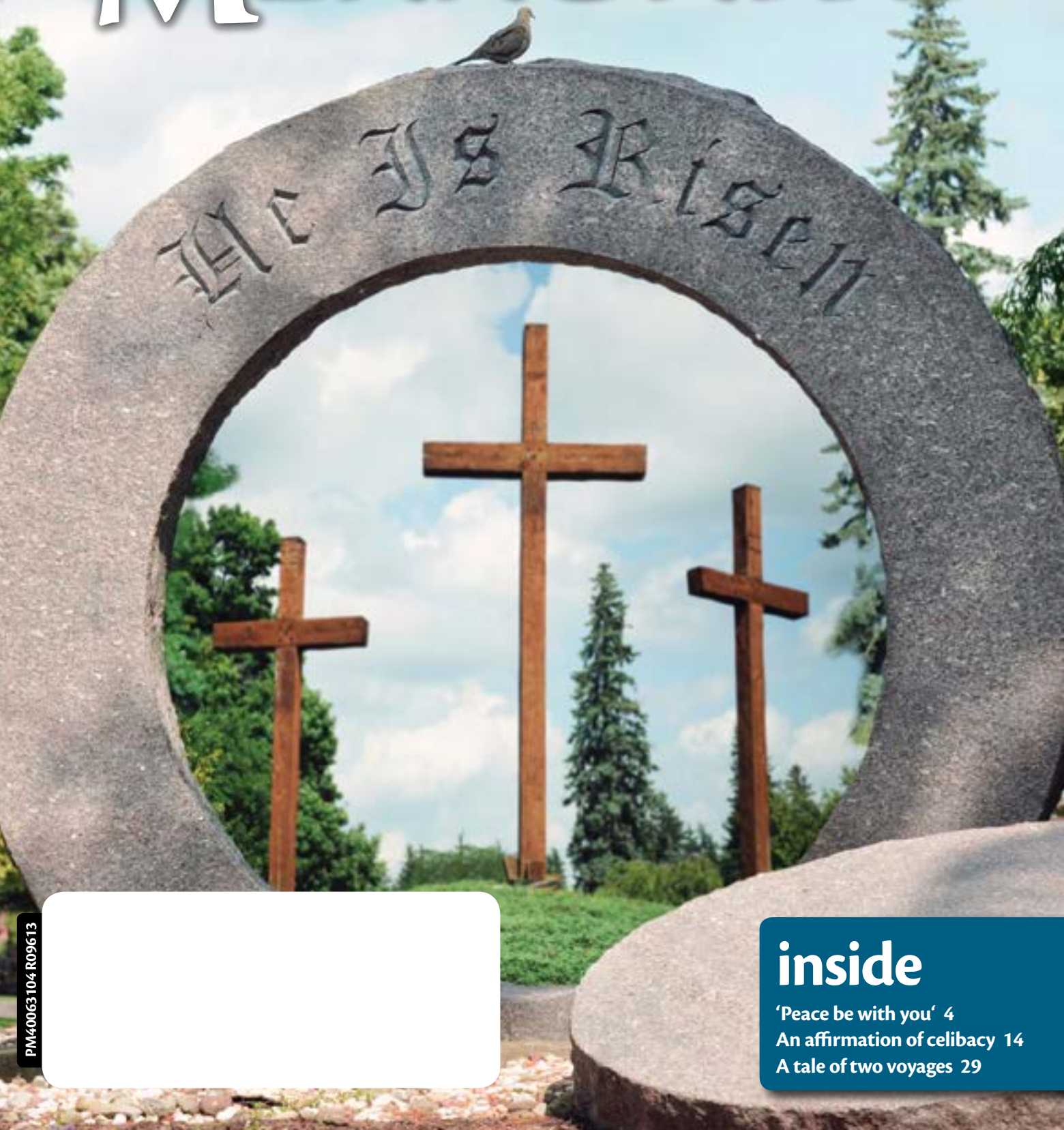


CANADIAN MENNONITE

April 14, 2014
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EDITORIAL

Of genitals and gender

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

The timing of Mennonite Church Canada's current segment on human sexuality couldn't have been better. And while the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) Task Force has been intentionally silent on the matter (while congregations process the issue), the wider religious community seems to think there is nothing more important to discuss right now.

"If it doesn't concern sex, forget about it," writes columnist Tom Ehrich for Religion News Service. "Our public presence has narrowed to questions around abortion and homosexuality. We obsess about sex, a topic that Jesus himself ignored. Never mind about war and peace, never mind wealth and power, never mind caring for the 'least of these,' never mind about human suffering."

Ehrich compares this obsession to teenage adolescence—"treating our faith as if it rests in an endless adolescence centred around sex, as if living responsible adult lives grounded in the faith as Jesus actually commended was unnecessary. Instead of doing what Jesus did—caring for victims and outcasts, and speaking truth to power—we create victims and outcasts, cosy up to wealth and power, and bury Jesus in lavish and gaudy show."

Think about it for a moment. How much of our church press news and commentary have been taken up with

this topic over the last several months? There is much discussion about what to do with the sexual abuse of the late John Howard Yoder. Questions linger about the authenticity of his theological contributions. Disclaimers are made. Victims push for a broader understanding of the power imbalance between men and women in leadership.

South of the border, our sister denomination, Mennonite Church U.S.A., is dealing with a new polarization on the subject as a result of one of its conferences licensing a lesbian pastor in Denver, Colo. Leaders from six conferences have objected and are asking Mountain States Conference "to reconsider and reverse their decision."

Earlier, a group of 150 pastors sent a letter to the denomination, asking for a statement that makes their congregations "more welcoming." A group calling itself the Pink Mennos is pushing hard for acceptance of the LGBTQ community, showing up at many official meetings, including the national assembly, to register its complaints and call for a change in the culture that ends intolerance and judgmental attitudes toward this marginalized group.

Isaac Villegas, a young pastor from Chapel Hill, N.C., put it this way in *The Mennonite*: "Our church system has estranged our LGBT sisters and brothers, rendering them perpetual strangers by means of our institutional documents: our



statements and guidelines, our agreements and covenants, all of which insist on categories for human beings that are supposed to disappear in the church; for as the apostle Paul declared, 'there is no longer male and female.' In Christ's church, Paul wrote, 'You are all children of God . . . you belong to Christ.'"

Passions and convictions run deep on both sides of this issue. In Canada, the church is working in a slightly different political milieu than in the U.S., same-sex marriage having been legalized here in 2005. This, however, has not made it less controversial in our faith community. The BFC Task Force, using what sociologists call the "bell curve" in the process of discerning the issue, estimates that "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."

Let us hope and pray that this more "mature, adult" BFC approach will result in something with which we can at least arrive at a place where we can all live together in peace, if not in complete unity. We join others in seeing this process "as truly grassroots, and the discernment not imposed by a committee or other body."

And let us not be among those, who, in Ehrich's lament, "instead of challenging each other to grow in faith, use our sex obsession as a cover for being unfaithful in what God actually values."

Finally, let us not be among the denominations that he characterizes as "having reduced their public message to regulations on sex. It's as if the four gospels weren't enough. They've had to write another book for God, in which humanity's ultimate purpose lies in genitals and gender."

ABOUT THE COVER:

Our Easter feature on page 4 explores the meaning and significance of Christ's post-resurrection pronouncement to his disciples: 'Peace be with you.'

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EASTER FEATURE

'Peace be with you'

The gift and the challenge Jesus offers

BY ALICIA J. BATTEN

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

As in many environments today, “peace” was a conventional salutation in the ancient world. In the Gospel of Luke, when the risen Jesus appears among the disciples in Jerusalem, he extends to them a greeting of peace.

This particular account of the resurrection reflects several themes specific to Luke’s gospel, and forms an important transition into Luke’s second volume, the Book of Acts. Some features of the narrative are highly memorable, such as the pair of sad characters who do not recognize the figure of Jesus as they trudge along, and Jesus’ insistence, when he appears to all of the disciples, that it is truly him, even eating some fish to convince the sceptics that he is not a ghost.

Luke portrays the disciples very positively, unlike Mark, and invests them with considerable power. The beginning of the chapter consists of the story of the women who had prepared spices and ointments for Christ’s body two days before, and who arrive at the tomb to discover that Jesus is gone. Two figures in dazzling white tell them that Jesus has risen, and the women return to the 11 disciples “and all the rest” (24:9) with this news. Yet the 11 do not believe the women, for “it seemed to them an idle tale” (24:11). Peter runs to the tomb and, finding it empty, returns home amazed.

