, including, apparently—breast-feeding.

There is the ongoing, and, for some, wearisome, coming to grips with the sexual abuse of our leading theologian, John Howard Yoder, now deceased for 17 years. Many letter writers, his women victims, the seminary at which he taught—Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary—and his publisher—MennoMedia—have all weighed in on the subject. The discussion has broadened to what the church should do to bring healing and perhaps compensation to the victims nearly two decades later, how to view him historically as a theologian/writer/teacher, how to view his widely published works.

The fifth plank in Mennonite Church Canada’s Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process is on human sexuality. The task force reports on page 16 of this issue that there is good participation of our congregations, as perhaps as many as 65 percent will report findings directly. This is encouraging and shows an engaged faith community in one of the pressing issues of 2014. We urge even fuller participation on this important subject.

Human sexuality is one of the engaging issues of our 21st century, happening in the context of a stronger voice for women and the growing acceptance of persons with differing sexual orientations. We need to address it reasonably and with great generosity towards each other in the faith community. We are both enlightened members of the kingdom and accomplished participants in our society.

For the BFC process, the planners have given us a good framework in which to carry on our conversation, not focusing on just one aspect of our sexuality, but attempting to make us faithful in its broader expressions. Let us respond in kind.

ABOUT THE COVER:

A reflection on the meaning of life, death and life after death by a Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization member attending this year’s ‘Zombie apocalypse’ winter retreat at the Shekinah Retreat Centre. See story and another photo on page 18.

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Hebrews 10:23-25 • Accuracy, fairness, balance • Editorial freedom •

Seeking and speaking the truth in love • Open hearts and minds in discerning God's will •

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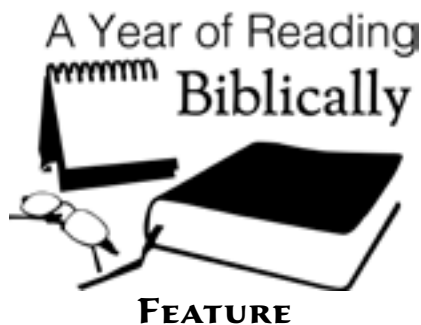
A book of answers



*Mennonite leaders and scholars reflect on
the role of the Bible in the church today*

BY AARON EPP

YOUNG VOICES CO-EDITOR



A mayor in Texas made headlines this past December when he proclaimed 2014 as “the Year of the Bible.” “Throughout the history of the United States, one of the most important influences that has shaped our country into a distinctive nation, none may have been more profound or enduring than the Bible,” Mayor Tom Hayden of Flower Mound, Tex., said in his proclamation. He invited everyone to participate in reading through the whole Bible in a year by spending roughly 15 to 20 minutes a day on daily reading.

“His desire [is to] bring our town back to a biblical foundation, which our country was founded and built upon,” reads

... or a book of God-with-us stories?



TheBible2014.com, a website that was created as part of the initiative.

Meanwhile, a number of publications are hailing 2014 as “Hollywood’s Year of the Bible.” *Son of God*, slated to open in theatres this month, tells the story of Jesus’ life. In November, *Noah*—a \$130 million epic with Russell Crowe (*Gladiator*, *A Beautiful Mind*) in the titular role—will come to the screen.

In December, two more biblically based films will hit theatres: *Exodus*, directed by Ridley Scott (*Alien*, *Blade Runner*), tells the story of the ancient Israelite people’s liberation from Egypt, with Christian Bale (best known for portraying Batman in *The Dark Knight* trilogy) playing Moses; and *Mary, Mother of Christ* is a prequel to Mel Gibson’s 2004 feature, *The Passion of the Christ*.

“The uptick in biblical movies is a testament to the ongoing power of those ancient narratives to capture the hearts and minds of the masses,” ReligionNews.com writer Jonathan Merritt noted last month.

But with this interest in the Bible throughout popular culture, how familiar are members of Mennonite Church Canada with the Bible? If biblical literacy is going down, what might some of the reasons be? What resources are available to people who want to study their Bible more seriously? And what are some of the benefits of spending time reading the Bible?

As part of *Canadian Mennonite’s* Year of Reading Biblically, I put these questions to six leaders from throughout the Mennonite church: a Mennonite Church

Canada executive, a Mennonite history professor, a Bible professor, a Christian Formation minister from Mennonite Church U.S.A.’s Western District Conference, and two pastors who lead or have led MC Canada congregations.

Don Penner, who has been in ministry for 27 years, currently as pastor of Shantz Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont., says that sometimes ploughing through books like Leviticus and Chronicles might be tough. At the same time, the Bible can connect readers to God as well as a greater story of God’s work in the world.



Don Penner

Readers can also glean solace from biblical figures who have gone through situations we find ourselves in today.

"It's not just a spiritual discipline of buckling down and ploughing ahead; it's life-giving for me," he says. "It gives me energy and hope and passion. . . . Like a good meal, I just keep coming back to that restaurant."

Decrease in familiarity with the Bible

It is ironic, Carol Penner (no relation to Don Penner) points out: In an age when information is available at our fingertips via the Internet, people are less familiar with the Bible than previous generations were.



Carol Penner

"Talking to pastors, I think people would agree with me," she says. A pastor for 12 years, she recently left The First Mennonite Church congregation in Vineland, Ont., to lead Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church in Edmonton. "It's a generalization, but it's a generalization that's accurate."

What are the reasons for this decline in biblical familiarity?

"People are busy," she says. "It's not that they don't think it's important, but they tend not to put a lot of time into biblical study."

And when it comes to a church's sermon series, for younger generations at least, topical studies are often more popular than biblical studies. "The older generation was always into Bible study," she says. "Biblical literacy was ingrained in them, and in the younger generation it's harder to find that."

Dan Epp-Tiessen, associate professor of Bible at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, believes the decline in biblical familiarity has something to do with the strength of Sunday school programs in



Dan Epp-Tiessen

the Mennonite church. "Our Sunday school programs are getting more and more watered down," he says. "When I was a kid 55 years ago and went to Sunday school, Sunday school went all year round, every Sunday of the year, unless Sunday fell on Christmas and New Year's."

Today, most churches do not offer Sunday school during June, July and August, and they also take a break around Christmas to coincide with school holidays.

While he does not want to sound alarmist or like he is simply harkening back to "the good old days," Epp-Tiessen believes there is a kind of cycle at work as the church is becoming more biblically illiterate.

"That means our Sunday school teachers are less biblically literate, they emphasize the Bible less in their teachings, which nurture the next generation . . . and it's that kind of spiral," he says, adding that his parents' generation lived in a more literal world in which the Bible was interpreted in a more simple way than it is today, when people believed that the world was created in six literal 24-hour days.

In 2014, as Mennonites have become more educated and acculturated, Epp-Tiessen says they simply do not read the Bible the same way they once did. "The authority of the Bible becomes lessened in some significant ways because of that process," he says.

Royden Loewen, professor of history and the Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, agrees. He adds that, for today's generation, the way one lives out one's faith is more important than biblical knowledge.

"In some respects, there's a reaction against feeling that knowledge itself was really important, and more of a new emphasis on lifestyle," he says, "so faith should make a difference in the way you live out your life, the way you interact

with the environment, the way you interact with disadvantaged groups. In the post-fundamentalist era that we live in . . . knowledge is not important so much as Christ's teachings: acceptance, tolerance, environmental concerns [and] concerns about nonviolence in an increasingly violent world."

Marlene Bogard adds that the hang-ups and preconceived notions people have about the Bible can get in the way of reading it. The minister of Christian Formation for MC U.S.A.'s Western District Conference (WDC)



Marlene Bogard

is also the creator of the Year of the Bible Network, a WDC initiative that encourages people to read their Bibles and provides resources for people who want to become more familiar with the Bible.

"Part of what our biblical literacy reflects is our emotional approach to the Scriptures, and how we were raised and what kind of framework our leaders approached it with," Bogard says. "For some Mennonites, say adults aged 30 to 80, they grew up in an era where, for whatever reason, the Bible was used to pound them down into scum. The Bible was a tool for judging and [monitoring] behaviour. In some ways, they have shelved the Bible because it wasn't useful for them. . . . That's a sad thing for me."

Carol Penner agrees. "My generation—people in their 50s and 60s—we know we're not as biblically literate as [older] people in our church, and we feel bad about that," she says. "We feel guilty about that. It was ingrained in us to read our Bible every day, and when we don't, we feel guilty."

She adds that sometimes people are scared of going to the Bible because they feel they have to do a lot of study and consult a number of secondary sources in order to properly understand what they are reading. "That does the text a disservice, because I think it can speak to us on its own," she says.



Royden Loewen

A people of amnesia?

Perhaps an emphasis on lifestyle rather than doctrine has been a healthy shift. At the same time, there are dangers when Christians are not familiar with the Bible.

They can lose the religious underpinnings of their values of nonviolence and caring for the environment, Loewen says, because they become ends in and of themselves. “From a church perspective, no faith should lose its contact with its sacred text,” he says.

At the same time, biblical knowledge is not a guarantee of religious faithfulness, Loewen adds. There can be too little biblical knowledge, but also too much emphasis on biblical inerrancy, to the point of idolatry, where biblical knowledge becomes an end in and of itself. “Our ideas of nonviolence and environmental stewardship and so on lack the mystery [today], the sense of the divine that these callings have,” Loewen says. “That’s problematic.”

Epp-Tiessen adds that if Christians do not remember the biblical story, they are in danger of becoming “a people of amnesia.” In one sense, he says, the Christian life depends on biblical literacy.

“To be Christian means to live every moment of every day as a person who remembers Jesus, and you can’t remember Jesus well unless you remember the biblical story that his whole life and ministry is based on,” he says. “Through that remembering, we get a sense of, ‘Oh, this is how I ought to live—because of who I remember.’ So how can one live as somebody who remembers Jesus if we don’t know . . . the foundational story?”

Bogard wonders what impact a lack of familiarity with the Bible might have on future church leadership. “If we want leaders five or 10 or 20 years from now, it’s important for our children and youth and young adults to know the Scriptures now,” she says. “Otherwise, what are we going to be? We might be a really nice Mennonite club or something. I just feel God’s invitation to partner with God includes being very savvy about God’s Word.”

Carol Penner says that, for some people, their path to God begins and ends with going to church and hearing a

sermon each Sunday. That is great, she says, adding, though, that it does not “maximize the potential of what the Bible could be for people.”

She adds that she is sad people are seemingly less willing to read the Bible on their own these days. “[There’s] lost potential,” Penner says. “God could teach people so much if they could use this, and they’re not availing themselves of it. It could really help people and they don’t have that tool in their hands when they need it.”

Promoting the Bible

MC Canada is continually involved in a number of initiatives to promote biblical literacy among its constituents, says Dave Bergen, executive minister of Christian Formation.

Most apparent to anyone in the church is the presence of curriculum materials like “Shine: Living in God’s light,” the new Sunday school series to be published by MennoMedia and Brethren Press in time for use this fall.

“We’re very directly involved in how that gets planned and written and so on,” Bergen says.

MC Canada is continually involved in developing new curriculum, whether it is for children, youth or adults. It also creates worship resources for Lent, Advent, Pentecost and a variety of other special topics. All of these materials are deeply steeped in Scripture, Bergen notes.

He adds that a bigger, longer-term project that may not necessarily be on the average person’s radar is the Believer’s Church Bible Commentary Series, a collection of scriptural analysis started in the 1970s that currently includes 26 volumes.

“That’s a tool for students and preachers and teachers . . . from an Anabaptist perspective,” Bergen says, adding that there is also a very clear biblical-literacy connection between MC Canada and the Being a Faithful Church process, which aims to discern issues of faithful living.



Dave Bergen

“A huge part of it is [asking], how do we understand Scripture?” he says. “How do we use Scripture to inform a conversation that’s very challenging to the church, and what’s the nature of Scripture’s ability to inform a question like this for which there are so many things Scripture doesn’t appear to conceive of in the way we’re experiencing it?”

The biennial assembly is another way MC Canada promotes biblical literacy. Planning for each assembly begins with a thematic focus and scriptural basis. The theme of this year’s assembly is “Wild hope: Faith for an unknown season,” based on Mark 4, where Jesus and his disciples encounter a storm. Bergen says assembly participants will look at that story and explore how it might connect to what the church is living through now.

South of the border, MC USA’s WDC is encouraging congregations to make use of its Year of the Bible Network resources. Conversations Bogard has had over the past 20 years with teachers, youth ministers and other church leaders, reflecting on the lack of biblical literacy in the church, propelled her to create the network. “It was a reaction to what we saw as a reality,” she says.

Year of the Bible launched this past August as a way to encourage people to read through the Bible in a year, but also to provide resources to highlight the many different ways there are to engage in the Bible.

The project’s website, YearOfTheBibleNetwork.org, includes multi-sensory resources for people of all ages, including reading plans, suggestions for Bible-related art projects, and a variety of events that allow participants to talk with professors and church leaders about different aspects of the Bible.

“We gave congregations complete freedom to do whatever they wanted,” Bogard says. “Some are taking the Bible reading very seriously, some are doing art, some are creating banners and others are working on multimedia projects. . . . It’s just been incredible to hear all these stories.”

A shaper of faith

Each person interviewed for this story

is positive about the benefits of Bible reading.

“My experience is that it’s a shaper of my faith,” Bogard says. “The Bible is my friend the same way I believe God is my friend. But I don’t hold dear everything in the Scriptures, either. Right now I am reading through the Bible. I’m still in the Old Testament and I’m not impressed.”

Reading some of the chapters is grueling, Bogard says, and she questions the way God sometimes shows God’s love for God’s people. “I was speaking with an 80-year-old who said, ‘Thank goodness the New Testament is on the horizon,’” Bogard says. “We know there’s a New Testament, we know there’s a Jesus, we know there’s a Christ.”

Don Penner from Shantz Mennonite Church says he often hears from people who tell him that reading the Bible—particularly the Old Testament—leaves them feeling bad about themselves. He suggests they read their Bible with a yellow highlighter in hand and mark each passage that reflects graciousness and mercy. “I did this myself,” he says. “I marked my Bible every time I saw God’s grace in the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Psalms and the Proverbs, and I’ll tell you, my Bible is very highlighted.”

Penner understands that people are wary of the Bible because they think it is full of threats and judgments. “Take another look,” he suggests. “Don’t just go by the memories you have of some sermon or Bible lesson. . . . Take a look, because you will be shocked at how patient, long-suffering and gracious God is, even in the Old Testament.”

The Bible is a path to God, according to Carol Penner. “It’s the Word of God, it’s a revelation,” she says. “Studying that revelation changes us. Spending time with the Word of God impacts us in a positive way.”

Different approaches

There is no one prescribed amount each Christian should read the Bible. Different devotional practices work better for some people than others.

“I don’t think there’s a direct one-to-one correlation [where] the more you read the Bible, the better Christian you

*I marked my Bible every time I saw God's grace
... and I'll tell you, my Bible is very highlighted.
(Don Penner)*

are,” Epp-Tiessen says. “It doesn’t work that way, and the devil can use Scripture for devilish purposes, so it also depends on what we do with the Bible and how we read it and so forth.”

For some people, daily Bible reading might work well, he says. For others, reading longer passages of Scripture a few times a week might work better.

Carol Penner agrees that different approaches to reading Scripture work for different people. If Christians want to strengthen their faith and draw closer to God, she says that can be accomplished with one verse or chapter because God can work through it. “If you’re pursuing God, if you’re longing to be with God, one psalm that you repeat every day can take you there,” she says. “God can give you new insight every day through that psalm.”

While some people are content to let their pastor read and interpret the Bible for them, Don Penner challenges them to look through the Bible on their own.

“You would see your name in the text if you went and did your own reading,” he says. “And isn’t that what we live for? To have God see us, know us and call us by name personally? That’s what I get out of personally reading the Scripture and knowing it. I feel like God sees me and knows me. . . . That’s all I need. More than answers. I don’t see the Bible predominantly as a book of answers, but as a book of God-with-us stories.”

He once took a hospice course and the instructor noted that the No. 1 thing people who are terminally ill want is to not be alone. He identifies with that. “That’s what the Bible does for me,” he says. “It says, ‘Don, you’re not alone.’” ❧

Aaron Epp is co-editor of Young Voices and the originator of Canadian Mennonite’s Year of Reading Biblically.



/// For discussion

1. What biblical movies have you seen? Will you watch the upcoming releases mentioned by Aaron Epp? Do you think Hollywood movies are an effective way to learn stories from the Bible? How do these movies influence our understanding of the Bible?
2. Do you agree with Carol Penner that there has been a general decline in biblical knowledge in our lifetime? How do you explain this decline among people who were raised in the church? How much of it is due to changes in our Sunday school curriculum? Why are we not as enthusiastic to know the Bible as our grandparents were?
3. What hinders us from reading the Bible? How guilty should we feel if we don’t read the Bible regularly? Are we in danger of losing contact with our sacred text? What are the long-term implications of biblical illiteracy?
4. Don Penner says that he sees the Bible not so much as a book of answers as he does a collection of God-with-us stories. Do you agree? What are the implications of these two ways of viewing the Bible?
5. What resources or activities have you found helpful in increasing your knowledge of the Bible? How can we best encourage each other to know the Bible better?

—BY BARB DRAPER

VIEWPOINTS

/// Readers write

We welcome your comments and publish most letters sent by subscribers intended for publication. This section is largely an open forum for the sharing of views. Letters are the opinion of the writer only—publication does not mean endorsement by the magazine or the church. Keep letters to 400 words or less and address issues rather than individuals. We do not countenance rancour or animosity. Personal attacks are inappropriate and will not see the light of print. Please send letters to be considered for publication to letters@canadianmennonite.org or by postal mail or fax, marked "Attn: Readers Write" (our address is on page 3). Letters should include the author's contact information and mailing address. Letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Preference will be given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

✉ Is the paraclete always comforting?

RE: "SPIRITUAL ATTUNEMENT: Part 4 of a series," Jan. 6, page 16.

I enjoyed Troy Watson's recent column. The image of being pickled in the Spirit is a great one.

It may, however, be worth considering if the paraclete always "comforts, encourages, uplifts and defends." Watson speaks from his own experience of coming to terms with critical voices masquerading as God, but there may be other experiences which call forth different responses from the paraclete.

Could it be that the Spirit of God sometimes does make us uncomfortable? Convicts us of sin? Gets under our skin? I can think of numerous biblical examples.

It's true that God wants the very best for us, but this doesn't preclude the paraclete from being a pain sometimes!

SCOTT BRUBAKER-ZEHR, KITCHENER, ONT.

FROM OUR LEADERS

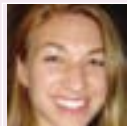
A few of my favourite things

KIRSTEN HAMM

One of my favourite things is rediscovering things: a movie I haven't seen in a couple years, or putting my iTunes on shuffle and letting it find some forgotten classics.

One of my new favourite things to rediscover has been the book of Genesis. Having accepted the Year of Reading Biblically challenge from Aaron Epp, *Canadian Mennonite's* Young Voices co-editor, I have been faithfully reading my three to four chapters a day and have found myself genuinely surprised at how new much of it seemed. I had fallen into that dangerous pitfall of thinking that it was all familiar and well known, of putting the Old Testament on a shelf marked "irrelevant," and forgetting that the Good Book really is a good book.

I had forgotten that in the story of



Joseph, Reuben, his oldest brother, had secretly planned to free Joseph from the pit the other brothers had thrown him into, and had been devastated when the slave traders came and he was unable to save Joseph (Genesis 37).

I had forgotten that the Bible is, in part, a story with intrigue and plot twists, beginnings and endings, love lost and love found. Not that we read it in the same spirit as we would a good mystery novel, but we don't always need to come to Scripture as though we are writing a sermon on it. While that might sometimes be the case, since starting this daily reading I have been reminded that the Bible can be read simply as a way of reconnecting with our history and reacquainting ourselves with God.

And that is why this daily reading and rediscovery has become one of my favourite things. It is usually the first thing

I do in the morning, even before turning on CBC Radio 2 Morning—another one of my favourite things—and throughout the day I often find myself reflecting back on what I read. Thinking about the characters, imagining what their daily lives would have been like, and how they would have felt about this God who delivered them out of Egypt and promised them more descendants than the stars. Thinking about God's relationship with them, and how he continues to be in relationship with us today.

Seeing how God is with the area church of Saskatchewan is another one of my new favourite things. Like most area churches, we are a diverse body, but as I continue to travel, listen and learn, the one thing that does not change is a sense of God's presence and guidance. God has remained an active part of our story, which has really been his story all along.

I have many new favourite things, but most of all I am excited about getting to know God, and what he is doing with his church, and from what I've been reading I think that might be one of his favourite things, too.

Kirsten Hamm is area church youth minister for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan.

✉ **Young Voice praised
for 'excellent article'**

RE: "REMEMBERING YODER honestly," Jan. 6,
page 33.

My thanks to Susie Guenther Loewen for her

excellent article.

Canadian Mennonite has published several articles referring to John Howard Yoder's sexual abuse of women. I have long wondered what the abuse consisted of, since "sexual abuse" can cover anything from looks or words to touching and brutal rape.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

The Dithering Age

PHIL WAGLER

It shows up in the smallest of ways. Send out an e-vite or ask people to confirm their attendance and you'll see proof that we are part of the Dithering Age.

Perhaps, like yours, our church routinely asks people to sign up for events with ample notice. Every conceivable means of communication known to the #drowninginoptionshumanrace is used, and yet increasingly without fail almost no one will RSVP until the very last minute, and then only after complaining they just found out about it. I'm beginning to think we should simply tell people it's always the eleventh hour (Matthew 20:6). I must confess, I can play the almost latecomer as well as anyone else and am grateful for the grace that pays the same wages.

And then in my daily tour of online papers, I came across an article by Sarah Boesveld on our culture's peculiar attitude regarding children. Some recent studies revealed this ground-breaking truth:



North America has shifted to 'thinking of freedom as freedom from obligations, not the freedom to choose our deep commitments.'

Couples who decide not to have children tend to be happier than those yoked to pip-squeaks. In other news, the sun is hot, Manitoba is cold and Maine will not anytime soon become South Quebec.

Forgive my Canadian sarcasm, but these studies could have been done by second graders asked to draw pictures of

what their parents looked like half-way through summer holidays. Of course, intentionally childless couples are happier than their burdened counterparts in the Dithering Age. It can't be otherwise. After all, we define happiness in purely selfish terms these days and, frankly, children bring the end of that once "happy" place. If happiness means doing what we want, then this can only lead us to dither. After all, what if I make a commitment today for something 10 days away, only to discover I don't "feel" like going the day of? What if it doesn't make me happy?

It is one thing to apply this thought process to showing up to a Saturday workshop; it's quite another when we make this the lens by which we measure the investment and commitment of our lives into things that ultimately mean the end of us. And this, any parent or youth worker will tell you, is precisely the unhappy lesson of investing in the next generation.

Now this little tirade is not about children or parenting at all, for being purposefully single or childless can be a greater kingdom investment than married parents ever make. Boesveld's article simply awakens the point that we are the Dithering Age and, I would argue, this growing cultural inability to choose any meaningful convictions or commitments

by which to live our lives, including spiritual ones—apart from the yearning for the burden-less freedom to experience whatever we choose—is a cancer in our churches and an eraser of the witness of the good news of God's kingdom fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Boesveld quotes family historian Stephanie Coontz, that North America has shifted to "thinking of freedom as freedom from obligations, not the freedom to choose our deep commitments." This is a radical and deeply ironic shift.

Older generations of Canadians made great sacrifices to find freedom where certain commitments and convictions could flourish unhindered for them and their offspring. Many reading this are the beneficiaries of those sacrifices. Many new generations still enter our country every day seeking this hope.

If Coontz is correct, however, the tragedy is that we are now enamoured not in the least with a land where we are free to choose deep commitments and throw ourselves into them. Now we simply want to be free from any commitments whatsoever! Does this not smell like the end of genuine freedom? And what does this mean for the future of Christ-centred mission and the fellowships and organ-

izations seeking to live it out? Discuss amongst yourselves, if you can get anyone to commit to the conversation.

Phil Wagler dithered for a long time about what to write here. Isn't that ironic? He and his family live in Surrey, B.C. If you get around to it, you can converse with him at phil_wagler@yahoo.ca.

Loewen's article mentions "extra-marital affairs," which I assume means sexual intercourse in a situation of serious emotional power imbalance but without physical force. If this is not correct, then I hope someone will enlighten me and perhaps others who have wondered as I have. (*There is no indication in the record that Yoder's sexual abuse included sexual intercourse. Ed.*)

I was also interested in her argument about the likelihood of his actions, and the attitude implied, affecting his writings. Without having studied the issue or read much of Yoder's writing, I cannot see how her argument could be other than correct, since he is addressing issues that relate closely to his own behaviour.

EDWARD J. WIEBE, EDMONTON

NEW CANADIAN VOICE

Borscht, congee or both?

BRIAN QUAN

I've heard of borscht, but I can't really say that I've eaten it. And only very recently had I come across the word *zwieback*. I needed to Google that one. I would hazard a guess that I would receive perplexed looks if I were to ask the people in my church if they could identify these two items.

However, if I asked them if they knew what *congee*, *tong sui* and *xiaolongbao* were, not only would they know what it was, all of them would have probably had it for a meal during the week.

I've been part of the Chinese Mennonite church for more the half of my life, but I must confess that growing up in a Mennonite church has been a source of confusion and mystery for me. Naturally, my friends are very inquisitive when they find out that I am a Chinese Mennonite. So when they ask, "How did that happen?" I have a hard time giving them an appropriate answer.

I believe it was by divine appointment that I ended up as a Mennonite, since it wasn't by choice that I ended up a part of this community. In fact, they came to find me.

One day a pair of really nice people showed up on our front porch. They spoke to my parents about a new Chinese-language school opening up just down the street. They promised

we'd learn to read, write and even sing in Chinese. No Asian parent would turn down an offer like this.

This was the humble beginning of my connection to this church community. As I matured into adulthood, I still had no sense of clarity of what it meant for me to be an Anabaptist Mennonite. Having been a part of the church for over two decades, I was still unable to clearly articulate the distinctions of being an Anabaptist.

What kept me connected to the church wasn't its history, but it was the sense of belonging. I felt a strong connection with the people in the church as we discovered faith together. Although I didn't have the privilege of being raised in a

It is only now that I have had the opportunity to start my journey in discovering the rich history of Anabaptism. I have been thoroughly enjoying my time learning, reading and interacting with my friends in this community. Reading the experiences of those who have gone before me has been tremendously enriching. At this point, I feel that I'm just beginning my journey of faith as an Anabaptist. The more that I learn, the more I want my life and teaching to reflect the Mennonite convictions of authenticity, simplicity, community, peace and nonviolence.

At this point, do I see a distinction between being a follower of Jesus and being a Mennonite? I would say yes. I don't believe one can be a follower of Jesus in isolation from a context. There is always a historical and biblical context that defines an individual's faith. Being a



Although I didn't have the privilege of being raised in a genetic Anabaptist community I feel that being a Mennonite is a gift.

genetic Anabaptist community I feel that being a Mennonite is a gift. It was not earned nor chosen, but given.

My identity confusion was shelved for a decade as I pastored a church in the Christian and Missionary Alliance of Canada. However, my identity issues resurfaced very recently. It has been a refreshing experience to be invited to come back and to serve as the pastor of the English-speaking congregation in the church in which I grew up.

Mennonite means that I've embraced a distinct biblical and historical framework stemming from Anabaptism. There is great value in holding these distinctions. For me, being a Mennonite is one way of following Christ, and it is a good way.

Brian Quan is pastor of the English-speaking congregation at Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church. He holds a master's degree in pastoral studies from Tyndale Seminary, Toronto.

✉ History prof questions disclaimer for John Howard Yoder books

I AM DISAPPOINTED to read that MennoMedia is issuing a disclaimer regarding John Howard Yoder's books on account of his sins ("Disclaimer to be included in John Howard Yoder books," Jan. 6, page 28). What is MennoMedia planning to do with the books of all its other authors, and what are the roots of the desire to continue to chasten a man who has died?