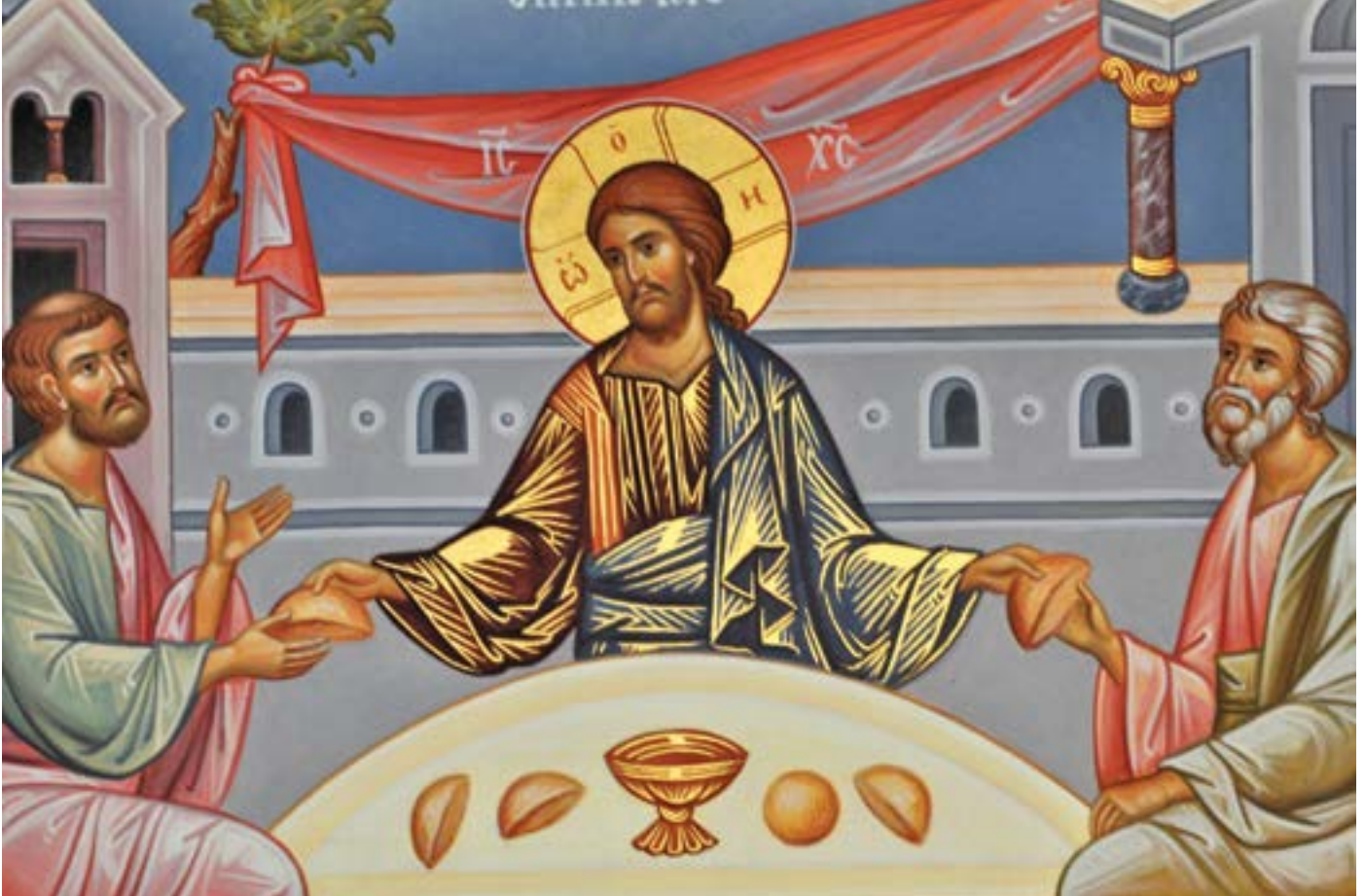
In the next scene, two despondent followers, one of them named Cleopas, but the other unidentified, are walking along the road to the village of Emmaus and talking, when Jesus approaches them and asks them about what they are conversing. Surprised that he did not know about what had happened in Jerusalem, they speak of Jesus of Nazareth, and how he was a great prophet who was condemned, handed over and crucified. They then explain that they had hoped Jesus would redeem Israel, but that it had been three days since the execution. So far, no one had seen him (24:24).

In response to this, Jesus exclaims that they are “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!” (24:25) and goes on to analyze and interpret all the things about himself from the Scriptures.

The two followers, still in the dark about who this stranger is, ask him to stay with them in Emmaus. There, at table, he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. Suddenly their “eyes were opened” (24:31) and they recognize him, but he immediately vanishes.

The two return to the 11 disciples and their companions

In Rabbinic tradition [peace] often connoted notions of well-being and salvation. Jesus’ greeting of peace in Luke 24 may be understood similarly.



The two followers, still in the dark about who this stranger is, ask him to stay with them in the village of Emmaus. There, at table, he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. Suddenly their 'eyes were opened' (Luke 24:31) and they recognize him, but he immediately vanishes.

in Jerusalem, who were all gathered together. This latter group was discussing how Jesus had indeed risen and appeared to Simon (24:34). The two recent arrivals share what had happened and how Jesus' identity "had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (24:35).

(To listen to "When He Broke the Bread"—words by Ross W. Muir / music by Sean O'Leary—visit canadianmennonite.org/when-he-broke-the-bread.)

While they are talking, Jesus then appears in their midst declaring, "Peace be with you" (24:36). The group is terrified, but Jesus convinces them that it is indeed him, invites them to touch him, and eats a piece of broiled fish. He then explains that he is the fulfillment of prophecy and

opens their minds to understand the Scriptures (24:45). He informs them that they must remain in Jerusalem until they have been "clothed with power from on high" (24:49).

Finally, Jesus leads them out to Bethany, lifts his hands and blesses them, and, while doing so, withdraws and is "carried up into heaven" (24:50). The final image in the gospel is of the disciples worshipping Jesus, then joyfully returning to Jerusalem, where they are "continually in the temple blessing God" (24:52).

Peace . . . and the breaking of bread

One of the themes evident in Luke 24 is the emphasis on meals and the breaking

of bread. The fact that Jesus' identity becomes apparent when he breaks bread with the two followers in Emmaus (24:31-32) both recalls the Last Supper, but also anticipates table fellowship as one of the important settings for life together among the people of "the way" in Acts (2:42, 46).

Whether these references have deliberate liturgical significance for Luke's audience is difficult to say, but the author does emphasize that it is in this breaking of bread and sharing of a meal that Jesus is present among the believers.

These dimensions of the resurrection story are consistent with the gospel as a whole. In no other gospel does Jesus eat so often—indeed, he is accused of being a

glutton and a drunkard in Luke 7:33-34—and with such a wide variety of people.

With whom one ate was very significant in the ancient world. Boundaries and hierarchies were maintained and reinforced by dining patterns. In Luke, Jesus breaks these boundaries by eating with tax collectors, Pharisees and sinners, and telling stories about banquets to which poor people, the blind and the lame are invited (14:21).

In Acts, after Peter has a vision of unclean foods, and hears a voice telling him to eat such foods (10:12-14), he states that, despite the prohibitions of Jews associating or eating with Gentiles, God has shown him that he should call no one profane or unclean (10:28). These verses illustrate that the practice of inclusive eating is upheld in Luke's perception of the early church.

The message of "peace" mentioned above would not be an unusual way to address people in antiquity; it was both a typical means by which a Judean man could greet his friends and also a recurring theme in Luke's gospel. In one of Peter's speeches in Acts, he says that God's message to Israel included "*preaching peace by Jesus Christ*" (10:36), and the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria is also depicted as peaceful (Acts 9:31).

The meaning of "peace" could include a variety of dimensions, deriving as it does from both the Hebrew concept of *shalom* and the Greek notion of *eirēnē*. In some contexts, peace could simply mean the absence of war, but in other settings it had to do with material and physical health and accord among human beings. In Rabbinic tradition it often connoted notions of well-being and salvation. Jesus' greeting of peace in Luke 24 may be understood similarly. Jesus offers an encouraging good wish for his followers, who must attempt to continue living in peace despite the fact that he will soon depart from them.

Jesus wishes people peace, but this does not mean that his followers will experience the rest of their days irenically. Members of the Jesus movement in Acts, such as Stephen, suffer and die for their deeds and words (7:54-60). Repeatedly throughout

Acts, various figures within the church are killed, such as James the brother of John, who is executed at the orders of Herod Agrippa I (12:1-2). Others are tossed into prison, such as Peter (12:3). Paul and Silas are both stripped and beaten with rods before they are thrown into jail in Philippi (16:19-24).

Peace may be a characteristic of the church, but, according to Acts, those to whom the gospel is preached do not always receive it peacefully. Although the apostles try to be peaceful, they are often received with hostility. Acts ends with Paul under arrest, and does not say how Peter died, although some non-canonical texts contain accounts

of their violent executions. Despite the message of peace, and the attempts to live in peace, there is no guarantee that one will have peace. In fact, seeking peace may invite persecution and death. If the church desired to create a culture of peace, but in doing so challenged the dominant values and practices of the day, it was not assured that its message would be welcomed.

Justice, liberation . . . and peace

A dimension of Jesus' teaching and activity throughout the gospel of Luke is to proclaim justice and liberation through word and deed. Jesus proclaims the poor blessed, but also, as we have seen, eats with tax collectors and sinners. Some would appreciate such a message and activities, while others would react negatively to it.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Luke includes the greeting of peace by the risen Jesus to his followers is to offer a reminder that peace, in the gospel or throughout the Book of Acts, is not simply an absence of war, but the realization of God's realm, in which all people can eat together, regardless of their social status or background, and those who are sick are healed. It is a deeper, more profound notion of peace that assures the

well-being of everyone.

In a society in which all goods were perceived as limited, this meant that those who had more than they needed, such as wealth, would have to share (Acts 2:44-45). Thus peace would require that some relinquish some of their possessions or sense of privilege. It would require that they share their table with prostitutes, sinners and outsiders. Peace, therefore, would not be welcomed by all.

Positive and negative peace

Peace is a central idea in many religions of the world, yet it obviously remains elusive, fraught as the world is with conflict. Those working in peace studies often

As a Central American peasant once pointed out in the New York Times, 'I am for peace, but not peace with hunger.'

point out that there are two concepts of peace:

- **NEGATIVE PEACE** is understood as an attempt to put a stop to violent conflict.
- **POSITIVE PEACE** wants to minimize violence, but it focuses on issues of structural violence, which can occur in a variety of forms, such as economic injustice, sexism or environmental degradation.

A nation or community may not be experiencing violent military conflict internally or with another, but it still may be quite violent if there are all types of systemic social injustices. In such a context, some may experience this as peaceful because they enjoy a pleasant standard of living, while others, living in poverty, experience it as violent.

As a Central American peasant once pointed out in the *New York Times*, "I am for peace, but not peace with hunger."

Positive peacemaking, therefore, would address the issues that create economic and social disparities. In doing so, it might upset the status quo and risk creating hostility among those who are more privileged, because positive peace requires structural social change. Peace in this sense is not simply the absence

of war; it is the realization of a more just community. It is possible to end violent conflicts and achieve a negative peace without broaching the more profound underlying issues that prevent the possibility of ever attaining a deeper and more enduring positive peace.

The gift of peace Jesus offers

Despite the brutality that he had experienced, the risen Jesus extends peace to his followers, although they will soon face violence. I do not think that the story presents us with a Jesus who utters mere niceties, nor one who expresses a peace

purpose of the resurrection narratives is to bolster and legitimate Jesus' followers, who are depressed about the demise of their leader and who wonder whether they should carry on. Jesus' appearance, together with his message of peace and other teachings, motivates them, in turn, to use their gifts in order to persevere with their difficult work.

Passing the peace

In many Christian contexts there is a greeting of peace at some point in the worship or liturgy. How do people understand this wish for peace? One dimension

to the needs of the world in the face of setbacks. When we share the peace, it may be useful to think of it as a form of encouragement to pursue peace despite the hardships that such a path might entail. As such, "passing the peace" can be a concrete expression of hope.

The late Vaclav Havel famously stated in *Disturbing the Peace* that hope "is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."