There is a caution for all of us in Romans 2:1-3: "*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. . . So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?*"

I have similar misgivings with Susie Guenther Loewen's comments about Yoder's books in the same issue ("Remembering Yoder honestly," page 33). She says that Yoder's "'revolutionary subordination' . . . never did sit right with me." She describes it as "abstract, context-less gender equality," which does not analyze "deep-seated power imbalances" between men and women.

Fair enough. It's a legitimate assessment. Literature on gender in his generation is full of such descriptions. When we see such time-bound observations, we note this and proceed with our own writing, conscious of the judgment of the generation which follows us.

Loewen and the people she cites rightly shift the responsibility onto Yoderians and negligent conference and seminary officials. Still, she has decided to mention Yoder's abusiveness when using his books. What will she do with the books of other sinners she uses?

Her claim to honesty is astonishing. In general, it would be good for us all to make claims to innocent knowledge with great care, and to focus on our own living generation. It is important to challenge our tendency as humans to glorify mostly those with whom we agree and whose writings are pleasing to us.

I attended a total of five Mennonite educational institutions. The tendency to glorify professors uncritically was present in all of them.

JOHN KLASSEN, LANGLEY, B.C.

John Klassen is professor emeritus in Trinity Western University's Department of History.

✉ Stories about John Howard Yoder must stop . . . for his family's sake

RE: "REMEMBERING YODER honestly," Jan. 6, page 33.

I disagree with Susie Guenther Loewen's comment: "I don't think Yoderians have been sufficiently conscientious about acknowledging and naming his abusiveness and its ongoing ramifications."

As deplorable and truly sad as were John Howard Yoder's actions, I believe that there has been enough coverage of this matter in *Canadian Mennonite* and other publications. As a friend of the family, I feel for his wife and children when this matter is repeated over and over again. We still read the psalms of David and refer to the patriarchs of the Old Testament in spite of their sexual misconduct.

Whether or not Yoder can be blamed for the lack of "female academic theologians," I am not convinced. I recognize that readers and students have felt deep disappointment when the news broke—in fact, I was in Elkhart, Ind., when the story hit the news—and have met some of the "victims." But who can judge the sincerity of his response to the disciplinary action of the church?

I, too, want to hold "his brilliance and his brokenness together," but enough has been published.

HELEN DUECK, WINNIPEG

✉ Unlearn the Bible? A thousand times no

RE: "UNLEARNING THE Bible to welcome homosexuals," Jan. 6, page 15.

Gerhard Neufeld asks, "What is the Bible?"

It is God's love letter to a hopelessly lost and fallen human race, showing us the way of salvation, eternal life, joy and hope:

- **THE WORD** of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12).
- **SALVATION IS** found in no one else (Acts 4:12).
- **GOD'S WORD** in our heart keeps us from sinning (Psalm 119:11).

Jesus quoted Scripture to defeat the temptations of Satan. He suffered and died on the cross for our sins and arose again as victor over sin, death and Satan. His Sermon on the Mount is his kingdom consultation for happiness, life and morality. Each person must choose either the broad way or narrow way, serve God or mammon, and build on a foundation of rock or sand.

So my advice is, dig deep in the Word, have faith in Jesus, pray, repent, trust the guidance of the Holy

Spirit to renew your mind and purge all evil thoughts and violence, knowing that the best is yet to come.

But “unlearn the Bible” and more than two thousand years of Christian education? A thousand times no.

NEIL KLASSEN, ROSEMARY, ALTA.

✉ **Setting the record straight about thrift shop contributions to MCC**

RE: “MCC IS more than thrift stores to MCI students,” Jan. 6, page 31.

An error was reported in this article regarding Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) thrift shop contributions to the MCC Manitoba budget. The most recent audited financial statements of MCC Manitoba (March 31, 2013) report thrift shop contributions of \$2.639 million, but the article reported “more than \$6 million of MCC Manitoba’s budget is covered by the province’s thrift store sales.”

While the total sales of MCC thrift shops in Manitoba may be in the range of \$6 million, the average contribution to MCC Manitoba’s budget is in the range of 50 percent of gross sales. Operating costs, mortgage payments, capital reserve allocations and additional contributions to local community charities typically represent the remaining 50 percent.

RON JANZEN, WINNIPEG

Ron Janzen is executive director of MCC Manitoba.

✉ **Reader grateful for those who provide ‘a safe place’**

RE: “SILENCE AND spinning wheels,” Jan. 20, page 26.

The story of Martha and Paul Snyder providing a safe place for those who, because they are not heterosexual, are shunned by their family, caused me to think of my mother and my mother-in-law.

Both suffered being slashed with a pointer across their fingers because they were part of the 10 percent of the population who were not right-handed. They wrote with the right hand at school. At home, they were left-handed. I am thankful that these two women were safe at home.

I am grateful that they did not live in the years 1450-1750, when left-handed people were considered to be witches. Even as late as the 1960s and ’70s, Catholic school teachers inflicted corporal punishment on those who were not right-handed.

It seems that sometimes we do not like minorities. We find it difficult to understand those who are not like us. We all know of the past persecution and killing

of those not heterosexual. We have all heard of what occurred under Hitler’s regime. In some parts of the world it is still illegal to be in the minority group that is not heterosexual, and the punishment is death.

Those shunned are out in the cold, wrapped in a sheet of condemnation. Some have found a safe house and are wrapped in a warm blanket of love. For those who provide a safe house, I am grateful. Perhaps someday the church, too, will become a safe haven.

BERTHA LANDERS,
R.R. 1, WATERLOO, ONT.

✉ **‘Dominion’ is biblical imperative for creation, not ‘stewardship’**

RE: “STUDENTS SAY YESS! to creation care,” Jan. 6, page 30.

How heartening to see the students at Rosthern (Sask.) Junior College taking initiative on matters of earth justice and doing so in conversation with their first nation neighbours. May the wider church have the courage to follow their example.

Yet one thing puzzles me. The article states: “The Faith and Life Committee chose the word ‘stewardship’ intentionally as part of the event’s title. Although not part of most teenagers’ vocabulary, the word is used in biblical texts pertaining to caring for the earth and is a word that carries with it the idea of moral responsibility.”

Unfortunately, this is simply untrue. Indeed, stewardship has become an eco-theology buzzword, but it is not a biblical concept. Rather, it has arisen from a desire to tone down the biblical imperatives to “*subdue the earth and have dominion over it*” (Genesis 1:28).

This desire is understandable, even commendable. But I think it’s a wrong and misleading strategy to simply claim that “stewardship” is what the Bible really says. A better strategy, I propose, would be to face honestly the fact that the Bible has nothing much to say about ecology as we now understand it, nor about the ecological crisis that is now upon us.

Once we have made such an admission, we may, I hope, be able to see new and deeper—if less direct—ways in which the Bible can be a resource for a justice-seeking, eco-aware 21st-century church.

GLENN SAWATZKY, VANCOUVER




Do you know of someone in your congregation not getting Canadian Mennonite?

Ask your church administrator to add them to the list. It is already paid for.

VIEWPOINT

I'm an Olympic atheist

BY WILL BRAUN

SENIOR WRITER

Amid the medal counts, terror threats and Norwegian curling flare lies the notion that the Olympics make the world a better place.

The goal of "Olympism"—yes, it's a real word—says the Olympic Charter, is to "contribute to building a peaceful and better world." Who could argue?

But what does ski jumping have to do with a better world? How is a fist-pumping, adulated athlete at the bottom of a snowy half pipe contributing to humanity? How would Canada "owning the podium" help the world?

"We want to use the power of our values and symbols to promote the positive, peaceful development of global society," said Thomas Bach, International Olympic Committee (IOC) president, at the United Nations last November.

Bach spoke about the Olympic "ideal," "movement" and "spirit," in addition to the "sacred . . . Olympic truce," a UN formality that invokes the ancient Greek tradition whereby the kings of three city states temporarily called off hostilities in favour of sport.

To be fair, the pageantry of nations gathering in a festive spirit creates good vibes in the global village. Humanity smiles. For a couple weeks (Feb. 7 to 23), the world is aglow with goodwill. There is some truth in this, but Olympism's model of global betterment and international togetherness lends itself better to spectacle than scrutiny.

Any sense of togetherness at the 2012 London Games, for instance, certainly did not apply to the podium. Only 85 of the 204 countries with Olympic



committees won medals. Canada took home twice as much hardware as India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria combined, countries home to more than a quarter of humanity.

The winter games are even more club-ish. Ninety percent of the medals went to nine percent of the world's nations at the 2010 Vancouver Games. Only an eighth of the world's countries were even there.

If we look at what Olympism has yielded for some of the countries most in need of peace and goodwill, the picture is even less inclusive. Afghanistan has two bronze medals to its credit—ever. Sudan, one silver. Democratic Republic of Congo, zilch. Haiti has been shut out since 1928.

It's not the IOC's job to rectify that, but it is its job to be honest. Its hyped-up global goodwill brand betrays a reality that is much closer to an advertising bonanza tacked on to a fairly elite recreational entertainment event.

In addition to the global peace narrative, there are at least two other scripts that play big at the Olympics:

- **ONE IS**, "Try hard, believe in your dreams, don't give up and your dreams will come true." This may be true for the infinitesimal fraction of human beings who end up on an Olympic podium, but the reason a 2010 Haitian earthquake orphan will not make it to the Olympics is probably not because she doesn't believe staunchly enough in her dreams.
- **A MORE** accurate rendering of the Olympic dream narrative would be that a highly select number of people who demonstrated remarkable perseverance and

dedicated a lot of time to sport—most likely at the expense of family or causes greater than sport—were able to beat some other people who also tried very hard and sacrificed balanced lives.

Neither version has much to do with global well-being, although they can make for compelling vignettes in between sporting events. An acquaintance of mine who won a rowing medal in Atlanta offered a more realistic perspective on her Olympic heroics: "I can move a piece of wood backward across a lake really fast."

Another Olympic narrative is, "Buy stuff." It's not hard to understand why Olympic promoters want to present the Games as something more than just people hurtling down hills or rocks sliding on pebbled ice. As the Olympic website says, the games are "one of the most effective international marketing platforms in the world." That is due largely to an ingenious Olympic brand that is about so much more than sport.

Coca-Cola, McDonald's and General Electric spend big bucks to cozy their brands up to the Olympic one. Forget the fact that General Electric is a major arms manufacturer or that the Big Mac hardly seems like a symbol of peace.

Just the same, the IOC considers these and other sponsors "an intrinsic part of the Olympic family." That familial embrace is more than some of the most ravaged and populous countries receive. Coca-Cola and McDonald's clearly have more to gain at the Olympics than the majority of the world's nations.

Like much of life, the Olympics are laden with contradictions. The Games are a symbol of togetherness and a gathering of the elite. They promote ethics and advertising, "universal principles" and McNuggets. In order to address these contradictions, the IOC should either put values ahead of hype, or, more realistically, set the lofty ideals aside and stop pretending that the Games are more than just that, games.

I'm not against sport. I just don't believe in Olympism. ❧

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Friesen—Isaiah (b. Jan. 14, 2014), to Isaac Friesen and Wanda Wall-Bergen, Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Waterloo, Ont.

Kelterborn—Weston Samuel (b. Jan. 4, 2014), to Scott and Melissa Kelterborn, Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

Kleinschmidt—George Francis (b. Oct. 18, 2013), to Anna (Friesen) and Paul Kleinschmidt, Waterloo North Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Baptisms

Mary Dupuis, Melody Penner—Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man., Jan. 26, 2014.

Alvaro Martinez, Murray Oliver—Danforth Mennonite, Toronto, Nov. 3, 2013.

Deaths

Bender—Elma, 95 (b. Oct. 15, 1918; d. Jan. 18, 2014), Nith Valley Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Breul—Tina, 82 (d. Feb. 3, 2014), Springfield Heights Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Brush—Elsa (nee Papke), 94 (b. Feb. 14, 1919; d. Dec. 25, 2013), Harrow Mennonite, Ont.

Cressman—Kenneth, 78 (b. Feb. 10, 1935; d. Jan. 6, 2014), Nith Valley Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Dyck—Dallas Frank, 49 (b. Nov. 18, 1964; d. Jan. 13, 2014), North Star Mennonite, Drake, Sask.

Dyck—Nick, 88 (b. April 25, 1925; d. Dec. 19, 2013), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Good—Martha, 90 (b. Jan. 26, 1924; d. Jan. 26, 2014), Nith Valley Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Hoover—Douglas, 74 (b. April 6, 1939; d. Jan. 4, 2014), Wideman Mennonite, Markham, Ont.

Langelotz—Walter, 83 (b. Feb. 8, 1930; d. Jan. 19, 2014), Springfield Heights Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Letkeman—Elvira (nee Derksen), 87 (b. July 20, 1926; d. Dec. 23, 2013), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Pauls—Frank, 91 (b. Jan. 12, 1922; d. Nov. 15, 2013), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Penner—Helmut, 93 (b. Feb. 14, 1920; d. Nov. 28, 2013), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Roth—Vicki, 62 (b. Dec. 31, 1951; d. Jan. 12, 2014), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

Spenler—John, 86 (b. June 6, 1927; d. Dec. 29, 2013), Poole Mennonite, Milverton, Ont.

Steinman—Emma (nee Yantzi), 86 (b. March 22, 1927; d. Jan. 18, 2014), Tavistock Mennonite, Ont.

Thiessen—Walter, 84 (b. Dec. 24, 1928; d. Sept. 30, 2013), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Unger—Jacob, 88 (b. July 28, 1925; d. Jan. 28, 2014), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Widrick—Harold, 90 (b. May 4, 1923; d. Jan. 28, 2014), Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Wiebe—Anna, 86 (b. Jan. 22, 1927; d. Jan. 17, 2014), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Zacharias—David, 91 (b. May 14, 1922; d. Jan. 24, 2014), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones

announcements within four months of the event.

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

Pontius' Puddle



GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

For information and clarification



Perspectives and updates from the Being a Faithful Church discernment process

Being a Faithful Church Task Force

As a task force we have been publicly silent as perspectives are expressed and information is shared all around us.

This silence has been intentional. We want to lead a process that respects the voices of our churches, and we have listened without debate or comment.

We are encouraged that the process is generating very good discussion and discernment.

We are grateful for the many voices that have spoke, both publicly and privately.

At this stage—the fifth year of discernment—we do wish to share some perspectives that are a bit more than a “report.” We trust that this can be helpful as information and clarification.