Thinking about the "peace wish"—a gift and challenge from the risen Jesus—in light of these notions of sharing our gifts, positive peace, and in the context of the gospel and the story of the early church, may be useful, especially at this moment of renewed Easter hope. ❧

The late Vaclav Havel famously stated in Disturbing the Peace that hope 'is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.'

wish to a group, some of whom will soon face death, as a wry, ironic comment. Rather, Jesus offers encouragement to those who had become despondent: a gift of peace—positive peace—and hope that they must seek to sustain and share as they live in the world.

When thinking about gifts, John O'Donohue, the late Irish poet and philosopher, wrote in *Eternal Echoes* that "[n]o gift is ever given for your private use. . . . The gift calls you to embrace it, not to be afraid of it. The only way to honour the unmerited presence of the gift in your life is to attend to the gift; this is the most difficult path to walk. . . . It calls you to courage and humility. If you hear its voice in your heart, you simply have to follow it. Otherwise, your life could be dragged into the valley of disappointment. People who truly follow their gift find that it can often strip their lives and yet invest them with a sense of enrichment and fulfilment that nothing else could bring. Those who renege on or repress their gift are unwittingly sowing the seeds of regret."

O'Donohue's words cause me to think about Luke 24:36 as a free piece of encouragement—a gift—to continue seeking positive peace, even if at times it is seemingly impossible. In part, the

of it that could be explored is this notion of the greeting as an impetus for people to continue to seek positive peace.

As O'Donohue says, our gifts are not given for private use, but to be shared with others, with the world. It is difficult, however, to sustain the courage, commitment and energy required to attend

Alicia J. Batten is an associate professor of religious studies and theological studies at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont.



❧ For discussion

1. When you meet friends or family, what form of greeting do you use? Have you ever met anyone who used "peace" as a greeting? Does your congregation use "passing the peace" or some type of peace greeting in worship? What is the meaning of this greeting of peace?
2. Alicia Batten offers two views of peace that she calls negative and positive. When you use the word "peace," are you using it as an absence of overt violence or as a sense of well-being for all? What is the connection between justice and peace? Are there other words that we could substitute for "peace" to clarify our meaning?
3. Batten says that the risen Jesus extends peace to his followers even though they will face difficult times. She quotes from John O'Donohue: "People who truly follow their gift find that it can strip their lives and yet invest them with a sense of enrichment and fulfilment." Do you agree? How does this lead to a sense of peace?
4. If peace is seen as providing a sense of well-being for all, how can we work at making our faith communities more peaceful? What is the role of peace in the kingdom of God? If the risen Christ appeared to us today, what would he say to us about the meaning of peace?

—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.

✉ **Writer stands up for the victims of John Howard Yoder's abuse**

RE: "MENNO MEDIA QUESTIONED over John Howard Yoder disclaimer" letter, March 3, page 11.

There are a number of misconceptions in this letter that need to be addressed:

- **THE FACT** that Yoder's behaviour is addressed at this time is because it was not addressed satisfactorily when he was still alive. It seems the reputation and protection of the church and its institutions were more important than the pain and duress inflicted on Yoder's victims. Only a fraction of the victims came forward at that time because it was not safe to disclose their experience then.
- **THAT THE** "plaintiffs" are described as "unknown to most members of the Mennonite churches" seems to imply that the voices of people who are not prominent in the church don't count, especially over and against such a prominent man as Yoder was.
- **THE WOMEN** did not have the complete freedom to say no. Yoder, as an acclaimed theologian the world over, wielded an immense power and influence, especially in respect to the people he mentored, in this case, female students and other women. A common dynamic in professional abuse is for the perpetrator to distort the distinction between his professional role and sexualized behaviour, grooming the victim to believe that the sexual overtures are part of the professional role.
- **A DISCLAIMER** is not a court trial, as the letter suggests, but a statement about the other life Yoder lived, which was so contrary to the nonviolence he wrote

about, a very real factor in how one reads Yoder.
WALTER WIEBE, MORDEN, MAN.

✉ **Christians should fund CoSA if governments won't**

RE: "CoSA: CAUTIOUS optimism" editorial, March 17, page 2.

In Manitoba, the potential funding cut represented the final execution of a slow but gradual death by a thousand cuts. Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) funding has not been increased for 20 years. Funding for CoSA has been eroded to less than half of its original buying power through a lack of inflation increases. Government support has been soft, fickle and non-committal.

The facts that the justice system is a revolving door of repeat offenders, and programs like CoSA reduce recidivism by up to 70 percent, sadly mean little to politicians. Even though CoSA requires strong accountability and responsibility from offenders for their horrible crimes, it's perceived as "soft-on-crime" alternative justice.

I recently sat in a CoSA circle and listened to an offender describe how the program had saved him from suicide and restored his relationship with his family. This individual will spend the rest of his life suffering the psycho-social pain of his offence, as may his victims. CoSA offers a bit of light in the dark tunnel of recovery for offenders and their loved ones. Offenders desire restored relationships and a way to pay for their crime. CoSA offers a way.

If governments are so blind to the brilliance of CoSA's light, people of faith should readily step up and fund this important ministry. If nothing else, consider that your donation creates more than 10 times the social return on investment than a tax dollar put into the justice system.

RON JANZEN (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ **Labelling relief workers 'terrorists' is political and unhelpful**

RE: "MCC SHOULD consider new partner in Gaza" letter, March 17, page 8.

In reporting on the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) response to the Gaza floods ("Flooding worsens Gazans' plight," Jan. 20, page 19), it is regrettable to hear such harsh words as those uttered by Andrew Pinnell, who suggests MCC choose different partners in Gaza based on unattributed reports from amateur media with axes to grind.

Palestinian news first reported the story about

“Israel opening dams” causing Gaza flooding, and Christian news media reported rebuttals, stating, “Israel has no dams in these areas.” Both are untrue, and professional media, including the *Jerusalem Post* and Al Jazeera, properly ignored both versions.

Israel manages water in the Besor (Gaza) region to the best of its ability without concern for Gaza’s residents. It does this through a combination of stone

retaining walls to reduce erosion, wells, reservoirs and dams on the wadis Garar, Hebron, Be’ersheva, and, in particular, on the Besor, where a low concrete dam at Tze’elim diverts the water from Nahal Be’ersheva for use in Israel.

Although water quality standards in Israel are high, and sewage treatment is generally tertiary, significant
(Continued on page 10)

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Thinking biblically about sex

PHIL WAGLER

Be honest, you’re only reading this because of the title.

Yup, you have issues. But so do I.

My understanding of sex was shaped within the context of my small-town church community and wider family. Pretty much everywhere there was blushing at that dirty word.

Then I got married to a beautiful woman. The transition into post-virginity was both wonderful and treacherous. That wasn’t her fault and it wasn’t mine, it just was. Sex is messy because I am messy.

What’s the point of this uncomfortable conversation? Well, the life of our wider church seems dominated by sex lately. We’re thinking a lot about “it.”



This issue is emotionally charged. We want to prove our point and win others to our side. We are quick to judge—on both sides of the debate. We want to be right; our identities depend upon it. Perhaps we’re led by fear, insecurity or pride. Perhaps our position has roots in our pain, our thirst for righteousness or our desire to protect human dignity. We’re probably even somewhat reluctant to admit the deeper roots of the emotions we feel.

Despite all this, I believe the real debate

is not over sexuality, but over the source of authority. This is the root question: Does the Bible speak with authority or is the authority for living—and living out our messy sexualities in this case—found somewhere else?

Everyone within our tribal debate seems to take Scripture seriously. However, are we being honest about what Lesslie Newbigin calls the “plausibility structure,” the underlying practices and beliefs that determine which ideas are believable and beyond doubt in our society?

I don’t believe we are, and this is the crux of the issue. Our pluralist society

For the Christian, the starting point for understanding truth is the gospel.

accepts science, reason and personal experience or fulfilment as the undeniable neutral fount from which something is believable and “true.” We are tempted, therefore, to interpret Scripture through that lens. If we do this, however, we start from the wrong place. While science, reason and personal experience are not to be dismissed, for the followers of Jesus none of these ultimately form the way in which what is true is determined.

For the Christian, the starting point for understanding truth is the gospel. The

gospel-given witness in Scripture—that Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will come again—relativizes every other way we once interpreted the world.

The first words of Jesus are, “*Repent and believe the good news*” (Mark 1:15). Jesus calls us to admit the way we’ve seen the world—and decided what is true—has been wrong, and to believe in him as the way, the truth and the life.

With some of his last words on the Road to Emmaus, he showed how the Scriptures were about him (Luke 24:13-49). Scripture is not a tool for self-justification or brow-beating, but witness of the One who is the image of the invisible God, full of grace and truth. From this gospel then, we interpret our world and our living in it.

And this brings us back to sex. Heterosexuals and homosexuals have common ground as sinners. Let’s stop the

denial: We are all sexually broken. Do we risk arguing for the world we desperately want to be true, only to find ourselves propping up either a Bible-quoting self-righteousness that has truth but no grace, or a Bible-editing self-righteousness that has grace but no truth? In both cases, we may get exactly what we already want without the good news.

Phil Wagler thinks it may take a lifetime to think clearly about sex. He is author of Kingdom Culture.

(Continued from page 9)

rainfall events occur periodically and overwhelm local engineering, just as they do in Canada. Thus, the downstream water in Gaza is atrocious. The water in the wadi is undrinkable due to nitrites from farm run-off and natural chloride in the land, but the aquifer beneath is also contaminated from salty water due to excessive pumping, mostly on Israel's side. The

water is nonetheless precious to Gazans; wealthy ones purchase desalination units, while the poor drink what they can.

Gazans themselves are not blameless; the new bridge built at the mouth of Wadi Gaza causes small gravel dams to form at the piers, which exacerbates the flooding into the refugee camps at Bureij and Nuseirat when storms occur.

NEW CANADIAN VOICE

A cry for equality

BRANDER McDONALD

Some may consider the following to be stated too strongly, but these are the realities for many native people.

Native Christians understand that non-native churches, denominations and Christians do not expect native people to be trustworthy with the gospel, finances or any responsibilities presented to them for ministry. There is still a strongly held assumption that native people are “savages” at heart, with too many beliefs and practices that make it a disadvantage for them to successfully do native ministry. The distrust is intrinsic, but most non-native Christians would never admit their biases toward native peoples. Most of the time, native people know they are looked upon as just another mission to pray for and possibly forget.

It appears, in many cases, that non-native Christians would rather give funding to outside missions and other non-native missions at home, rather than to truly indigenous native ministries. One reason is that non-native Christians still hold to the premise of “contamination by association” with native people, especially the more typically “traditional” native people, for fear of their “pagan” ways. Thus, non-native Christians are not willing to invest themselves personally or financially in native ministry, preferring vicarious involvement instead, by way of “prayer” and sending of good will, which

appear only as hypocrisy and placating to native people.

Non-native Christians still believe native people are stereotypically lazy and unreliable, with no initiative. They are unaware of the cultural “distinctives” that make this appear so, and are usually unwilling to give these concepts any credence, for fear of falling into a “pluralistic” or a syncretistic minefield. They would rather avoid the argument altogether than have to work hard to understand the relevant cultural issues.

Non-native Christians generally believe more in assimilation into the body politic of Christianity than in the positive vision of a truly supporting indigenous Christian ministry. They are afraid of the differences and possible “spiritual contamination” of other worldviews, and believe that to be one body in Christ, “we should all do things the same way non-

No more native advisory councils with no authority, or any other forms of tokenism.

native Christians do it.”

Native Christians are longing for a Christianity that is culturally relevant, inclusive and reconciliatory; not paternalistic or ethnocentric in thinking it knows best for the Indian, especially when it comes to doing native ministry and indigenous leadership.

This is our prayer and hope for equity

in the body of Christ, and it must start with mainstream leadership. It must be relevant and visible. It must be widely public and consistent. It must be celebrated and encouraged. It cannot be vain promises and only talk, because the time for words is over for native people. We have been waiting for generations to be truly celebrated and given equal privilege of doing ministry alongside non-native Christian leadership. The time is now. The time is critical. Otherwise, you may lose another group of people by your non-inclusive, ethno-centric and hierarchical forms of doing ministry.

This is the challenge: Put aside ethno-centric understandings and allow native Christian leaders to be your equal; your partner; your co-worker, even on your staff in your local church or denomination; your mentor; your consultant; and even your teacher. No more native advisory councils with no authority, or any other forms of tokenism.

We, as native Christian leaders, are the untapped resource that will help you wade through our postmodern world. It is our time to be forefront for the cause of Christ. Let us share this reality together

as equal members of a wonderful body of Christ. Let us share in this victory and reality.

This I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Great Creator Redeemer, the One and Only One.

Brander McDonald is MC B.C.'s indigenous relations coordinator.



As such, the words of Chris Guinness of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency are probably the most appropriate: “Any normal community would struggle to recover from this disaster. But a community . . . whose public health system has been destroyed, and where the risk of disease was already rife, must be freed from these man-made constraints to deal with the impact of a natural calamity such as this.”

God’s people should be looking past the angry words on both sides, to the truth—some have more water than others—and ask what God would have

them do. Simply standing aside and labelling relief workers “terrorists” is only political and unhelpful.

ANDRE PEKOVICH, VANCOUVER

✉ Speaking across the gender divide . . . from a bubble bath

RE: “SPEAKING MAN to man” and “Cleaning house and Lenten reflections,” March 17, pages 14 and 15.

(Continued on page 12)

FROM OUR LEADERS

What gets missed at meetings?

DAN GRABER

Meetings are always interesting, as they take on personalities of their own. And groups develop their own style or flavour. The 2014 Mennonite Church Alberta annual meeting was no different.

In 2013, MC Alberta spent more than it received, so this was front and centre as we looked at our 2014 budget. Some strongly encouraged us to not have another deficit year. Others persuasively urged improved fund-raising. Some strongly defended continuing an existing ministry, while no motion was made to support a new one, despite some people being invited to do so. In a brief survey of priorities, it was clear Camp Valaqua had broad support, with the area church minister role in second.

Some suggested we could spend money to potentially produce results—new converts—more quickly. There was respectful conversation around the tension between direct and friendship evangelism; verbal witness and social work; and personal testimony and service, justice and peace.



This was a good meeting, as the theological walls and monetary concerns didn’t seem to come between us. Delegates spoke appropriately in a fairly open manner. They shared directly without being unkind. There was lots of good will, even with strong differences of values, priorities and opinions.

In reflecting on any meeting, it’s good to ask questions. Here are some of mine:

- **HOW DO** Roberts Rules of Order help or hinder our listening and speaking?
- **WHAT POINTS** of view were missed, not mentioned or avoided?
- **WHAT DYNAMICS**, like conference history or personal relationships, affected the conversation?
- **DOES MONEY** unnecessarily cloud conversation about church planting?
- **ARE THERE** groups that tend to be in the same camp on many issues or is there diversity of viewpoints among these groups?
- **DID THIS** meeting break down walls between us or build them up?
- **WOULD IT** have helped our discernment to stop a time or two for prayer?
- **DID DELEGATES** leave with a clear

understanding of what was decided?

Some longer-term questions for MC Alberta:

- **CAN VALAQUA** be encouraged to find ways to increase its revenues?
- **SHOULD MC Alberta** support Valaqua and the cost of being an area church, but not much else?
- **HOW IMPORTANT** is it for spiritual health to sponsor, support and encourage outside ministries?
- **WHAT POTENTIAL** transformational decisions are we avoiding?

Raising questions doesn’t mean the annual delegate session was a failure. It was a good meeting because we worshipped, celebrated and laughed together. Collective deliberations are an attempt to sense God’s leading, and some of our different ideas were in the open for all to see.

We know finances aren’t going to improve without hard work, prayer and good communication. This delegate meeting helped us face the reality of finances, differing opinions and different strategies for the future. May we learn from this so future meetings are even better. May we continue to be good witnesses of the vision, healing and hope God offers us through his Son and the kingdom of God with us.

Dan Graber is Mennonite Church Alberta’s area church minister.

(Continued from page 11)

I sometimes like to introduce myself as the pastor's wife . . . in jest. Really I'm a pastor's husband. I'm a stay-at-home dad part-time and I work part-time. I like to cook and bake, and I make most of the meals during the week.

I clean the house mostly, although I must admit my wife deals with the storage part of our clutter. Since my daughter's birth, I have been the main person to put her to bed. For some reason, she always wants Daddy. Somehow she thinks I've got the "maternal instinct." Oh yeah, I do most of the laundry. At least I do most of the folding! Does no one in my house understand the importance of folding clothing?

As well, I am a connoisseur of barbecue chips, and I watch and play hockey. I like my part-time work, which is in construction. Interestingly enough, my co-workers are critical-thinking, sensitive brutes who lead caring, egalitarian lives.

The long and the short of it is, we live in a weird and wonderful world where God continues to surprise us just when we think humanity is going off the rails. I would agree that we need to talk and reflect on how we live together as males and females in this world, but I would add—even more primarily—we need to let the Spirit lead us to show Christ's light to the people around us whether it seems to fit into a gender stereotype or not.

Thanks for the articles! I've got to go. It's been a hard day at work and I feel like slipping into a relaxing candlelit bubble bath with a good novel. But I think I'll forgo it and do the dishes before I pass out in my kids' bed!

DAVE SARARUS, HANOVER, ONT.

✉ MCC offers resource when dealing with sexual abuse

RE: "REMEMBERING YODER honestly," Jan. 6, page 33, and letters to the editor in subsequent issues.

As members of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Response and Prevention Network, we have been watching with interest as the information about John Howard Yoder's sexual misconduct has been acknowledged publicly.

In several letters in the Feb. 17 and March 3 issues, discomfort has been expressed with the intention of MennoMedia to include a disclaimer in Yoder's writings.

It would be helpful for people to review the MCC publication, "Understanding sexual abuse by a church leader or caregiver," which can be obtained from the nearest MCC office or downloaded by visiting abuse.mcc.org/resources/mcc-resources.

ELSIE GOERZEN

(End Abuse, MCC B.C.)

VIRGINIA FROESE

(Voices for Non-Violence, MCC Manitoba)

EILEEN HENDERSON

(Sexual Misconduct & Abuse Resource and Response Team, MCC Ontario)

STEPHEN SIEMENS

(Restorative justice coordinator, MCC Canada)

✉ Clinical depression is neither sloth nor sin

RE: "THE DEADLY sin of sloth," March 3, page 11.

I was disappointed and alarmed by the this article's blatant condemnation of someone living with the burden of the dark and life-sucking characteristics it describes. Melissa Miller describes it as "sloth," and the clear inference in her description is that it follows that sloth is synonymous with sin, however one may interpret that term.

In my view, though, Miller has accurately described someone who is suffering from the debilitating illness of clinical depression. As I read the article, I was waiting for her to recognize that fact and encourage us to help such an individual receive professional help and our support. Already-depressed people reading this column would surely have added guilt and condemnation to a situation in which they may already see as hopeless.

If the column in any way represents the Mennonite church's recognition, understanding and treatment of depression, it urgently needs a conversation with mental health professionals. Clinical depression is not sloth. Neither is it sin. It is a mental illness. Those who suffer from it need our love, patience, support and understanding, anything but our condemnation.

DEL GINGRICH, ELMIRA, ONT.

✉ Is Will Braun too cool for school?

RE: "SUNDAY UN-SCHOOLING," March 3, page 17.

While I think we can celebrate the merits of a variety of approaches to educating our children, I disagree with Will Braun's dualistic approach of being against—or "hating," as he stated—the traditional schooling method and being for "un-schooling."

Richard Rohr states that the dualistic mind compares, competes, conflicts, conspires, condemns and cancels out any contrary evidence, and then it crucifies with impunity. He calls it the Seven Cs of delusion. It appears Braun is attempting to do this to school.

I would encourage him to reconsider, especially

considering that there are millions of children who dream of going to school, but instead spend their days engaging in activities such as picking garbage, begging or being sexually exploited.

On his first day of Grade 1, my son told me with great sincerity, "I love her," when asked about his teacher. He has learned a tremendous amount from teachers who care about him and who offer things that I may not be able to.

I am grateful that a larger community than myself will invest in the minds, bodies and spirits of my three children. I am sure there will be numerous moments when school will be boring. I, too, have been bored in life, sitting in traffic, doing laundry or taxes. Learning to cope with boredom is an essential life skill.

Finally, Braun states that his offspring will have "less stuff" because of their choice to "un-school" and resulting single income. Parents choose to work outside the home for a myriad of complex reasons, including a desire to help others. While materialism is rampant and something many Christians, including myself, struggle with, it is trite to bring it into this issue. Nurturing our children's curiosity is so important that we need to explore how we can best do this with humility, not arrogance, the tone which—likely unintentionally—comes across in the column.