Participation encouraging

The participation of individuals and congregations across the regions of Mennonite Church Canada has been encouraging. To date, about 110 congregations have responded. We are anticipating that even more will do so. It is likely that we will hear from at least 60 percent to 65 percent of MC Canada congregations directly. This number does not include the delegate discussions at the assemblies, which would increase the percentage even more. This high rate of response is quite abnormal in broad discernment processes, and we are grateful for the insight and wisdom being shared among us.

There has been an audible silence from the “newer Canadian” congregations. We are making a concerted effort to hear from them directly. Thus far, this effort has been much appreciated.

Until now, the responses to the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process and papers

have been overwhelmingly positive. Each draft and recommendation that has been taken to the MC Canada assemblies in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 has been approved by the delegates by near consensus (with two or three votes against so far). This has given us a strong foundation upon which to build. We do want to remind us all that this is a “building” process. We cannot repeat everything from previous studies in each new study. But we do assume that the previous

material is there, and that we can build on it.

We continue to hear very positive responses to the process in the congregations. Some see this as an opportunity for a broadly based conversation on sexuality that is very helpful and long overdue. Others appreciate the resources that are being provided and the consultative style that is being used to engage congregations and individuals. Still others express appreciation that the process is designed to be truly grassroots, and the discernment is not imposed by a committee or other body.

Not all are engaged, however

We know, however, that not all have chosen to participate. While this is predictable and understandable, we would wish for 100 percent participation.

Already at the beginning of this multi-stage process, we indicated that as we get closer to the actual discussion of sexuality, resistance would begin to build and participation could begin to drop. There

is some evidence, although not much yet, that this is beginning to happen with the BFC 5 paper: “Biblical perspectives on human sexuality.”

We have been alerted to a number of reasons for some reluctance now. Some are suspicious that the outcomes of this process are pre-determined, and that input is not really welcome. Some are concerned that the process is moving either too quickly or not quickly enough, thereby sensing that responding is not worth the effort. Some are concerned that opening the discussion of sexuality more overtly in the congregation will generate conflict and even division, and there is a reluctance to do this. Others indicate that the process drains “missional energy” away from other important agendas of the church. Some have a sense that they are not sufficiently prepared biblically and theologically to respond in a helpful way.

Still others support the process, but indicate that their congregations have recently gone through a similar process and do

There has been an audible silence from the ‘newer Canadian’ congregations. We are making a concerted effort to hear from them directly.

not want to repeat what has already been done. Still others have indicated that they have already reached a decision regarding underlying issues of same-sex relationships, and don’t feel a need to influence the broader church with their decision. Some individuals respond with the disclaimer: “I am not speaking for my congregation, but I do want to express my opinions.” Such input is also welcome.

We note that each congregation has its own story. Most are actively participating. There are those that are not necessarily opposed to the process but, because of their own story, do not wish to participate at this point. We also note that we are hearing representative voices from a very broad range of preferences.

Sociologists teach us that in a process like this, we should be aware of the “bell curve.” This insight is also becoming apparent to us. The “bell curve” suggests that we should expect a spectrum of opinion and understanding in our church.

Approximately 15 percent at both ends of the spectrum will have their minds made up, and will either not participate or will participate with the assumption that the process will not change the perspectives they already hold. The 70 percent portion between the two ends will be vitally interested in discussion, learning and discernment. This phenomenon, we believe, is also apparent in our process.

Seeking 'God's will for us in our time and place'

We can also share some further perspectives from experiences so far.

We wish to repeat again that the process has only one pre-determined outcome: our common desire to be a church that faithfully discerns—as best we can—God's will for us in our time and place. This desire is based on a conviction that Scripture discerned in the body of Christ, with the power of the Holy Spirit, is a faithful and needed guide. All other potential outcomes are subsumed within this larger intention.

While this process is designed to help us look carefully at challenges of sexuality, and, more specifically, same-sex realities among us, we need to keep in mind the larger intention. Discerning faithfulness is a normal and ongoing vocation of being the church in the world. This is a missional vocation, not one that detracts us from our missional purposes.

The process challenges us: Can we still be a biblically discerning church in the midst of 21st-century Canadian realities? Can we be such a church together from coast to coast to coast? We are already noting some preferences. For some, the autonomy of the local congregation should be a higher priority than how others may understand things. Others hope that the desire for autonomy can be moderated by covenant with others, even when we disagree. Still others suggest that the voices from our worldwide communion represented by Mennonite World Conference should also be heard and taken into account. We also hear the concern that the process must begin to take more seriously the voices of social, political, legal and scientific movements around us.

We are noting that testing individual or congregational discernment with what

others have discerned is not easy, and for this reason it is not always welcome. Living in the midst of diversity is uncomfortable. This means that we will need to pay close attention to finding ways in which diversity in our body can be acknowledged in healthy ways.

Living in the midst of diversity is uncomfortable. ... [W]e will need to pay close attention to finding ways in which diversity in our body can be acknowledged in healthy ways.

We wish to highlight one important fruit of the process already. From congregational and individual responses, together we have identified guidelines to interpret the Bible in healthy ways. These are summarized in the "Paths and ditches" document. This is quite a remarkable achievement. We have heard often that we need to have some help in how to read the Bible in healthy ways. We now have a common framework that can be used when discernment points to diversity. This framework

surely is not the last word. But it is likely the first time we have had such a resource generated by the "pews" in our quiver of resources. We are truly grateful.

The 21st century will be a stimulating and challenging time for the church to be the church in Canada. The Holy Spirit is

with us, and God's presence is guiding us. This process is strengthening our muscles in being a biblically, faithful, discerning church. And that will serve us well as we move forward together. ☘

The Being a Faithful Church Task Force was appointed by the Mennonite Church Canada General Board. It includes Willard Metzger, Andrew Reesor-McDowell, Rudy Baergen, Hilda Hildebrand, Laura Loewen and Robert J. Suderman.

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COVER STORY

Youth learn to write their own obituaries

Zombie-themed weekend provides opportunity to explore life and death issues

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent
WALDHEIM, SASK.

A roomful of zombies set the frightful scene for this year's senior-high retreat organized by the Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization (SMYO). While they weren't real zombies, they were dealing with real life and death issues.

Garth and Claire Ewert Fisher helped nearly 50 youth and their sponsors explore the weekend's chosen theme, "Zombie apocalypse: Questions about life, death and life after death."

Using the zombie theme was a way to explore a serious and relevant topic "without it being quite so scary," said Kirsten Hamm, Mennonite Church Saskatchewan's youth minister. Youth were invited to dig into the theme by writing their own obituaries. Sharing what they wrote was optional.

The event, held from Jan. 31 to Feb. 2 at Shekinah Retreat Centre, was timed to follow exam week, and provided needed down time for the young participants to rest, relax and enjoy each other's company.

For many, the retreat afforded a chance to see friends they only see during summer camp and at SMYO events.

And, as Hamm pointed out, because

Shekinah has no cell phone service, the retreat was also a break from technology.

Between sessions, participants enjoyed



Youth at the Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization's senior-high retreat keep the ball moving with a revolving ping pong game at their annual retreat.

games and indoor and outdoor recreational activities.

Mackenzie Nicolle described the singing and worship times as "a good vibe" because everyone participated fully.

McKenzie Funk anticipated Saturday evening's coffee house would be the high point of the retreat for him. ✎

✎ Briefly noted

Historian to examine church's response to Yoder abuse

A Mennonite Church U.S.A. discernment group, formed in August 2013 to continue healing and reconciliation work in the wake of John Howard Yoder's abuse of women and some ongoing questions about how the church responded to it, has invited Rachel Waltner Goossen, a history professor at Washburn University, Topeka, Kan., to engage historical research and documentation on this subject. She has 25 years of experience writing about Mennonite history, peace history and women's history. She is a graduate of Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., and a member of Southern Hills Mennonite Church in Topeka. Goossen will work with previously unreleased written sources as well as conduct oral history interviews with people who were involved in institutional accountability and discipline processes, and others who experienced or were knowledgeable about Yoder's abuse of women. Her intent is to make her scholarship available through churchwide and scholarly publications, including *The Mennonite*, *Mennonite World Review* and the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. She anticipates completing her work by the summer of 2015. Discernment group members are hopeful that a careful synthesis of historical evidence will help them more fully understand church-related accountability processes—both what they achieved in healing and reconciliation and ways in which they failed.

—Mennonite Church U.S.A.

The Bechtel Lectures

in Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies



Conrad Grebel
University College

Thursday, March 6, 2014 at 7:30pm

**Writing the Amish into
North American History**

Steven Nolt
Professor of History
Goshen College



Friday, March 7, 2014 at 7:30pm

**Writing Low German Mennonites
into a History of Canada**

Royden Loewen
Professor of History
Chair of Mennonite Studies
University of Winnipeg

Reception to follow



Chapel, Conrad Grebel University College

140 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, ON

grebel.ca/bechtel



Betty Pries of Associates Resourcing the Church discusses her presentation with Jim Brown, pastor of Riverdale Mennonite Church, Millbank, Ont., at Conrad Grebel University College's 'Ministry from the inside out' seminar on Jan. 24.

'Swallowing your brain'

Pastors, church leaders tend to the spiritual practices of leadership

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

“I swallow my brain,” in order to be fully present and to listen deeply.

Betty Pries of Associates Resourcing the Church (ARC) used this anatomical analogy with an ecumenical group of 40 pastors and church leaders gathered for “Ministry from the inside out: Tending to the spiritual practices of leadership” on Jan. 24. The session was part of Conrad Grebel University College’s Certificate in Conflict Management Program.

As a mediator and educator, Pries said she has many opportunities to practise “brain swallowing” in order to listen deeply and without judgment to those on either side of a conflict. Deep or contemplative

listening means not forming answers while others are speaking, but attending to what they are saying and to what is happening deep inside oneself. Like other contemplative practitioners, she is trying to hear what God is saying in the situation while hearing the words, emotions and deep longings of the one speaking.

According to a report by Andrew Irvine

[Betty] Pries believes that, for the church to be a successful place to grow people in more intimate relationships with God/Jesus, leaders need to be regularly experiencing God in their lives.

of the Center for Clergy Care regarding a survey across denominations, “89 percent of pastors never pray personally [only professionally],” and while “92.7 percent read Scripture, [they] do not hear it speaking to them personally.”

Pries believes that, for the church to be a successful place to grow people in more intimate relationships with God/Jesus, leaders need to be regularly experiencing God in their lives. Focussing on the story from Genesis 32:24-31 of Jacob wrestling with the angel/God, she drew the conclusion that it was through suffering and surrender/release that leaders are prepared to lead in this current post-Christendom period. Suffering makes leaders aware that they cannot do the work alone, that they need God, she said, while surrender/release is the inner action of trusting in God to lead and empower.

Pries, a long-time practitioner of contemplative prayer, believes that this ancient form of prayer recently reclaimed by non-Catholics, opens paths for leaders to come to terms with the inner attachments that keep them from being the best leaders in their congregations. For example, unresolved issues from the past, personality traits that set pastors or leaders against others, and the need to be in power or liked, are raised to the surface in quiet before God, who gently renews them so they can be present with others for the sake of others, the church and God, rather than for themselves. This is an ongoing process which God gently oversees as practitioners take regular time to be silent before God, focusing on a Bible passage or an attribute of God, or emptying themselves to hear God.

Pries led the group in a short contemplative time and encouraged each leader to find ways to learn more, speaking of her own long relationship with a series of spiritual directors and contemplative prayer. ☸

'A part of who we are'

South Sudanese Mennonite Church celebrates its first anniversary

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alberta Correspondent
EDMONTON

“When people named Ruteben, Peter, James and John show up at your door, you realize it’s a sign from God. . . . When they say they want your help to start a church, you help in any way you can.”

Tim Wiebe-Neufeld, co-pastor at Edmonton First Mennonite Church, voiced these words on Jan. 26 when he preached at the first anniversary service of Edmonton South Sudanese Mennonite Church.

The deep desire to form a church where they could worship in the Nuer language, provide a healthy faith atmosphere for children, and where the goal was to help others, led the community to search out First Mennonite. Relationships were

formed between the churches through visiting and small-group Bible study, with both groups wanting to continue this interaction.

“You are part of who we are and a blessing to the Mennonite family,” Wiebe-Neufeld said.

A group of Liberian singers from Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton and singers from First Mennonite contributed music to the Sudanese worship service. ☼



For a music video performance from the anniversary service, visit canadianmennonite.org/anniversary-service.

PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY



Suzanne Gross, back row left, a member of Edmonton First Mennonite Church, and Sam Semier, Julie Saby and Andre Tinio, students at the University of Alberta, pose with their Sudanese music students as part of an applied ethnomusicology course. Christmas Chany, Naigay Bhan and Changkuoth Tut hold instruments donated to Edmonton South Sudanese Mennonite Church by Mennonite Church Alberta; they began learning guitar last November and were able to help lead singing at their church’s first-anniversary celebration on Jan. 26.

Participants at Wilmot Mennonite Church, near Baden, Ont., come forward to give ‘the cost of a lunch’ as an extra offering on Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Fellowship Sunday, Jan. 19. As guest speaker Arli Klassen, MWC’s chief development officer, told the congregation that every church connected to MWC was being asked that each participant would contribute the cost of one lunch to MWC on this Sunday. Even with the worldwide disparity of cost and ability to pay, the planning committee believed this exercise could cover MWC’s costs of worship materials, with money left over for other ministries.

VIEWPOINT

Who feeds the world?

BY WILL BRAUN

SENIOR WRITER

Without conventional agriculture more people would starve. That is the link commonly drawn between global hunger and the dominant form of North American farming, which depends heavily on fertilizer, fuel, pesticide and genetic inputs.

This link is captured in the axiom that says farmers “feed the world.” The implication of this phrase is often two-fold: Farmers engage in something fundamental to human existence and without high-input, high-energy agriculture, there wouldn’t be enough food to go around. What seems to be implied is, we can only feed the world by farming the way we do.

While conventional farming has increased production, its relation to global hunger is complex. Since Mennonites play a role both in agriculture and addressing global hunger, we owe it to the world to understand these complexities.