LARA MONTGOMERY, CALGARY

✉ Québec history prof speaks against proposed charter

RE: "PROPOSED QUÉBEC charter not a threat to religious freedom" letter by John Klassen, Feb. 3, page 11.

There are clearly three agendas at work among defenders of the charter.

- **ONE IS** to control the Muslim immigrants, while adding in Jews and Sikhs to camouflage this. The suggestion is that this is not discrimination because anyone can take off their optional religious clothing. What would the Amish, Hutterite and Old Order Mennonite say to this? It is either a clear discrimination or clear misunderstanding of religious belief. While it does not touch Protestants, it is a distortion of religious liberty.
- **A SECOND** more long-range and often expressed agenda is to stop all public stances of religion. Again an unacceptable limitation for Anabaptists in particular. I am amazed that a history professor would justify this when government interpretation of religion in history has almost always been flawed and manipulative. In particular, the model of the French Revolution claimed in Québec is one that is hostile to all religion.
- **A THIRD** agenda is to provoke the Canadian Supreme Court to reject the charter and thus justify

separation from Canada.

Apart from these concerns, there is the biblical mandate to protect the stranger from harassment and alienation. Does that mean anything goes for immigrants? Of course not. Some regulation is necessary, but this should happen in consultation with immigrant representatives and religious leaders, and be enacted fairly. Anabaptist churches in Québec are joining with many others to insist that this proposition does not represent Québec values.


RICHARD LOUGHEED, MONTREAL

Lecturer in church history at École de Théologie Évangélique de Montréal, sponsored by the Mennonite Brethren and the Christian and Missionary Alliance denominations.




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VIEWPOINT

An affirmation of celibacy

BY LYDIA CRUTWELL

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

Having read “Between horizons: Biblical perspectives on human sexuality” (the fifth Being a Faithful Church [BFC] document), I found myself questioning once again how we approach the intertwined issues of singleness and celibacy—abstaining from sexual activity.

In any discussion of sexuality, what we believe about celibacy often unconsciously informs our assumptions and frames our conversation. Simply put, do we believe that those who are single and celibate can be fulfilled, happy and fully functional members of society and of our churches, or do we believe that they must be unfulfilled, immature or unlovable?

In the first chapter of their excellent book, *Singled Out: Why Celibacy Must Be Reinvented in Today's Church*, the authors point out that, in the secular media, adults who are celibate are portrayed at best as immature and unattractive—for example, the 2005 film *The 40-Year Old Virgin*—and at worst as potential child molesters.

While the sexual abuse scandals among Catholic priests are horrific and ought rightly to be condemned, we should not condemn the whole idea of celibacy along with it. If we do so, we dishonour the millions of Christians throughout the centuries who have demonstrated their devotion to God by remaining celibate and single, including, as BFC 5 points out, both Paul and Jesus.

While there are some positive portrayals of celibacy in both the secular and Christian media, by and large North American Christians tend to view singleness and celibacy as an unpleasant period



of young adulthood, to be hurried through as quickly as possible on the way to wedded bliss. However, this view does not honour the brothers and sisters in our midst for whom faithful discipleship means choosing celibacy.

Given that there is a higher proportion of women in the church than men, and given Paul's scriptural injunction to avoid “*being yoked with unbelievers*” (II Corinthians 6:14), for many women Christian discipleship may mean lifelong singleness and celibacy. If we view this simple fact as a tragedy or a waste, then we are likely assuming that celibacy is a horrible, cruel and unnatural fate.

Certainly, all those who are single and celibate will struggle with their sexuality and faithful living, but so do all married men and women. The difference is that we tend to assume all married people are happy unless proven otherwise, and that all singles are unhappy unless proven otherwise.

Viewing celibacy as unnatural does not help us in supporting those who are single, nor does it help those who are widowed or divorced, or even those within marriage who are called to abstain from sex for medical or spiritual reasons. This view certainly does not help those people whom we as a church would like to encourage towards celibacy: those who are dating, engaged or attracted to people of the same sex. If we adopt the view that those who are celibate must not be fully satisfied or fully mature, then it is no wonder that many Christians follow the wider society in no longer reserving sex for solely within the bounds of a covenant relationship between a man and a

woman.

One of the other trends within North American culture is the rhetoric of sex as a human right. This line of reasoning says that any human sexual activity—as long as it is with another consenting adult—is not only lawful, but actually needful.

Today, many secular advice columnists boldly state that if your partner does not satisfy all your sexual desires, then you should find someone else who will.

However, the call to Christian discipleship is not only to acknowledge that we all have sinful or disordered desires, but we are also to freely give up our rights—real or imagined—in order to offer all that we are and all that we have in service to God. As Paul says in I Corinthians 6, “we are not our own,” and thus our discipleship involves freely dedicating not only our time, talents and money to God, but our sexuality as well.

We ought to affirm that the single, celibate life is no less a valid form of discipleship than the married life, albeit one in which sexuality, intimacy and belonging are expressed in different ways.

This affirmation brings with it some important questions:

- **ARE WE**, as individuals, willing to let God—rather than our desires or societal norms—choose when and how we express our sexuality?
- **ARE WE**, as churches, committed to supporting the single, celibate Christians among us as thoroughly and intentionally as we support married couples and families?
- **AND FINALLY**, as we continue this BFC process, are we committed to viewing celibacy not as a curse, but as a God-given form of discipleship equal in value to marriage?

Lydia Crutwell is pastor of First United Mennonite Church in Vancouver, B.C., and is blessedly content with her current form of discipleship as a single, celibate woman.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Hohl—Zachary Douglas Vincent (b. March 4, 2014), to Sherry and Doug Hohl, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Klassen—Isaiah Luke (b. March 10, 2014), to Mike and Misty Klassen, Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Martin—Logan Cole (b. March 22, 2014), to Nick Martin and Andrea Shantz, Breslau Mennonite, Ont.

Siemens—Elliott Ryan Sinnaeve (b. March 9, 2014), to Ryan and Sandra Siemens, Grace Mennonite, Prince Albert, Sask.

Watemambala—Steve (b. March 13, 2014), to Didier and Giselle Watemambala, Ottawa Mennonite.

Baptisms

Vincent Hua, Austin Huynh, Grace Lam, Samuel

Nguyen, Esther Pham, Andy Tran—Edmonton Vietnamese Mennonite, March 2, 2014.

Michel Dostaler—Ottawa Mennonite, March 23, 2014.

Marriages

Hosler/Letkeman—Jason Hosler and Kristy Letkeman, at Wildwood Mennonite, Saskatoon, March 22, 2014.

Deaths

Albrecht—Aganeta (nee Dirks), 94 (b. Dec. 20, 1919; d. March 10, 2014), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Bauman—Rita (nee Musselman), 77 (b. July 20, 1936; d. March 10, 2014), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

Bechtel—(Clayton) Orville, 91 (b. Feb. 5, 1923; d. March 23, 2014), Wanner Mennonite, Cambridge, Ont.

Beck—Maria (nee Wiens), 92 (b. Aug. 19, 1921; d. March 18, 2014), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Bergen—Elsbeth (nee Penner), 94 (b. Nov. 3, 1919; d. March 9, 2014), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Dyck—Agatha (nee Zacharias), 99 (b. Dec. 10, 1914; d. March 23, 2014), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Elias—Mary (nee Plenert), 84 (b. July 4, 1929; d. Feb. 28, 2014), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Funk—Maria, 86 (b. Feb. 5, 1928; d. March 11, 2014), Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Giesbrecht—George, 66 (b. June 27, 1947; d. Jan. 28, 2014), Osler Mennonite, Sask.

Harms—Anna (nee Pauls), 94 (b. Oct. 17, 1919; d. Jan. 18, 2014), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Hendy—Richard Gordon, 65 (b. June 30, 1948; d. March 13, 2014), Level Ground Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.

Isaac—Ernest Frank, 80 (b. Aug. 19, 1933; d. Jan. 8, 2014), Wainfleet Brethren in Christ, Dunnville, Ont.

Kampen—Erna (nee Petkau), 81 (b. Nov. 20, 1932; d. March 5, 2014), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Klassen—Arlene Helen, 63 (b. March 5, 1950; d. Feb. 21, 2014), Wildwood Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Letkeman—David, 78 (b. April 15, 1935; d. March 18, 2014) Morden Mennonite, Man.

Litwiller—Earl, 93 (b. Feb. 17, 1921; d. March 22, 2014), Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Schoenfeld—John, 82 (b. Sept. 26, 1931; d. Jan. 3, 2014), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Unger—Jacob, 88 (b. July 27, 1925; d. Jan. 28, 2014), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Warkentin—Gerard, 83 (b. May 20, 1930; d. March 12, 2014), Wildwood Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Zacharias—Edward, 90 (d. March 17, 2014), Morden Mennonite, 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

Breaking down walls in the name of Christ

MC Alberta delegates wrestle with cultural, financial and resource walls

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alberta Correspondent
LETHBRIDGE, ALTA.

“As a child, I didn’t see the wall,” Arlyn Friesen Epp told delegates to the 85th annual Mennonite Church Alberta assembly, as he spoke of growing up in small-town Saskatchewan with

no real knowledge of, or connections to, first nations people other than negative stereotypes.

Cheryl Bear-Barnetson, Friesen Epp’s co-presenter at the March 21-22 assembly,



Cheryl Bear-Barnetson poses with a copy of her 2013 book, Introduction to First Nations Ministry, at the MC Alberta assembly.



Elaine Klassen and Noreen Neufeldt ham it up in the kitchen as they prepare food for delegates at the annual Mennonite Church Alberta assembly hosted by Lethbridge Mennonite Church.

is the opposite of those stereotypes. From the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation in B.C., Bear-Barnetson has a doctorate of ministry and is an accomplished musician and pastor. Her personal experience facing the wall of racism and her extensive research has shown how correct information and good relationships break down walls and allow people to hear and learn from each other across cultures.

The assembly theme, “Brothers and sisters in Christ: Christ breaks down the walls,” was anchored firmly in Ephesians 2:14: “For he is our peace; in his flesh he made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” It would prove a timely message for Alberta, as the next weekend Edmonton hosted the final national event in the Truth and Reconciliation process.

At a surface glance, there didn’t appear to be significant walls at the assembly. It progressed well, with the usual good food, conversation and business speeding by in a blur of information and ideas.