This is a delicate topic, so allow me three qualifiers:

- **I HESITATE** to criticize farmers. I grew up on a conventional farm and it was a great life. My current neighbours are conventional farmers and I teach my kids to respect them. They nurture the miracle of seed and life, and there is something sacred in that.
- **I AM** not an uncritical fan of alternative agriculture, particularly when its proponents dogmatically demonize their mainstream counterparts.
- **THIS IS** not just about farmers. Bargain-obsessed, fast-paced eaters drive the food system as much as farmers do. Profit-obsessed, ad-happy mega-food retailers, even more so. We’re all in this together.

And there are a lot of us. About 7.2 billion people inhabit the earth and many of them go hungry. More than 840 million people are “undernourished,” according to the UN. The causes are many.

One factor is access. Even the poorest regions of the world generally produce enough food to feed their inhabitants. Access, not quantity, is the issue.

As farmers know better than others, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) no longer ship food overseas, other than MCC’s canned meat. They buy food in the region where it is needed; it’s more timely and, in theory, it supports local markets, rather than flooding them.

Lack of access in a certain area could result because global markets—driven in part by speculators—have made food too expensive; because small farmers have been displaced by export-driven operations; because global trade regulations have hurt poorer regions (often to the benefit of wealthier ones); or because of political strife, climate impacts or other reasons.

Regarding access, we can ask whether hungry people have access to Canadian grain. Only about 5 percent of Canadian grain exports go to countries listed by the UN as having high undernourishment. This is an admittedly simplified indicator, though, as undernourishment is increasingly found in wealthy countries too.

We can say with more certainty how much Canadian—and American—grain goes to feed livestock: about three-quarters. The resulting meat does eventually feed humans, but this is, on the whole, a highly inefficient way of transferring nutrients from the earth to humans, with a qualifier for livestock raised and

preferably finished on land suitable for grazing, but not cultivation.

A certain percentage of grain production also goes for fibre, fuel and other non-edible uses, although the figure is relatively low in Canada.

Then there is waste. Studies show that between a quarter and a half of food produced in North America is wasted at various points from the field to the table. That is not to imply—contrary to what parents sometimes say—that if it were not wasted here it would feed hungry kids elsewhere in the world. But it again highlights that the food system is much more complex than just maximizing overall production in order to feed the hungry.

Waste is also a factor abroad, where poor grain storage can lead to spoilage.

Global obesity, which some say gobbles up enough nutrients for an additional billion people, is another form of waste.

The question then is whether the world needs high-input agriculture, or reduced waste and less meat, combined perhaps with effective poverty-reduction strategies, effective climate strategies, and improved farming methods other than the high-input, high-energy variety. CFGB has received notable kudos in the latter category.

Farmers do indeed produce a lot of food, but if the ultimate goal were to minimize global hunger, the North American food and agriculture system would look different. Farmers are, of course, entitled to make ethical and business decisions as they see fit, but we need a rigorous discussion about global food systems.

This topic is far more complex than a one-page article—or a one-line axiom—can convey. That is my point. Farmers, eaters and people concerned about hunger need to own those complexities. ❧



Visit canadianmennonite.org/who-feeds-the-world for an online conversation with Jim Cornelius of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, farmer Ron Krahn and Martin Entz of the University of Manitoba.

Walking and fasting for truth and reconciliation

STORY AND PHOTO BY DEBORAH FROESE

Mennonite Church Canada

When Brad Langendoen told an indigenous friend that he planned to walk 550 kilometres to honour Indian Residential School (IRS) survivors and encourage awareness about truth and reconciliation, he got an unexpected response.

“He offered me his boots,” Langendoen says of his friend, who is an IRS survivor.

Langendoen, along with Erin Sawatzky, Laurens Thiessen van Esch and Ann Heinrichs, will walk from Stoney Knoll, Sask., to Edmonton from March 7 to 26.

The departure point has historical significance. In 2006, Mennonites, Lutherans and indigenous people groups signed a memorandum of understanding there outlining the need for all parties to respect “the sacred nature of covenants,” agreeing to work together for “peace, justice and sufficiency for all our communities.”

A spiritual journey as well as a physical

one, the walk coincides with Lent, the season of lament. It concludes just in time for walkers to attend the final Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) event beginning March 27 in Edmonton.

Participants invite others to join them—for part of the journey as companions, as supporters in prayer or hospitality, by fasting, or through donations of funds and supplies. They will be accompanied by a van and a driver for transport during off-walk hours and for safety purposes.

Simultaneously, others will fast in Winnipeg, including Steve Heinrichs, Ann’s husband and Mennonite Church Canada’s director of indigenous relations. The couple has two adopted indigenous daughters with relatives who have first-hand experience of IRS institutions.

“I wouldn’t have my daughters if the colonial system hadn’t messed up native

communities,” says Ann, pointing out the emotional conflict she wrestles with. The walk will give her time for reflection and prayer. Although she says she will miss her family when she leaves them for three weeks, it doesn’t compare to the forced separation inflicted on so many survivors and families. “I hope to honour the stories of my daughters’ birth communities,” she says.

The walk emerged from weekly meetings of Student Christian Movement (SCM) Manitoba, at which discussions about indigenous/settler solidarity led to participation in Winnipeg Idle No More events and a desire to do more. Inspiration came from Cree teens who hiked 1600 km between Quebec and Ottawa last year, drawing public attention to justice issues.

Sawatzky, a fourth year student at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), spent last summer with a reforestation group in an illegally logged northern B.C. community, where she heard indigenous stories. “By throwing myself into this walk, I will be challenged to spend more time learning about the past and learning what my role is in the present,” she says.

Born and raised in the Netherlands, Thiessen van Esch learned about the history of indigenous Canadians through a delegation assignment with Christian Peacemaker Teams in Ontario. “I was blown away by the stories I heard, which struck me as incredible in a country that has such a positive image,” he says.

Langendoen just completed peace and conflict resolution studies at CMU. “I didn’t know about Indian Residential Schools until I came to CMU,” he says. But since then, he has actively supported indigenous relationships, travelling with Steve Heinrichs to the TRC event in Quebec last year, and producing a powerful video about the experience. (See the video at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/2276.)

Whether or not he wears his friend’s boots may come down to foot size, says Langendoen. Still, he appreciates the gesture. “I took the offer to wear his boots as a kind of commissioning.”

The walk and accompanying fast is supported by SCM Manitoba and MC Canada. ❧



Laurens Thiessen van Esch, left, Erin Sawatzky, Ann Heinrichs and Brad Langendoen are walking 550 kilometres from Stoney Knoll, Sask., to Edmonton from March 7 to 26 to honour Indian Residential School survivors and draw attention to the need for truth and reconciliation. Sawatzky, who recently sprained her ankle, expects to put her crutches away in plenty of time to prepare for the walk.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Attentive to my neighbour's story

RYAN DUECK

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

Through a combination of storytelling, dramatic monologue and song, Ojibway author Richard Wagamese invited his listeners into an appreciation of how, through the sharing of stories, we can break down the walls that human beings so quickly and reflexively put up between one another.

In addition to Wagamese's presentation, which was at times bracingly blunt, profoundly moving and side-splittingly hilarious, guests who packed St. David's United Church in Calgary on Jan. 24 for "Smoked fish, bannock and Indian tea: The power of storytelling," were treated to music from Chantal Chagnon and Cheryle Chagnon-Greyeyes, Cree drummers and singers.

The event was the culmination of the efforts of an ad hoc group of Mennonites who have met over the past two years with staff from Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada, MCC Alberta, Mennonite Church Alberta and MC Canada, to talk about what it means to love and honour our indigenous neighbours in the long shadow cast by Canada's colonial past. The group was formed to raise awareness, understanding and engagement among Mennonites and beyond about the injustices perpetrated upon Canada's indigenous people in the past and how these injustices continue to manifest themselves in the present.

The fact that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is coming to Edmonton next month lent urgency to the group's twin convictions that, as followers of Jesus, we are to be good listeners and that we are to attend with particular care and attention to stories that have been marginalized in

the past, whether inside or outside the church.

The Jan. 24 event was a powerful one for me on many levels. However, if I were to identify one overarching theme that came through over and over in Wagamese's presentation, it would be that of how attending to each other's stories—truly hearing one another, rather than listening through already existing prejudices—can be an antidote to fear. And the elimination of fear is a necessary

prerequisite to things like gratitude, grace and love springing up, things that lead to life, hope and strength for all people.

The irony probably was not lost on many of us, as we sat in a majestic old building that historically represented the very institutions responsible for the stifling of indigenous stories.

As a follower of Jesus—who frequently told stories both to unsettle and disorient, to broaden categories that had grown rigid and narrow, to hold out a vision of what it means to be a truly human being, and to expand our conceptions of who our neighbours are and how we are to honour them—I was grateful for both the stories we heard from Wagamese and for the call to live up to the high and holy calling of love that we have all been entrusted with. ✎

Ryan Dueck is pastor of Lethbridge Mennonite Church, Alta.

[T]he elimination of fear is a necessary prerequisite to things like gratitude, grace and love springing up, things that lead to life, hope and strength for all people.

PHOTO BY JESSE THIESSEN



Ojibway author Richard Wagamese speaks to a packed church in Calgary last month about the need for people to listen attentively to each other's stories.

Please pray for a peaceful solution

Mennonite pastor reports via e-mail from Ukraine

BY DAVE ROGALSKY
Eastern Canada Correspondent

Andrey Utkin is pastor of the Kutuzovka/Petershagen Mennonite Church and a member of the committee building a new church in Molochansk/Halbstadt. These are names some Russian Mennonites will remember from the Molotschna Mennonite Colony of the 1800s.



Andre Utkin

Utkin, who is part of a small rebirth of the Mennonite church in Ukraine, asks for prayer from Christian sisters and brothers in the West for peaceful solutions to Ukraine's current political unrest, which he shares with readers via e-mail:

Jan. 31

"Let me give you my point of view as a simple Ukrainian citizen. We are in the process of registering land for the new church in Molochansk; this is the second year we are trying to accomplish it, and we don't see the end.

"We need to collect huge numbers of absolutely useless documents. Often clerks openly ask for bribes. And this is only one area.

"Medicines, education, as well as other areas in our country, are in a total mess. Our people daily face such attitudes from the government, and see no improvements. It is not surprising that people became angry.

"Many of my personal friends have lost their businesses, not because they are poor managers, but because of unrealistic taxes and other government regulations. Only by God's huge grace our business still exists.

"People are definitely tired, they have nothing to lose. Total poverty in the villages and unrealistic wealth of several pro-government families brought people on

the streets. People understand if they give up now, our country will turn to the dictatorship regime, which will depress freedom of word and other democratic rights.

"I am glad that denominations and churches are united to pray and insist on peaceful solutions to this situation."

Feb. 3

"Although many negative things are happening in Ukraine, there is much positive news, too. I was deeply touched to learn that many doctors and nurses throughout

Ukraine are taking vacations on their account and go to Kiev to look after many wounded and ill people. Every day people bring food, winter clothing and medications to the places where people protest.

"Several European countries are ready to receive seriously wounded people for free treatment. Poland prepared a special airplane and is ready to take as many people as they can for treatment. Several people are already in Latvia.

"Many police officers, judges and others resigned from their work on conscientious grounds, explaining that they cannot fight against people. Judges say that they are under heavy pressure from the pro-government people. It means that our courts are not independent, and anyone 'unworthy' can get to the prison.

"Our prayers are heard." ❧

Andrey Utkin agreed to have this material published in print.

/// Briefly noted

Saskatchewan couple serving in Jesus' hometown

Henry and Erna Funk won't be in Israel long, but they expect to pack a great deal into their three-month assignment as Mennonite Church Canada workers associated with Serve Nazareth. The couple will work as hospital chaplains at Nazareth General Hospital. Erna will also teach English as a second language. The couple will live at Nazareth Village, where Henry will also work on the first-century farm, telling stories about Jesus to visitors at the living museum. Erna sees their role as bringing hope and encouragement to the Christian church in Nazareth. Although they will not be there long enough to master the language, she hopes to learn to greet people in their own tongue. They expect to build relationships with the people of Nazareth and to gain a better understanding of the Bible, and also to "prayerfully extend comfort, empathy and justice to those who experience great turmoil in their lives," says Erna. The Funks have served as interim co-pastors in six congregations; Erna's background is in education and Henry's is in agriculture and psychology. They each hold master of arts degrees in theological studies from the Lutheran Seminary in Saskatoon. The couple farm near Hague, Sask., and are members of Zoar Mennonite Church in Waldheim.

—BY DONNA SCHULZ



Erna and Henry Funk

A many-splendoured thing

*Half-century of MCC in Canada celebrated
by Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.*

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

The Mennonite Historical Society of B.C. celebrated the 50th anniversary of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Canada the weekend of Feb. 1 with the presentation, “MCC: A many-splendoured thing.”

Esther Epp-Tiessen, author of the newly released *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History*, was the keynote speaker. The public engagement coordinator for

MCC Canada’s Ottawa office has served with MCC both overseas and in Canada.

At the evening lecture at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Epp-Tiessen acknowledged the role of British Columbians in the early years of MCC, even before it was formally organized in Canada. She noted that B.C. has been on the forefront of such programs as prison ministry, HIV/AIDS programs and the organization’s domestic

abuse response.

The author told of many entertaining and poignant stories she heard while researching the book. In asking the questions, “What is MCC in Canada?” and “What is MCC Canada?” she said she realized, “It is a many-splendoured thing.”

Epp-Tiessen says she found many pictures of MCC in her research, among them ones of “amazing generosity” through contributions ranging from women sewing school kit bags to children earning MCC money at lemonade stands. She also cited how MCC played a part in building bridges across once-significant divides of different Mennonite groups through introducing marriage partners and cooperation at relief sales. MCC has also served as an agent of social change, as workers went overseas to serve others and came back changed themselves to help change their churches and communities.

On Jan. 30, Epp-Tiessen also took part in a public event sponsored by several Mennonite groups at the local Reach Museum’s National Gallery of Canada exhibit, “Clash: Conflict and its consequences.” Following a tour of the art work, Epp-Tiessen led an interactive conversation about the exhibit entitled “In conversation: Steps toward healing and hope.”

/// Briefly noted

MCC Saskatchewan marks 50th anniversary

Sometimes there is so much to celebrate that one party is not enough. That is why Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Saskatchewan plans to mark its 50th anniversary with a party every month. The first event, held Jan. 18 at the offices of Saskatoon architectural firm AODBT, celebrated MCC Saskatchewan’s 31-year involvement with the International Visitor Exchange Program (IVEP). Guests included current and former host families, work-placement supervisors and program coordinators. Irene Klassen of North Battleford, who hosted 25 participants over 16 years, was honoured for her service, as were Otto and Florence Driedger of Regina, who are currently hosting Nelson Martinez from Colombia, their 27th IVEP participant. Although Martinez was the only current participant in attendance, three IVEP alumni joined the celebration via Skype. February events in Warman and Swift Current celebrated thrift stores. March’s festivities that focus on the Canadian Foodgrains Bank are planned for the Osler area. Executive director Claire Ewert Fisher says, “After 50 years, I think we should honour what has been done. We stand on the shoulders of some pretty impressive people; we’re able to do the work we’re doing because a lot of people have cared over the years.” For a complete listing of planned events and a history of MCC Saskatchewan, visit <http://mhss.sk.ca/MCCsk/>.

—BY DONNA SCHULZ

PHOTO BY CLAIRE EWERT FISHER



MCC Saskatchewan community engagement coordinators Myriam Ullah, centre, and Kaytee Edwards, right, chat with Rachele Ternier from Muenster, Germany, who is associated with Earth Care Connections, a former IVEP work-placement partner.



*Esther Epp-Tiessen signs a copy of her new book, *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History*, for Helen Reimer. Waiting her turn is Elsianna Harder.*

GOD AT WORK IN US

Tall Grass from deep convictions

Bread cooperative grows out of church study of food and land issues

BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

Manitoba Correspondent

WINNIPEG



Tall Grass Prairie Bread Company is well-known in and around Winnipeg for its gooey cinnamon buns and its organic local baking and preserves, suffusing the marketplace at the Forks and its Wolseley neighbourhood with the aroma of fresh baking.

As Paul and Tabitha Langel sit down to enjoy some of the homemade soup from their Tall Grass Bakery at the Forks, they

describe the journey they embarked on nearly three decades ago with their church community and their business partners, Lyle and Kathy Barkman. They don't highlight the long hours, the incredibly hard work, or the surprising twists and turns, but rather the critical role of faith, prayer and the support of their faith community on this journey.

Tabitha, a former social worker, and

Paul, a former teacher, are long-time members of the Grain of Wheat Church-Community. In the late 1980s, the church was studying food and land issues.

"Back then, farmers were still getting the same price for a bushel of wheat that they got a hundred years ago," Tabitha recalls. "A record number of small farms were being sold and agri-business was taking off."

A small bread co-op grew out of the church's concerns and its desire for a more communal life in its neighbourhood. It used a local church's kitchen and baked bread every Saturday morning. The group of bakers decided to invest in a mill and purchase grain directly from local organic farmers. "We did this for philosophical reasons, but none of us were prepared for how much better the bread tasted," says Tabitha.

"The demand for the bread became too overwhelming," she says. "We were baking up to 100 loaves on Saturday and on Wednesday I baked another 60."

People began to question whether they should try to form a business and support more farmers, eventually bringing the issue to the church community.

"A group of five of us solidified with not a single business course between us," says Tabitha, whose resolve for an ethical loaf of bread never wavered.

When the bank would not give them a loan to purchase a bakery, many in the bread co-op lent them money and they took out personal loans.

"We had a vision for a dreamy kind of neighbourhood bakery," Tabitha recalls.

They would all keep their part-time jobs.

"But nobody had prepared us for success," says Paul. "On opening day, there were at least 200 people and they had baked only 30 loaves of bread, a few dozen muffins and two-dozen cinnamon buns."

At its fifth anniversary, Tall Grass Prairie decided to throw a party and invite all the farmers. About 400 people came, and when the farmers were introduced, people cheered. The farmers were visibly moved.

"We never had any idea that the bakery would grow into a medium-sized business," says Paul.

Together with the Barkmans, who work at the Wolseley site, they employ nearly 60 people. From the beginning, the bakery



Paul and Tabitha Langel are pictured in front of their bakery at the Forks in Winnipeg. 'We had a vision for a dreamy kind of neighbourhood bakery,' Tabitha recalls.

has always been about doing what is just and what is good for the land and for the people.

“Our philosophy is hugely shaped by the community and our faith,” Paul says. “It is a challenge how to be fair to everyone, to ensure that farmers and everyone get paid a fair living, and that we still make a decent living.”

Tall Grass Prairie farmers get 14 cents for every loaf, and every couple of years Tall Grass staff try to visit their farm suppliers.

“By far the greatest challenge as owners is to stay on the same page, stay honest and still meet for communion with each other on Sundays,” says Paul. “Any time human beings do things this intense together, there are rough stretches.”

To get them through those stretches, the partners have relied on the help of mediation whenever they felt the need. They have also relied heavily on their church community.

Twelve years ago, when they were invited to open at the Forks, a stipulation was that they had to be open on Sundays. Their church community encouraged and supported them in this.

“It has proven to be the right decision, but it has also been a strain,” Tabitha says. “I knew a rabbi whose family shops here and he told us, ‘Remember God made the sabbath for us and not us for the sabbath.’ Eleven years later, it still is a challenge.

“The rabbi came by a while ago,” she adds, “and said, ‘I hear you miss church many Sundays. Private prayer and praying with your people are two different things, so my daughter is coming to work on Sundays so you can go to church.’ That germinated the idea that we would experiment with scheduling our Muslim, Jewish and Christian employees according to their religious days. So now we have a Jewish baker who bakes on Sundays. It has made a lot of difference.”

“It is never not a struggle to live your faith in the workplace,” says Paul.

“But the joy is immense,” Tabitha hastens to add. “There is respect in the workplace. You get a sense the staff enjoy coming to work. We guard the culture of the workplace very carefully.” ❧

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TOURMAGINATION

What's different about today's youth?

A grandmother and her granddaughter compare youth group experiences and reach some interesting conclusions

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent
ROSTHERN, SASK.

Across Generations

It is not uncommon to hear people complain about the younger generation. But are today's youth really all that different from youth of previous generations? Saskatoon grandmother Marlene Froese and her granddaughter Kenna Forrester don't think so.

Froese grew up attending Pleasant Point Mennonite Church in Clavet, Sask., where the young people's group met weekly for choir practices and sang in church almost every Sunday. Summer choir practices included youth from Dundurn and Hanley Mennonite churches, which, together with Pleasant Point, formed the *Nordheimer Gemeinde*. Rehearsals culminated in a mass choir concert and picnic known as *Gemeindefest*.

In addition to singing, youth attended parties featuring circle games and dancing. They also met weekly for Sunday school, but not for mid-week Bible study, as some groups did.

"The Mennonites that settled that area came from a very liberal Russian congregation," says Froese.

There were boundaries, though—dancing was permitted, alcohol was not—but young people knew where the boundaries were and did not cross them.

"No one ever felt that we would be destructive, that we would choose bad behaviour," says Froese. "We just went to enjoy the socialization."

Parties were held in one-room schoolhouses or in sheds or garages at members' homes. Those who played instruments accompanied the dancing. Parties always followed weddings, but these were inter-generational affairs at which parents as well as youth enjoyed dancing and socializing.

Forrester's family attends Nutana Park

Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, where junior and senior youth meet each Tuesday evening and enjoy fun activities on weekends. There are no choir practices—Forrester is pretty sure the youth wouldn't attend if there were—but they do engage in a broad range of learning, service and recreational activities, from creating videos on Mennonite history to go-carting and green Jell-O nights.

Most activities take place at the church. Not all attendees are from church families; some come at the invitation of a friend and have no prior church experience, but are included, nonetheless. Forrester appreciates that her church welcomes everyone regardless of race, age or sexual orientation. This makes her feel the youth are a vital part of the congregation.

Whereas Froese participated in youth activities with the same friends she'd grown up with, Forrester's group is more diverse. But, Forrester maintains, "the church is always a community, no matter if [you're with people you've known all your life] or

you are meeting them for the first time."

Froese agrees. Although her generation didn't talk about it, they certainly experienced community. "It wasn't even a descriptor that we thought we had to use," she says. "We were just together. Now we actually plan events that will bring us together."

Froese believes today's youth have the same need to be loved and accepted as her generation did. But the sense of belonging no longer just happens; it must be fostered.

Forrester adds that youth also need to know their church values them. Although she knows they are accepted, at times she feels they are "kind of put on the back burner." She would welcome opportunities for the youth to take a greater role in congregational life, because, she says, "we need to show [the church] what we've been learning."

Both grandmother and granddaughter were nurtured in loving church families with active youth groups. Yet their reflections reveal differences not in the nature of youth, but in the circumstances surrounding their experiences. The bond of community that once grew naturally from homogeneity and proximity must today be grown intentionally through inclusive activities and a welcoming spirit within the youth group and the congregation as a whole.

That this seems to be Forrester's experience is heartening, but is it true for youth in every church? ❧



To view a video conversation between Froese and Forrester, visit canadianmennonite.org/youth-across-generations.



Kenna Forrester, left, relaxes with her grandmother Marlene Froese in the Rosthern Junior College student commons.

ARTBEAT

BOOK REVIEW

Was Jesus just a rebel with a cause?

Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth.
By Reza Aslan. Random House, 2013, 296 pages.

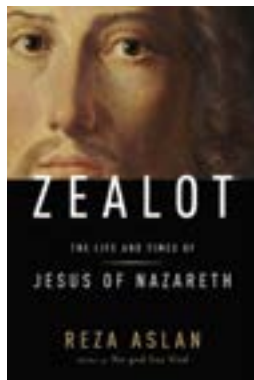
REVIEWED BY AMANDA WITMER

Zealot is a popular presentation of scholarly research on the historical Jesus, read through the lens of Jewish resistance to Roman imperial domination. The main thesis of the book is that Jesus, like the leaders of other Jewish prophetic and messianic movements in Galilee and Judea in the first century, was primarily a rebel whose messianic aspirations included the intention to take up arms against Rome to inaugurate the kingdom of God.

The author's treatment is academic and does not address, except very briefly, issues of Christian faith.

One of the major strengths of the book is its clear and cogent presentation of the broad social and political context of first-century Palestine and the way in which Jesus and his contemporaries fit into it. Reza Aslan skillfully demonstrates the role of social structures, including those associated with the temple in Jerusalem, in exploiting the poor, as well as the endemic social unrest that resulted from this situation. *Zealot* distills current scholarly information about Jesus and first-century Palestine into a format that is both accessible to lay readers and interesting to read.

One of the important points discussed by Aslan, which should be of interest to Christians, is the tendency within the gospel tradition to portray the Jews as responsible for Jesus' death and to



downplay the role and responsibility of the Romans and Pontius Pilate. While the gospels depict Pilate as reluctant to execute Jesus—and even friendly towards him—sources outside the New Testament describe Pilate as a brutal and unprincipled despot who continually provoked the Jewish population and exercised violent force when chal-

lenged. The too-rosy gospel depiction of Rome's and Pilate's roles in Jesus' death has contributed to, among other misunderstandings, Christian anti-Semitism throughout the history of the church.

There are some problems with *Zealot*, however. One is a tendency, at times, to force the issue of Jesus' ties to the Zealots a little too strongly. The provocative title implies that Jesus was a Zealot, but the Zealots were a Jewish resistance movement formed just before the Jewish war in A.D. 66-70, which viewed armed resistance as the path to bring about God's reign. While Aslan acknowledges that Jesus, who died around A.D. 30, was not a capital 'Z' Zealot, but rather a small 'z' zealot, the amount of material in the book devoted to the Jewish war and its aftermath means that this distinction may not always be clear to his readers.

This same tendency occurs when Aslan argues that Jesus intended his disciples

to be armed. While he quotes passages that suggest Jesus supported violence, he either dismisses or avoids those passages in the gospels where Jesus eschews violence and commands non-resistance, such as Matthew 5:39 and Luke 6:27-29.

He also draws disproportionately on texts from both the Old Testament and the gospels that support violence, while omitting counter-voices in the text. Similarly, Aslan interprets Jesus' somewhat ambiguous and cagey response to the question about paying taxes to Caesar—"Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God, the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17)—as a clear Zealot statement.

There are also some errors. One of these is his conflation of two distinct versions of the "Great Dinner," found in Matthew and Luke. He later equates Matthew's more violent version of the parable with Jesus' own view of the kingdom. Most scholars see Luke's simpler and less violent version, rather than Matthew's, as closer to Jesus' original parable.

With these caveats in mind, Aslan's portrait of Jesus is nonetheless provocative and informative about Jesus and his context. And while Aslan's revolutionary Jesus may be slightly exaggerated, much of the information he provides is accurate and presents what for many may be a new and challenging take on Jesus' life. The book serves as a strong corrective to our modern penchant for viewing Jesus as a carefree, non-threatening bohemian who spent his time preaching peace and wandering through the backwoods of Galilee. ❧

Amanda Witmer has a Ph.D. in religious studies from McMaster University, Hamilton, Ont. She is the author of Jesus, the Galilean Exorcist: His Exorcisms in Social and Political Context (T & T Clark, 2012).

The author's treatment is academic and does not address, except very briefly, issues of Christian faith.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THEATRE OF THE BEAT AND NINETEEN ON THE PARK THEATRE



Ellen Reesor of Community Mennonite Church, Stouffville, Ont., stars as the title character in Selah's Song. She is pictured singing a song of peace to the villagers who stand up to a warmongering king.

THEATRE REVIEW

Church, community rally to present new play

Selah's Song

Produced by Theatre of the Beat, Jan. 9 to 11, at the Lebovic Centre for the Arts, Stouffville, Ont.

REVIEWED BY SIMON MARTIN
SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

A social-justice folk musical isn't something that you see every day. But when you have the social-justice-focused Theatre of the Beat and musician Bryan Moyer Suderman, both hailing from Stouffville, Ont., these kinds of collaborations can be just a few potlucks away.

Hundreds of people came out between Jan. 9 to 11 to see *Selah's Song* at the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment in Stouffville. The play, written by Theatre of the Beat's artistic director, Johnny Wideman, is about a village that stands up to a warmongering king through the power of song. It is the story of the underdog and leaves you feeling like

the nonviolence movement starts with you. The performance makes the audience wonder if something as simple as song can effect change in the world.