Walls dismantled and still standing

If one listened closely, however, walls were evident both in how they are being dismantled and in those left standing. Violence in Sudan and racism in Canada are two walls that members of the Edmonton South Sudanese Mennonite



Dan Graber, MC Alberta area church minister, left; Elias Miranda, pastor of Word of Life Mennonite Church, Calgary; Thomas Pham, pastor of Edmonton Vietnamese Mennonite Church; and Jon Olfert, Camp Valaqua director, lead the 2014 MC Alberta assembly delegates in a time of remembering those who have passed away in the last year, and celebrating those who have joined the area church through baptism.

Church have first-hand knowledge of. When the church was accepted into full MC Alberta membership, these walls were seen to be crumbling.

Tabitha Mut, a church delegate, spoke to the assembly in her native language, Nuer, while another translated. "You have to know, you plant a seed for us. . . . The seed you plant for us is the love of the Heavenly Father," she said.

Rueben Tut added, "We want to get the peace we missed, and we can get that in a Mennonite church. . . . This is how God wants us to be: different colours, different cultures, all one in God."

While the assembly rejoiced at the acceptance of a new congregation, there was also loss at the formal withdrawal of Rosemary Mennonite Church from MC Alberta. In his written report, Ernie Engbrecht, area church chair, said, "We are saddened that our friends at Rosemary have chosen a different path, but we wish them God's blessing as they proceed without [MC Alberta] in their future."

Don Stoesz, chaplain at Bowden Institution, was recognized for 30 years of service ministering to ex-offenders who

are often forgotten and reviled by society. For a number of years, MC Alberta has managed Stoesz's contract, receiving government money to pay his salary. In 2014, chaplains will be salaried by another organization, but MC Alberta will continue to hold Stoesz's ministry credentials.

Hitting some financial walls

Finances were an obvious wall the assembly was forced to address. The proposed budget, with a deficit of \$39,266, was passed with the understanding that reserve funds will cover the deficiency in the short term.

A proposal to continue Donna Entz's relationship-building ministry with Muslim Somalis and establish a faith community in Edmonton, was reduced from a three-year commitment to only one year, with the hope that some other funding, possibly from Mennonite Central Committee, might be found.

Camp Valaqua, representing the biggest chunk of MC Alberta's budget, at \$86,423 (approximately 29 percent), reported a second consecutive 10 percent increase in camper numbers; 45 percent

of the 339 campers in 2014 have no other church connections. Valaqua will continue its cabin replacement program this summer with the building help of Mennonite Disaster Service. A resolution to increase MC Alberta's credit limit to the camp to \$50,000.00, to cover materials, was passed.

At one point in the discussion, Engbrecht reminded assembly delegates that Alberta is a small area church, with no office and few staff. "Other than camp, we have one half-time employee [area church minister]," he said. "Most of us on the executive work 45 hours a week and we do this on evenings and weekends."

The comment reminded people of another wall: the limited resources of time and skills.

Asked how he felt about the 2014 assembly, Engbrecht replied: "I felt good about things. We've got some real challenges ahead. I'm concerned, but I'm also optimistic." ❧



To view a video of three voluntary service workers accompany worship music with cups as percussion at the MC Alberta 2014 assembly, visit <http://canadianmennonite.org/mca-assembly>.

AMBS PHOTO BY MARY E. KLASSEN



Fewer Canadian students are making use of the library and bookstore at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

Fewer Canadians studying at AMBS

BY WILL BRAUN
Senior Writer

Maclean's magazine sits on the library shelf at the Mennonite seminary in Elkhart, Ind., but there are few Canadians there to read it.

Officially, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) is a binational school, serving Mennonite Church U.S.A. and MC Canada, but this year there are only six people from north of the border among the school's 101 students. That's down from 18 Canadian students a decade ago, when the seminary had 191 students in total.

schools that receive government funding of various forms.

Rudy-Froese says more people are also studying closer to home, even if that means crossing denominational lines.

He also points to a growing gap between Mennonites on either side of the border. "AMBS is no longer seen as [MC] Canada's seminary," he says, lamenting the decline in cross-border connections.

While few Canadians enrol as students at AMBS, Rudy-Froese says significant

Allan Rudy-Froese says more people are also studying closer to home, even if that means crossing denominational lines.

Several factors contribute to declining Canadian numbers. According to Allan Rudy-Froese—one of two Canadian professors at AMBS (the other is Andy Brubacher Kaethler)—those factors include a more complex visa application process since 9/11 and the cost. Tuition for a year is \$12,500, which is cheap by American standards—Goshen College just down the road is more than double the cost—but not compared to Canadian

numbers do participate in Pastor's Week, webinars and pastoral distance education. According to the school, 241 Canadians have participated in these sorts of programs since 2004.

Willard Metzger, MC Canada executive director, says the short online courses offered by AMBS are in part a response to MC Canada's request to make the seminary more accessible to Canadians.

Does the decline in Canadian enrolment

YEAR	TOTAL	CAN	% CAN
04-05	191	18	9.4%
05-06	185	26	14.1%
06-07	192	21	10.9%
07-08	169	15	8.9%
08-09	146	14	9.6%
09-10	157	11	7.0%
10-11	141	12	8.5%
11-12	115	6	5.2%
12-13	104	5	4.8%
13-14	101	6	5.9%

at AMBS and the gradually widening gap between Mennonites in the U.S. and Canada mean that it is time for an MC Canada seminary on this side of the border?

"There are no formal conversations at this time," Metzger says regarding such an option.

Meanwhile, AMBS registrar Scott Janzen says, "There is a real resolve to find a way to attract more Canadian students to AMBS." The school even accepts Canadian money at par with the U.S. dollar for tuition payments.

"We here are all mourning [the declining Canadian enrolment]," Janzen says, "because we believe in the importance of being a binational seminary." ❧

Asking the Bible questions about God's body and gender

BY MARY E. KLASSEN

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary
ELKHART, IND.

Does God in the Bible have a body? Does God have gender and sexuality?

These were two questions Mark S. Smith, Ph.D., professor of Hebrew and Judaic studies at New York University, asked in the 2014 Theological Lectureship at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary last month.

Smith first explored whether God in the Bible has a body. Although it might seem that God should not have a body, "there is no denying the vast amount of human language used for God in the Bible," Smith said.

The Bible describes three bodies for God, Smith pointed out, and each helps humans understand something about God. One is a natural body, human in scale, that walks, eats and drinks, as when God appears to Abraham in Genesis 18 and 19. The second is a superhuman body, such as when God's hand covers Moses so Moses will see only the God's backside. The third body of God described in the Bible is a cosmic, mystical body seated over the heavens and earth, as described in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

"While the first two bodies of God express special divine presence that may inspire us, God's mystical body is for us to contemplate and to help us sense the divine working in our lives and our world," Smith concluded in his first lecture.

His second lecture asked why God is angry in the Bible. While many see God in the Old Testament as a God of angry judgment and God in the New Testament as a God of love, "both love and anger are attributed to God in both testaments," Smith argued, adding, "God's anger and God's love are closely related."

God's anger appears in the Old Testament at times when Israel has challenged or disregarded divine authority and when Israel fails to keep its covenant with God. God's anger is part of God's love, comparable to that of a parent towards a child or one spouse towards another.

Smith sees this language of anger and love as a poetic way of expressing the mystery of the divine-human struggle.

The final question Smith addressed is whether God in the Bible has gender or sexuality. "The male understanding of God is true of much of what we see in ancient Israel and in Israel's Bible, yet this is hardly the whole story," Smith said.

"God may be represented as male in most passages, but several passages complicate this picture either with female imagery or representation of God as beyond gender," Smith noted. More female images and references for God appear in the texts as Israel embraced monotheism, and the goddesses that were part of their religious landscape became less prominent.

Moving to the New Testament, Smith examined gender language for the Trinity. God the Father and Jesus the Son emphasize their special relationship, not their maleness, he said. "What counts in the Trinity are the relationships of the three persons and, more specifically, the relationship of love, not some sort of divine male essence."

The Roman Catholic scholar of the Hebrew world of the Old Testament



AMBS PHOTO

Mark S. Smith, the Skirball chair of Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at New York University, presents the 2014 Theological Lectureship at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in March.

admitted that modern liturgy has room for much more inclusive language for God. Acknowledging the different voices in the church on this issue, Smith said, "That the ending is not yet written, but open-ended, may be the best news at the moment."

He left listeners with the challenge to continue struggling "to reconsider not only what the question of sexual and gender language for God discloses about God's transcendence, but also for what it hides."

Smith holds the Skirball chair of Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at New York University. He has published more than 100 essays and articles, including first editions of four minor manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls. He is the author of 14 books and co-author of two others. ❧

/// Staff change

Klassen new executive director of Nithview Community

NEW HAMBURG, ONT.—Elizabeth Klassen has accepted Tri-County Mennonite Homes' offer of employment for the position of executive director of its Nithview Community division in New Hamburg. Klassen formerly served as executive director of Tri-County's Aldaview Services division for the past seven years. She is a registered nurse and, prior to coming to Tri-County, she worked in the field of mental health. Klassen has her Canadian certification as a psychiatric and mental health nurse and as an administrator through the Ontario Association for Non-profit Homes and Services for Seniors. Klassen and her husband, Gerry Steingart, attend Rockway Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

—Tri-County Mennonite Homes



Elizabeth Klassen



Pastor Tadesse Mekuria, playing guitar, leads the Medahnialem Evangelical Church, an emerging Toronto congregation of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, in worship. Yared, in a black toque, stands in the front pew after being healed.

Emerging church has a passion for Ethiopian people

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
TORONTO



“Talk to him, he’s had a healing,” said Pastor Tadesse Mekuria, pointing to Yared. The middle-aged man was sitting in a pew at Woodbine Baptist Church in Toronto, rented on Sunday afternoons by the Medahnialem Evangelical Church, an emerging Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregation ministering to Ethiopian immigrants.

Healed from lymphoma through prayer and the work of doctors, Yared, who has lived in Canada for 25 years, had lost the use of one of his legs, but on March 15 he had been healed through Mekuria’s prayers and now could walk well again.

“We will pray for 45 minutes, then worship for an hour and 15 minutes, followed by a 40-minute sermon, and one song in closing,” said Mekuria before the service rolled out with him leading the congregation of about 16 in impassioned prayer in Amharic, a Semitic language used in East Africa. Some knelt in the pews, others sat, echoing Mekuria’s words or adding their own.

Then the congregation, which usually

numbers in the 30s—but was shrunk by illness that Sunday—sang song after song projected on screen with Mekuria leading on the guitar.

Afterwards, Desaleje preached on John 15:1-4, challenging the congregation to stay connected to Jesus, and to stay away from the wiles of the world.

Some congregants arrived for worship, others for the preaching, while a few were there for the whole service. At the end, hugs and handshakes of *saalem* passed the peace among the participants.

During this whole time, Hayegot (Joseph) Tadesse led the Sunday school of five eager learners, feeding them pizza and quizzing them on Bible memorization in the church basement. They joined the congregants for Ethiopian bread baked by Helene Mekuria and drinks after the service.

The congregation once had more than 60 participants, but some moved out of province, while a few moved to other congregations in the city, reducing Medahnialem to a low of only 16 at one point.

Now, through outreach and a few new commitments to Christ, the congregation is growing again. Membere Weldegeorgis, the congregation’s treasurer, hopes that the increased membership will result in more ability to reach out to the many impoverished Ethiopians living in Toronto, some with mental illness and functionally homeless. Mekuria hopes for enough money to buy a mini-van to be able to pick up people who can’t even afford public transit to get to church.

Coming from a time in Ethiopia when the practice of religion was suppressed, some members express fears for the future. Mekuria himself is afraid that Canadian government pressure may keep him from preaching against sins as he sees them, in particular relating to sexuality. He wants to focus the congregants on living holy lives for Christ. With his wife Helene holding down a job, he works full-time for the congregation.

There are three small Ethiopian churches in Toronto relating to MC Eastern Canada. Their pastors get together to encourage each other, and sometimes they meet with other Ethiopian pastors from further afield. There are currently seven Ethiopian congregations in MC Eastern Canada, some of whose leaders have roots in Meserete Kristos, a member of Mennonite World Conference, and most practise a charismatic style of worship. ☸

Congregations learn to practise nurturing hope

Conrad Grebel University College and Associates Resourcing the Church make church renewal theory practical

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

Many participants at the January 2013 “Nurturing hope: Tending the journey of congregational renewal and change” seminar asked for help in applying what they had learned.

It took over a year, but on March 28 Betty Pries, a conflict management specialist with Conrad Grebel University College and Associates Resourcing the Church’s Conflict Management and Congregational Leadership Certificate program, revisited the foundations of congregational renewal journeys. Using the “Life cycle of the congregation” as a basis, she taught about the renewal journey, one she sees as “first and foremost a spiritual journey” for the congregation, its leaders and members.

That said, she led the group through practical steps:

- **PLAN FOR** the process: gather current data on the congregation and its surrounding community.
- **SURRENDER THE** mind: make sense of the current situation by creating, discussing and editing a document of what the

congregation and leaders think they know.

- **SURRENDER THE** heart: engage the data congregationally.
- **SURRENDER THE** will: grieve what has been found to be true, let go of what is not working or may not be true of the congregation anymore.
- **ABIDE IN** Christ: be open to

encountering God through a time of prayerful waiting; listen alone and together in worship for what God is saying to the congregation at this time in its life; and use many spiritual disciplines—contemplation, lectio divina and walking prayer.

- **LISTEN TO** disagreements and think about identity.
- **ACT QUICKLY** to implement decisions. Try new things. Be open to failure, then refine and act again.

The ecumenical group of mostly pastors quickly began to apply this to their current and past situations, asking deeper questions and telling stories of success or quandaries. Overwhelmingly, they grasped the spiritual nature of the journey and the prominence of God in congregational renewal. ☸



Keith Regehr, left, a mediator/facilitator with Associates Resourcing the Church, discusses practical ideas presented at ‘Nurturing hope revisited’ with Susan Baker of Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., where the event was held on March 28, and Douglas Schulz, pastor at St. Catharines United Mennonite.

☸ Staff changes

AMBS appoints two faculty members

ELKHART, IND.—Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) has appointed two new faculty members: Malinda Berry, Ph.D., who will begin this summer; and Janna Hunter-Bowman, Ph.D. candidate, who will begin in the summer of 2015. Berry currently is assistant professor of theological studies and director of the master of arts program at Bethany Theological Seminary, Richmond, Ind. Hunter-Bowman is completing a Ph.D. program at the University of Notre Dame and serving

as a teaching assistant there. Berry will begin serving at AMBS as assistant professor of theology and ethics in July. Hunter-Bowman will begin at AMBS as assistant professor of peace studies and social ethics in July 2015. She is focusing her PhD study on integrating moral theology and peace studies, with John Paul Lederach as one of her advisers. Berry and Hunter-Bowman will join the AMBS faculty as two long-term professors retire: Ted Koontz, who teaches peace studies and ethics; and Gayle Gerber Koontz, who teaches theology and ethics. —Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary



A worship band from Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., performs at this year's MC Eastern Canada winter youth retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp.

'Encountering Jesus' in the snow

STORY AND PHOTO BY MICHAEL TURMAN

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

SAUBLE BEACH, ONT.

A hard winter and high-piled snow didn't stop nearly 140 youth and sponsors from Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregations from making the cold and windy trek to Silver Lake Mennonite Camp for the annual winter youth retreat earlier this year. Nor did they prevent anyone from having a great time.

Two buses provided transportation for youth groups from the Leamington and Kitchener-Waterloo/Elmira areas, while churches from the Stratford, Drayton, Markham and Toronto areas also sent groups.

The theme for the weekend was "Encountering Jesus: Table revolution." Speaker Heidi Miller, an author and professor from Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, Tex., told stories from the Bible and from life to describe the ways that Jesus upsets the usual order of things at the table. Using ancient Christian practices, such as foot-washing and eating together, she invited participants to come to the table and to serve each other in unsettling, yet

symbolically significant ways. Many youth remembered Perkins, who spoke at the MC Canada youth assembly in Waterloo, Ont., in 2011.

A team of five youth leaders planned and led each day's worship services. They dramatized each service's biblical texts, and shared prayers and readings that they wrote based on the theme of each session. Weekend highlights included a rousing game of box ball, and skits related to the weekend's table theme, with hilarious results.

Music leadership and accompaniment was provided by a band of university students from Conrad Grebel University College, who did double duty as meal servers.

With all the noise of 140 teenagers packed in the dining hall, those in need of peace and quiet could retreat to a cabin set in the midst of a grove of pines for prayer and quiet reflection. Two spiritual directors were on hand to listen and provide guidance for spiritual seekers.

The retreat was planned in partnership by MC Eastern Canada, Conrad Grebel

/// Briefly noted

Grebel student wins C. Henry Smith Oratorical Competition

WATERLOO, ONT.—Jacob Winter, a second-year international development student at Conrad Grebel University College, is the 2013 winner of the binational C. Henry Smith Oratorical Competition. This



Jacob Winter

friendly contest between Mennonite and Brethren in Christ universities and colleges across Canada and the U.S. is administered by the Peace and Justice Ministries of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). With his speech entitled, "What's your problem?" Winter offered compelling reasons for listeners to think about their reactions or solutions to world problems. "To design a solution, you need a proper view of the problem," he explained. He described how poverty can be defined as "less about money and malaria nets, and more about humiliation, voicelessness, shame and isolation. Poverty is broken relationships with the earth, with others, with yourself and with God. If the problem is broken relationships, then the solution is reconciliation—shalom. Building shalom is about taking away shame, demarginalizing the vulnerable, and giving voice to the powerless. It's all about relationships." Winter won \$300 plus a \$500 conference scholarship. To view Winter's speech online, visit www.youtube.com/ConradGrebelUC.

—Conrad Grebel University College

University College, Silver Lake Mennonite Camp and Rockway Mennonite Collegiate. ///

Michael Turman is associate minister for youth and family ministries at Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church and he helped coordinate this year's Mennonite Church Eastern Canada winter youth retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp.

GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

War doesn't work

Ernie Regehr gives the University of Waterloo's 16th annual Arts Alumni Achievement Award presentation

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

According to Ernie Regehr, for statistical purposes a war is defined as political fighting—not criminal violence—that engages the security forces of the state; as well, it is a situation in which “at least 1,000 people [combatants and civilians] have been killed directly by the fighting during the course of the conflict, and 25 or more are killed annually.”

Regehr, the founder of Project Ploughshares who was honoured with the University of Waterloo's 16th annual Arts Alumni Achievement Award, addressed a packed audience at Conrad Grebel University College on March 26.

Using Regehr's criteria, there have been 98 wars in 71 countries since 1987, with 26 active wars at present. Of these 98 wars, only six were inter-state conflicts between two or more nations; all the rest were intra-state within a country's national boundaries.

Of the wars that have ended since 1987, only one inter-state war (Kuwait/Iraq) ended through military victory. Only nine intra-state wars ended with military victories, with the “rebels” winning five and the government four. Over half of the wars end through negotiation and others wither away to an inconclusive end.

“The noted British military commander of a variety of collective security operations, the late General Sir Rupert Smith, described post-Cold War military actions as a succession of campaigns ‘that have in one way or another spectacularly failed to achieve the results intended, namely a decisive military victory which would in turn deliver a solution to the original problem, which is usually political,’” Regehr said during his talk.

He explained that wars begin because of the “presence of heightened political,

economic and social grievances,” and are more likely to break out if the “grievances are directly linked to identity.”

But for wars to take place, there has to be a “capacity for violence,” Regehr said, listing access and willingness to use arms, and a “perceived absence of alternatives,” such as courts or other civil society means. According to him, solving wars, or stopping them before they start, means taking grievances seriously, making sure minority groups are part of the process, limiting access to arms, and ensuring that civil means to deal with grievances are healthy.



Ernie Regehr, left, the 16th annual University of Waterloo Arts Alumni Achievement Award recipient, visits with Susan Schultz Huxman, Conrad Grebel University College's president, following his lecture at Grebel on March 26.

Taking up arms—making war—does not work, he said, and costs huge amounts of money, lives and natural resources, both through making armaments and through the destruction they wreak. Other means, including fair distribution of wealth through development work in a country, giving all members of society a voice, working at reconciliation and limiting access to weapons do work, Regehr concluded. ☺

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ECUMENICAL REFLECTION

The role of faith in our culture

TIM KUEPFER

On Jan. 17, Tim Kuepfer, pastor of Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond, B.C., was invited to join a local Muslim youth gathering for the commemoration of the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. What follows is an adaptation of his message to this gathering.