At the heart of each act is a song composed by Suderman. Accompanied by Suderman, Daniel Kruger and Nimal Alagawatee, the original music is sardonic, sweet and full of zest.

Ellen Reesor delivered a standout performance as the title character Selah with a soft, rich voice that melted over the audience.

Selah's Song shows how the community can band together and make a difference. Unlike Theatre of Beat's past productions, the cast was 35 members large in what

/// Briefly noted

MennoMedia hikes prices for Canadian customers

Citing a drop in the Canadian-U.S. dollar exchange rate and higher costs of doing business in Canada, MennoMedia increased prices paid by its Canadian customers by 10 percent on Jan. 1. Executive director Russ Eanes said of the decision, "We regret that we have to do this, but the difference in the exchange rate over the past year is the primary reason. Since late spring, the Canadian dollar has dropped against the U.S. dollar. For several years, we have had a policy of adjusting prices based on that exchange rate. It has gone both ways [up and down] more than once."

—MennoMedia

could be described as a cross between church pageant and professional theatre.

Although Community Mennonite Church in Stouffville sponsored the performance, a fair number of the cast came from outside the church, really making it a community production. ///

BOOK REVIEW

When faith and an autistic child collide

Mother of the Year and Other Elusive Awards.

By Kalyn Falk. Self-published, 2013, 141 pages. Available online at Amazon.ca.

REVIEWED BY BERNIE WIEBE

In this book, aptly subtitled “Misadventures in Autism,” Kalyn Falk throws wide open the doors to her life with her son Noah, who was diagnosed as severely autistic at an early age and is now 15 years old. Since there is no manual, she tells us how she manages to traverse this journey by the “seat of her pants.”

Falk and her husband David began their marriage as a Mennonite Brethren couple, both graduates of their Winnipeg college and both committed to their heritage of simple and devout faith. Their first son, Jase, lived so “intensely” that they called him their “volcano” boy.

Along came Noah, totally calm and seemingly totally contented. And then the real explosion came: At four months, Noah began to truly erupt, as a severely autistic child will from time to time. Of course, professionals were at first reluctant to give them an explicit diagnosis, being conflict avoiders as so many professionals are.

When they had their verdict about Noah, Falk writes of being shattered, her faith overwhelmed, and wandering for more than a decade in a lonely, subtle, complex universe, where truth and devastation, heartaches and miracles had to learn to walk side by side.

From horrific times—when Noah almost drowned, when he was run over by an SUV, when he set fire to their house—to Noah’s commitment to aesthetics in most creative ways, his finding a “voice” from nonverbal to having a vocabulary of hundreds of words, Falk lets it “all hang out.”

She writes of her attempts not only to hang on to Noah, but also to express her own spirituality as she becomes a



spiritual director who is finding herself while trying to help others find their “voices” and themselves.

This book is a whirlwind of emotions, an encyclopedia of autism stories and a roller coaster of events. It is not for those who look for fairy-tale endings or syrupy faith.

It is a book for all of us who have faced—or do face—times of struggle with our children or others. The book vacillates from tragedy to comedy. In a self-deprecating manner, Falk humbly forges a trail even as tears roll down the pages and you can feel the grinding of gritted teeth. She has no easy answers for those of faith, but she brings her A-game to the pages of this book.

We need to read this book for our own journeys. We need to use it for study and

for prayer groups. We need to learn the courage and honesty Falk demonstrates. We need to appreciate all those around us who are “different” and struggling with that reality. All caregivers need our support and respect.

And we need to continue being open to God for those moments of tender mercy, love and grace that do come along with those times of being terrified and feeling totally inadequate. ❧

Bernie Wiebe of Winnipeg is a retired professor of conflict resolution studies and the former board chair of Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service.

❧ Briefly noted

\$100,000 pledge for new ‘Shine’ children’s curriculum

MennoMedia, which produces Sunday school curriculum to help children form an Anabaptist faith, recently received a \$25,000 donation and a pledge of an additional \$75,000 to help fund the new curriculum development now underway by MennoMedia and Brethren Press. The gift came from Ed and Carol Nofziger of Archbold, Ohio, who have themselves been Sunday school teachers, and whose children and grandchildren have grown up using denominational materials. The Nofzigers say they feel it is important that children “learn God’s truths, as well as the Anabaptist faith. We trust MennoMedia to produce the materials Sunday school teachers need in their important faith-formation ministry.” The new Anabaptist curriculum, “Shine: Living in God’s light,” planned in cooperation with Brethren Press, will be released this fall. Although written for a Mennonite audience, these materials also target those outside Anabaptist circles who value the biblical themes of peace, justice and community.

—MennoMedia



VIEWPOINT

‘Let me walk with you’

Acknowledging one’s own weaknesses and wrongdoings key to walking with people who have committed violent offences

DANIEL EPP-JANZEN

SPECIAL TO YOUNG VOICES

“A person released from prison with a high risk to reoffend moves back into our communities. What can we do?”

This is a question Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) in Manitoba often asks in public-awareness and volunteer-recruitment efforts. It’s a challenge few accept, but a unique combination of life circumstances, the grace of God, and encouraging and loving people in my life led me to answer the call nearly four years ago.

CoSA is a community-based integration program steeped in restorative justice principles. It supports people coming

reached, the circle members agree that a core member has developed a healthy network and positive skills and interests. Sometimes it includes a healthy, age-appropriate, committed relationship, but sometimes it doesn’t. Maybe it means a core member has become a member of a local church or synagogue, but maybe it doesn’t.

Unlike painting a house or building a fence, where progress is easily marked, and gratification from a job well done can come quickly, walking with people with offence histories can be difficult and tiring. Beyond their violent criminal records, many of our core members

I continue to nurture my empathy and my ability to distinguish the act from the person. This way, I can walk alongside them as a friend who looks deeper

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIEL EPP-JANZEN



For nearly four years, Daniel Epp-Janzen has worked with Circles of Support and Accountability, a community-based integration program that supports people coming out of prison who have requested help to live safer, healthier lives.

out of prison who have requested help to live safer, healthier lives as they transition back into community. These people have often committed violent offences and are at a high risk to reoffend. They have many needs, and have few, if any, positive supports left in the community. CoSA forms circles of trained support volunteers around its core members—the people with criminal-offence histories—in an effort to prevent further victimization.

Besides the ultimate goal of preventing further victimization, it is the dream that all core members eventually mature out of their circle. When that point is

have entrenched negative thoughts and attitudes toward women as well as sexual and ethnic minorities. This has been frustrating to observe, and tricky to challenge, especially when dealing with a core member who is nearly twice my age.

Initially, as I got to know the core members involved with the program, it was easy for me to discover their humanity—their likable qualities, the parts of them that bring joy to others and the aspects that I can resonate with—because I share them as well.

As my relationships grew through trust and vulnerability, I began to better

understand the paradoxical nature of reconciling the value of people with the wrong they have done. Instead of wrestling with this paradox, it can be easier to treat as “other,” people we fear or don’t understand. We prefer to pass judgment on them, and remain oblivious to the faults we carry and the pain we’ve caused others. I think this fear and this unwillingness to understand plays a major role in the general public’s attitude towards those involved with the prison system.

The work of restorative justice has allowed me to begin to understand what it takes to appreciate the inherent goodness of a person, while at the same time respect the gripping power a destructive pattern of behaviour can have. I continue to learn what it means to walk with a person who raped a young girl, or to support a person who, while inebriated, murdered his nine-week-old son.

The intense suffering my core members have caused others is something I will never be able to normalize. I do not know the sort of anguish, powerlessness and hurt my core members experienced that led them to commit such violent

acts. However, I continue to nurture my empathy and my ability to distinguish the act from the person. This way, I can walk alongside them as a friend who looks deeper, so that the lovable, godly qualities that exist in them may be revealed and nurtured, and so that the powerful grip of an unhealthy behavioural cycle can loosen its hold.

Being involved with CoSA requires me to acknowledge my own brokenness. I cannot be expected to provide informed support and accountability to someone if I am unwilling to acknowledge my own weaknesses, past hurts and wrongdoings. In owning my own suffering, and the suffering I have caused others, I am able to be a helpful role model to those seeking to break out of cycles of violence. This has allowed me to stand in solidarity with those who have committed acts of great violence and say, “You are loved. Let me walk with you.” ❧

Daniel Epp-Janzen, 25, is a program associate at CoSA. He attends Hope Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

‘It’s all part of the game’

NHL players address B.C. youth about their faith . . . and violence in hockey

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RACHEL BERGEN

Young Voices Co-editor
RICHMOND, B.C.

Nashville Predators players Nick Spaling and Mike Fisher are famous for their hockey careers, but what many may not know is that they are also Christians eager to speak about their faith.

So when they travelled to Vancouver to face off against the Canucks last month, they spent time answering questions about their faith at a Mennonite Church Canada event at Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond.

MC Canada executive director Willard Metzger, who served as Spaling’s pastor at Community Mennonite Fellowship in Drayton, Ont., when Spaling was growing

up, interviewed the players about their personal lives, their hockey careers and their faith at a “Faith and Hockey” event on Jan. 22.

Both Spaling and Fisher started playing hockey at a young age. When they were young, they found it difficult to talk about their faith with their teammates.

“Growing up in juniors . . . there are a lot of kids and you’re trying to be cool, and it was tough,” Spaling said, adding, “Nobody was outspoken about it, so you didn’t know if there were other Christians that played, and everyone just wanted to fit in and not

(Continued on page 34)



Mike Fisher, left, and Nick Spaling of the Nashville Predators speak to youth at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond, B.C., last month

(Continued from page 33)
be out of the norm.”

Now they feel more comfortable talking about their religious beliefs, and Fisher has even coordinated a monthly chapel for other Christian players.

“There’s a lot of distractions in our lives and a lot of easy ways out,” Spaling said. “A lot of times it’s easy to do something else instead, but a big focus for me is making time. . . . It’s helped me be stronger in my faith and going forward in the game.”

Although the youth and young adults all seemed star-struck, not everyone was

good to note that I’ve had no fights in the NHL, so that’s impressive. . . . But [fighting] is something that’s part of the game and can’t really be taken out.”

“I look at some guys that I’ve fought and I think there’s a respect level there,” Fisher added. “We know it’s a part of the game, but after, everything’s fine and there’s no anger towards each other for the most part.”

Keith Grubaugh, 30, of the host church felt Spaling’s answer was irresponsible, given that he is a role model for young people. “Somebody that is latching on to

*‘We know [fighting is] a part of the game, but after, everything’s fine and there’s no anger towards each other for the most part.’
(Mike Fisher of the Nashville Predators)*

thrilled with their responses.

When asked by *Canadian Mennonite* how he reconciles his Anabaptist faith with his career in a violent sport, Spaling said it’s all part of the game. “I don’t know if it’s a really violent sport, but there’s the fighting aspect,” he acknowledged. “It would be

the Mennonite theology and Anabaptist theology should be more proactive about taking fighting out of the game,” Grubaugh said.

After the interview, Fisher and Spaling signed autographs and gave away door prizes.

For the two organizers of the event, Brittani and Jon Gifford of Peace Mennonite, the event was an opportunity for youth and young adults to see what it’s like for celebrity Christians.

“I hope they were encouraged by someone who is living in the limelight who is also living out their faith,” Jon said.

Together, Metzger and Spaling have organized various events to talk about being a Mennonite in the spotlight. Spaling was involved in one of MC Canada’s “Mennonites are Everywhere” videos, and they give talks together at Mennonite camps across Canada. They are hoping to host a similar event at Camp Squeah in Hope, B.C., this summer.

The “Faith and Hockey” event was also a fundraising opportunity for MC Canada Witness projects in the Philippines. According to MC Canada, the Richmond event raised nearly \$800, which will be used to build the burgeoning Peace Church Philippines congregation in metro Manila and help with disaster relief after Super Typhoon Haiyan. ❧



Nick Spaling, left, and Mike Fisher of the Nashville Predators sign autographs for an enthusiastic youth.

VIEWPOINT

More than a word

Unpacking what we mean when we use certain words is key to healthy dialogue

MATT VEITH

SPECIAL TO YOUNG VOICES

Recently, I posted on Facebook about the term “friend zone.” I’ve often heard it used to victimize guys who can’t deal with rejection and vilify women who turn down “nice guys.” For example, “I heard she totally friend-zoned him the other day.”

The post has nearly 40 comments now, with more than 70 likes.

Many people concurred with my take on the matter, but just as many shared a different understanding of the term. For some, it meant being led on, only to be thrown to the curb later. For others, it was a term for grief and heartbreak. One person bravely identified sexual advances and abuse within her understanding and experiences of the term.

What intrigues me about this discussion has little to do with the friend zone, but rather with how a term can stand for so many different, often contradictory things. I question if the terminology we use in our increasingly wordy discussions on complex issues actually works as well as we think it does to communicate what we are actually trying to convey.

A friend recently pointed out to me that you can express your “love” for pizza and “love” for God using the same word. It’s a simple example, but it shows how important modifiers, context, tone and articulation are to situating a word. What does someone perceive when I say, “I love God”?

Doublespeak is a phenomenon in which the meanings and connotations of words can be distorted, made vague or completely altered. Take words like “green,” “smart” or “inclusive,” for example. They connote generic positivity, but through excessive overuse they no longer denote an articulated definition.

Then you have the opposite, where a word clearly stands for something specific, but its connotations practically redefine it. I once had a conversation with a friend who cringes at the terms “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” because they invoke the stuffy, rigid and prescriptive relational mores she grew up hating.

At a recent forum discussing the LGBTQ dialogue in the church, I suggested that a lot of the staple language and terminology in the conversation harbours unexamined deeper definitions and connotations. Terms like “boundaries,” “acceptance” and “sin” are like icebergs: They are seemingly straightforward in their specific definition, but hiding under the surface lies a mass of unvoiced and diverse experiences, emotions and subjectivity.

You couldn’t, for instance, bring up “sin” without also examining “judgment,” “grace,” “forgiveness,” “morality,” “desire” and more. My hunch is that the LGBTQ dialogue in the church is continuously protracted and ineffective because these terms need to be unpacked.

Going deeper in these conversations is complicated and unglamorous for a variety of reasons. People of my generation want to be politically correct, in-the-know and up-to-speed on the latest hot terms. We’re less patient than our parents and value concise confidence in our text-based, fast-paced social media culture. To do this, we bank on the right word—devoid of larger context, body language and tone of voice—to convey the nuances of what we really mean.

When we sit down and talk through a lot of issues, we expect to get a lot done quickly. I certainly do. Like people who

(Continued on page 36)

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT VEITH



Matt Veith

PHOTO BY MATT VEITH



Defining the words we use in conversation is important in today’s text-based, fast-paced social-media culture.

(Continued from page 35)

think a good camera will take good pictures, we think the right words can solve everything. I've been in too many discussions with nodding heads that end in confused disagreement. However, I've also heard, "That's not what that word means for me! What do you think it means?" That gives me hope.

We need to learn to drop our self-assured, cosmopolitan sense of urgency and be willing to have an entire conversation when we feel a word would do.


Those who make—and remake—the words, rule any discourse. But no discourse should be ruled. As Anabaptists, we work for reconciliation through nonviolence, pacifism and a love of

justice. Dialoguing towards reconciliation requires a corresponding reconciliation of language through a patient, unassuming flexing of eloquence and articulation, recognizing the inseparability of words from their subjective definitions and experiences. ☸

Matt Veith is a Mennonite missionary kid who grew up in China and now lives in Winnipeg. He graduated from Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in 2013 with a bachelor of arts degree in communications and media.

Schools directory

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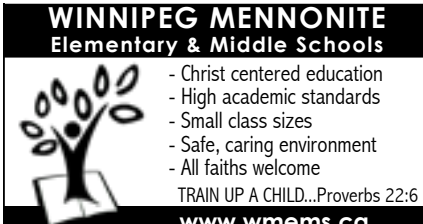
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Calendar

British Columbia

April 11-13: MC B.C. Junior Impact youth retreat at Camp Squeah, Hope.
April 12,13: Lenten Vespers with the Abendmusik Choir; (12) at Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, Abbotsford, (13) at Knox United Church, Vancouver; both services at 8 p.m.
May 3: Mennonite Women B.C.'s 75th Inspirational Day at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford. Speaker: Karen Martens Zimmerly.
May 8,9,10,11: Recycled Orchestra, a youth orchestra from Paraguay is on tour across Canada; (8) Broadway Community Church, Chilliwack, at 7 p.m. (9) Vancouver, venue and time TBA; (10) Peace Portal Alliance Church, Surrey, at 7 p.m. (11) Central Heights Church, Abbotsford, time TBA; all concerts with Calvin Dyck and

Abbotsford Youth Orchestra.

Alberta

March 8: MCC Relief Sale fundraiser and CD release party at Edmonton First Mennonite Church. Featured musicians: Kim Thiessen and Daryl Neustaedter-Barg. For more information, call Trish Elgersma toll-free at 1-888-622-6337 or visit www.mccreliefsale.com.
March 21-22: MC Alberta annual general meeting, at Lethbridge Mennonite Church.
March 27-30: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final event in Edmonton at the Shaw Conference Centre. For more information, visit trc.ca.
March 30-April 9: MCC Alberta Middle East Learning Tour.

(Continued on page 38)

UpComing

CMU site of this summer's North American Native Assembly

Mennonite Church Canada and MC Manitoba are hosting the North American Native Assembly in Winnipeg from July 28 to 31 at Canadian Mennonite University. Confirmed speakers include Stan McKay, former United Church of Canada moderator; Randy Woodley, professor of faith and culture at George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Ore., and co-founder of Eagle Wings ministry; Melanie Kampen, a graduate student at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont.; Judy da Silva, an activist from Grassy Narrows First Nation, Ont., who received the 2013 Michael Sattler Peace Prize; and Peter Haresnape of Christian Peacemaker Teams in Toronto. A variety of workshops will also be presented along the theme, "Ears to earth, eyes to God." A tent city will be set up to accommodate the indigenous churches and communities that will be coming together from across North America. The last time the assembly was hosted in Manitoba was in Riverton in the mid-'90s, when more than 300 attended. For more information, contact Steve Heinrichs at sheinrich@mennonitechurch.ca or Norm Voth at nvoth@mennochurch.mb.ca.

—BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

UpComing

Justice Murray Sinclair to speak at Building Bridges event

Justice Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, will be the guest speaker at the annual Building Bridges event in Winnipeg on April 25. Sinclair will be speaking publicly at Thunderbird House following an invitation-only fundraising dinner. Building Bridges is co-hosted every year by Mennonite Church Canada and MC Manitoba. Sinclair's speech will be followed on April 26 by the semi-annual meeting of the Partnership Circles at a location yet to be determined. Ray Mason from Spirit Wind will be speaking about the effect of the government-run day schools on indigenous people. "In many ways these effects were similar to the residential schools," says Norm Voth of MC Manitoba. "We, as Mennonites, had teachers involved in these schools in some communities. We hope to explore some activities that will give us a more hands-on understanding." For more information, contact Steve Heinrichs at sheinrich@mennonitechurch.ca or Norm Voth at nvoth@mennochurch.mb.ca.



Murray Sinclair

—BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

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(Continued from page 37)

Saskatchewan

March 2: RJC Guys and Pies concert fundraiser.

March 7: Spring pastors gathering at Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim, at 1 p.m. Theme: "Church leaders in a post-Christendom world."

March 7-9: Prairie Winds worship retreat, at Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim. Keynote speaker: John Bell. Theme: "Why do God's people . . . pray, sing, read Scripture and worship together?" For more information, visit mcsask@mcsask.ca or call 306-249-4844.

March 14-15: MC Saskatchewan annual delegate sessions at Parliament Community Church, Regina, including youth event and overnighter on March 14.

March 16: Joint choir concert by Rosthern Junior College, Canadian Mennonite University and Station Singers, at Third Avenue United Church, Saskatoon; at 2:30 p.m.

March 29: SMYO Worship Extravaganza, at Shekinah Retreat

Centre, Waldheim.

April 26: Saskatchewan Women in Mission Enrichment Day, at Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

May 6: Recycled Orchestra, a youth orchestra from Paraguay is on tour across Canada; at Rosthern Junior College; at 7 p.m.

May 10: RJC spring choir concert, at RJC.

Manitoba

Feb. 28: MC Manitoba leadership seminar, at Elim Mennonite Church, Grunthal. For more information, visit www.mennochurch.mb.ca.

Feb. 28-March 1: MC Manitoba annual delegate gathering at Steinbach Mennonite Church; (28) evening worship; (1) business meeting.

For more information, visit www.mennochurch.mb.ca.

March 7: CMU dessert fundraising evening, in Winkler, at 7 p.m. For more information, visit cmu.ca/events.html.

March 20: CMU Verna Mae Janzen

Music Competition finals, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit cmu.ca/programs/music.html.

March 20: IDS Esau Public Lecture Series, with Jules Pretty, at Menno Simons College. For more information, visit mscollege.ca/esau.

March 23: Mennonite Community Orchestra and CMU Singers, Women's Chorus and Men's Chorus perform *Missa Pax* by Timothy Corlis. With guest artist: Catherine Richard, piano.

March 27: Face 2 Face | On Campus. Topic: "You lost me: The church and young adults." For more information, visit cmu.ca/face2face.

April 5: Jazz@CMU. For more information, visit cmu.ca/programs/music/html.

April 26: CMU spring concert, at 7 p.m. For more information, visit cmu.ca/events.html.

April 30, May 2, 4: Recycled Orchestra, a youth orchestra from Paraguay is on tour across Canada;

(30) Steinbach Mennonite Church; (2) Winkler MB Church; (4) North Kildonan MB Church, Winnipeg. All performances at 7 p.m.

May 6: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fundraiser banquet, at the Marlborough Hotel, Winnipeg, at 6 p.m.

May 14: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate work day.

Ontario

Feb. 26: Irish singer-songwriter Steafan Hanvy performs in the Chapel at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo; at 7 p.m.

Feb. 28-March 2: Women's retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite, Camp, Sauble Beach. Resource person: Tanya Dyck Steinmann. For more information, or to register, visit slmc.ca/retreats.

March 1-2: Noah, the Ark and the Rainbow, an upbeat, inter-generational, story-telling musical, at Erb Street

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UpComing

Recycled Orchestra touring Canada this spring

A group of teenagers playing instruments made from trash found on a landfill in Asuncion, Paraguay, is coming to Canada to raise funds to create a better future for their community, hosted by the Global Family Foundation, a Canadian Christian charity. The tour will raise awareness and funds to build a community education centre in Cateura, home of the Recycled Orchestra and considered one of the poorest slums in South America. Turning metal drums, oil cans, spoons, copper pipes, wire and bottle caps into cellos, violins, guitars and flutes, the Recycled Orchestra is proving that, despite its circumstances, the community has something beautiful to offer. After a documentary crew posted an online trailer of the Recycled Orchestra on YouTube last year, the video went viral. Mike Duerksen of the Global Family Foundation, says the concert series is "about creating opportunity for an incredibly resourceful and resilient community that is living on the margins. Helping their children get a quality education will not only improve their economic situation, but it will also allow them to re-invest into their families and community to start breaking the cycle of inherited generational poverty." The whirlwind tour begins at Waterloo (Ont.) First Baptist Church on April 25 and wraps up on May 11 at Central Heights Church, Abbotsford, B.C., on May 11. (For complete tour schedule, see our Calendar listings.)

—Global Family Foundation

Mennonite Church, Waterloo; written by Joanne Bender, directed by Gord Davis. (1) at 7 p.m.; (2) 9:45 a.m. and 7 p.m.

March 6-7: Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist/Mennonite Studies at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo; at 7:30 p.m. each evening. (6) Steve Nolt will speak on "Writing the Amish in North American history"; (7) Royden Loewen will speak on "Writing Low-German Mennonites into a history of Canada."

March 7: Menno Youth Singers coffeehouse at Breslau Mennonite Church, at 7 p.m. Includes silent auction and bake sale.

March 10,11: Grandparent and Grandchild Days at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg; for children from Grade 1 to Grade 6. For more information or registration forms, call 519-625-8602 or visit www.hiddenacres.ca.

March 14-15: Engaged Workshop at Living Water Fellowship, New Hamburg. For more information, or

to register, e-mail Denise Bender at denise_bender@yahoo.com.

March 18: The Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre hosts a panel discussion of the book *Buffalo Shout*, Salmon Cry (Herald Press, 2013), in Boardroom 1 at the Toronto School of Theology Building, Toronto, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.

March 22: Menno Singers presents "Explorations: Concert No. 3—East," with Gerard Yun and the East-West Ensemble, at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m.

April 8: Mennonite Savings and Credit Union's 50th annual general meeting, at Rockaway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener; registration at 6:30 p.m., followed by the meeting at 7 p.m.

April 12: MC Eastern Canada Youth Bible Quizzing

April 25-26: MC Eastern Canada annual church gathering in the Niagara Region.

April 26,27: Pax Christi Chorale presents "Passion and Peace," featuring the True North Brass; (26) St. Peter's

Lutheran Church, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m.; (27) Grace Church-on-the-Hill, Toronto, at 3 p.m. For tickets, call 416-491-8542 or e-mail boxoffice@paxchristichorale.org.

April 25-28: Recycled Orchestra, a youth orchestra from Paraguay is on tour across Canada; (25) First Baptist Church, Waterloo; (26) UMEI Christian High School, Leamington; (27) Bethany Community Church, St. Catharines; (28) Wainfleet Brethren in Christ Church. All performances at 7 p.m.

April 28: New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale promotion dinner at Bingemans in Kitchener, at 6:30 p.m.

Classifieds

Travel

Visit Europe the Mennonite Way with Mennonite Heritage Tours! Small group Hotel Tours focusing on Mennonite/ Anabaptist heritage in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Poland and Ukraine. www.mennonite-heritagetours.eu

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Employment Opportunities

Connexus Language Institute in South Korea seeks university graduates to teach elementary school students English, while living in Christian community. One to two year commitment. Round-trip airfare provided. Email master@connexus.co.kr.

Speaker: Eileen Henderson, MCC Ontario restorative justice coordinator. Topic: "Finding God in unexpected places." For tickets, call 519-745-8458. **May 2-3:** Engaged Workshop at Maple View Mennonite Church, Wellesley. For more information, or to register, e-mail Denise Bender at denise_bender@yahoo.com.

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

For Rent

Two bedroom semi detached condo for rent. Pondview Retirement Community, Wellesley, Ont. Includes appliances, garage, backyard. Call 519 656 3460 or email jkgerber@kw.igs.net.

UpComing

Calling all 'wildly hopeful' artists

The Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery invites artists to submit artwork for consideration for a national exhibition to take place during the Mennonite Church Canada assembly to be held in Winnipeg from July 3 to 6. Artists are asked to consider the following statement as they create art that portrays their beliefs and convictions as the church together moves into "an unknown season": "The western world is rapidly moving beyond Christendom. The church must take Christian faith into a new cultural and civic landscape. There is disorientation for God's church in this new wilderness, but also a strong sense of hope that this represents a tremendous opportunity to hear God's call anew and shape a new kind of church for the future, a future that may be more like witness planting than church planting. The beliefs and convictions of individuals will be influenced in ways we have not yet imagined or discovered." The art can be strictly personal or community-oriented. It can be abstract or realistic or anything in between. It can be painting, textiles, sculpture or other media, but it must be able to travel easily and safely. Submit up to three artworks for consideration. Send high-resolution digital images to Ray Dirks at rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca by May 31. For more information, visit bit.ly/lipoLOK.

—Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery



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See www.mennonitechurch.ca/serve for details.



Artbeat Snapshot



PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Carol Ann Weaver, associate professor of music at Conrad Grebel University College, seated at the piano, performs 'The Leaving,' a musical tribute to Nicholas Elliot-Friesen. Weaver's nephew died two years ago this coming March at the age of 21. The concert, held at Uptown Waterloo's Jazz Room on Jan. 29, also featured, from left to right: drummer Kyle Skillman; saxophonist Mary Petrich of Phoenix, Ariz.; bassist Greg Prior; and guitarist Kyle Pinnell. Weaver said that she had wanted to write something in her nephew's honour, and, while it had taken this long, it was now helping her to also release him.