I am so impressed by this way you choose to honour your revered founder: inviting guests from other faiths and backgrounds to reflect on a subject that was very, very important to both your founder and mine. Islam and Christianity are both deeply concerned about the questions you have posed today:

- **DOES FAITH** have a role to play in our culture?
- **IS OUR** faith something public, or should it be private?

Both Christians and Muslims agree that our faith is not something to be hidden in a closet. It is true that our faith is something we hold very dear within our hearts, internally. But our faith is not just internal and private. If it does make such a difference inside us, can we not also expect it to make an enormous difference in our world, publicly? If our faith is internal and personal, transforming our lives from the



inside out, we should expect this personal faith to also be a public faith, a world-changing faith. If our faith is personally life-giving, surely we'd also expect it to be life-giving when shared with others.

But what if people disagree with our firmly held convictions? What if our public faith, anchored deeply in our hearts, gets rejected? Won't this cause trouble? Many in our culture are deeply fearful of this shadow side of religious faith.

Some of the most popular books today, which keep climbing to the top of the best-seller lists, are written by a group called the New Atheists. They say that faith is a dangerous public enemy. They say that faith in God creates conflict and is the cause of many of the problems in our world.

The most famous of these New Atheists are Richard Dawkins, known for his book *The God Delusion*; Christopher Hitchens, whose most famous book is *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons*

Everything; Sam Harris, who wrote *Letter to a Christian Nation: A Challenge to the Faith of America and The End of Faith*; and Daniel Dennett, who writes books like *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*.

These are very gifted communicators. Why are their arguments so persuasive to so many? Is it perhaps because too often we people of faith are not following our own books? Could it be because we preach love and mercy and peace, but we do not always act in love, in mercy, in peace?

We Christians turn, of course, to the gospel—the *injeel*—to learn about the way of Jesus the Messiah and his teachings.

What are the marks of a genuine public Christian faith, according to Jesus the Messiah?

- **FIRST AND** most obvious, Jesus the Christ announces that it is political.

From the very first day of his ministry to the day of his death, Jesus insisted on using unapologetically political language: He proclaimed the kingdom of God. Consider his inaugural speech at the very beginning of his ministry: *"Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news'"* (Mark 1:14-15).

Time and time again Jesus stated: *"I have come to establish the kingdom of God."* He would begin story after story with, *"The kingdom of God is like . . ."* More than a hundred times in the gospels Jesus declares this kingdom of God, and himself the king.

Muslims also believe strongly that their public faith is political. Surah 3:110 of the Qur'an says: *"You [Muslims] are the best nation brought out for mankind, commanding what is righteous and forbidding what is wrong."*

- **SECOND, JESUS** the Christ teaches that the public Christian faith is peaceable—a peaceable kingdom.

Contrast this with the kingdoms of this world, which are always advanced by violence and conquest. Even today, presidents and prime ministers of this world are adversarial, especially around

PHOTO COURTESY OF TIM KUEPFER



On Jan. 17, Tim Kuepfer, pastor of Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond, B.C., was invited to speak to a local Muslim youth gathering.

elections. They attack one another with their words. There are always winners and there are always losers.

But Jesus repeated over and over that the kingdom of God is entirely different from the kingdoms of this world. In every way it is different. Listen to what Jesus said, *“My kingdom is not from this world [my kingdom is from heaven]. If my kingdom were from this world, then my servants would fight”* (John 18:36).

Jesus taught us, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, ‘Do not [violently] resist an evil person.’ . . . Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you”* (Matthew 5:38-48); and, *“Blessed are the peacemakers; they will be called children of God”* (Matthew 5:9).

• **THIRD, JESUS** the Christ teaches us that the public Christian faith is humble.

The night before Jesus was put to death, his disciples were arguing among themselves about who would be the greatest, and who would take up the most coveted positions in government when Jesus became king.

So what did Jesus do? He got down on his knees, took a basin of water, and humbly washed each one of his disciples' dirty feet—even the feet of Judas, who later betrayed him. And this is what he said that night: *“The kings of [this world] lord it over [their subjects]; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves ‘benefactors.’ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves”* (Luke 22:24-27).

• **FOURTH AND** finally, Jesus Christ reveals to us that the Christian faith is sacrificial.

Politicians want us to be sacrificial. They want us to be patriotic. The greatest patriotism, we are told, is to be willing to die for your country, to sacrifice your life for your nation. The kings of this world demand that we lay down our lives for them and for their agenda.

Jesus, our king, did just the opposite. He laid down his life as the ultimate sacrifice for his subjects. Christ loved his enemies. He prayed for those who nailed

him to the cross. He said, *“God, forgive them; they don’t know what they are doing”* The cross is the central and ultimate symbol of Christianity. Jesus kept prophesying all throughout his ministry that he would be lifted up on a throne. Nobody understood that this throne on which he would be lifted up would be that terrible cross on which he died.

Now, many martyrs have followed Jesus in his death. We also commemorate the birth of Martin Luther King Jr., who sacrificed his life in 1968, the year before I was born, for the sake of millions in the United States.

In his famous “American Dream” speech, he said, “To our most bitter opponents we say, “Throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our houses and threaten our children, and we will still love you. Beat us and leave us half dead, and we will still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.”

• **WE SHOULD** probably add a fifth mark—courageous—to the four above.

I think of the Prophet Mohammed especially when I think of this word “courageous.” The prophet was fearless. He was not afraid to be in the minority. He was not afraid to speak out and stand firm for what he believed in.

Courage is also the mark of one of our Mennonite organizations: Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). Many CPT teams have gone to Palestine/Israel to stand between Israeli soldiers with their guns and Palestinian teenagers with their rocks. Getting in the way, they willingly sacrifice their bodies for the sake of the peace of the kingdom of God. CPT has stood in the way in Iraq during the Gulf Wars, in Colombia, in Haiti and in troubled African nations.

As a Christian, I trust Jesus was true and not mistaken: that these are indeed the ways that faith can have an enormous role for good in our culture.


Salam alaikum and God bless you. ❧

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In the face of personal trauma

Filipino pastors who lost their homes in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan learn to minister to others facing the same miseries

BY MELANIE HESS AND DEBORAH FROESE

Mennonite Central Committee / Mennonite Church Canada

When Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines last November, it not only left a trail of ruined homes, flattened businesses and uprooted trees. It also caused emotional trauma for many in the disaster's path—including pastors and other caregivers.

"I felt so helpless. I didn't know how to protect my family," Pastor Janar Ruiz says. "We all went to the church during the typhoon and we couldn't do anything but cry."

In the week after the storm, Peacebuilders Community Inc. conducted an assessment with church leaders in Ormoc City, Leyte Province, and realized that pastors would need assistance. Peacebuilders is the ministry of Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers

Daniel and Joji Pantoja and a partner of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), with ties to the Integrated Mennonite Church of the Philippines.

Based on the assessment, Peacebuilders developed a plan to provide 50 pastors with an opportunity to talk about their experiences and to be trained in immediate trauma counselling, disaster risk reduction, and peace and reconciliation. MCC supported the assessment and the plan.

For three days in early February, a group of pastors from the Philippines Council of Evangelical Churches met in Ormoc City for the first training session. Clinical psychologist Bennette Tenecio, Peacebuilders' consultant for personal care and development, led pastors in several rounds of sharing about their feelings during the typhoon

and afterwards.

Pastor Jonathan Pobadora lost his home during the typhoon. His family was still living in a tent three months later. He found new meaning in his emotions. "Fear is what allowed us to survive," he says. "We evacuated and stayed away from danger areas. God made us survivors by giving us fear. I am thankful for these emotions."

The training in trauma counselling prepared the participants to walk alongside others who are suffering after disaster or tragedy. Tenecio offered phrases that can help calm and communicate caring: "Is there anything you want to tell me about what happened?" "How is your family doing?" "Is there anything you need right now?"

Boyet Ongkiko, Peacebuilders' facilitator, challenged the pastors to get involved in their village's disaster response, rather than create parallel structures only for churches. "Holiness does not mean separation from the community," he told them. "If you are too busy in church activities, you don't have time for the community."

The group of 16 men and four women formulated strategies to organize effective disaster responses involving church and government agencies. They will meet again for a second training session in peace and reconciliation. When all 50 pastors are trained, they will each pass on what they learned to four others, reaching a total of 200 pastors.

The training also helped pastors who historically have not looked to each other for support, to establish closer personal connections, said Jeanne Jantzi, who attended the training session in her role as an MCC area director for Southeast Asia.

In addition to training pastors for trauma support, Peacebuilders is using special colouring books it developed to help children and families reclaim feelings of peace, joy and happiness in the midst of distress.

The pastoral assistance given to pastors in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan is in keeping with a larger MC Canada-supported project by Peacebuilders, to develop Peace and Reconciliation (PAR) communities across the country. PAR communities will help to bring lasting peace to areas experiencing ongoing conflict or natural disasters. ❧

MCC PHOTO BY JEANNE JANTZI



Pastor Jesusa Garba and other Filipino pastors take a break from their intense sharing about Typhoon Haiyan to play a group game. The pastors were at a trauma healing and disaster risk reduction training session in Ormoc, the Philippines, sponsored by Peacebuilders Community Inc., a ministry of Mennonite Church Canada Witness.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA HILDEBRAND



For years, the Ladies Aid from Crystal City (Man.) Mennonite Church has been sewing quilts for Mennonite Central Committee. Hundreds, maybe even thousands, of quilts have been stitched together in love and compassion for shipment around the world. In February, the congregation's small group of Sunday School children decided to get in on the act. Lisa Hildebrand, Sunday school superintendent, pieced together the top and asked 'experienced' quilters to teach the children how to tie it. The children were very pleased with their contribution to this year's donation from the church.

God at work in the World Snapshots

PHOTO COURTESY OF MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA



On March 16, 1,500 people gathered in front of the Kherson administration building to pray for Ukraine. Tension in the country continues after a Russian-initiated referendum in Crimea that day favoured secession to Russia. 'The situation is still very tense,' wrote Sergey Deynekin, a Mennonite Church Canada partner, who, with his wife Lena, leads a small church in Kherson, in an e-mail message to John Pauls, a relative in Winnipeg. 'No one can say how it will end. . . . Much [of the gathering] debated [the] question of inability to avoid hostilities. So we really ask God to help avoid war with Russia. . . . The church is quiet. People are a little worried, but believe that the Lord will not leave anyone.'

GOD AT WORK IN US

Lessons from the West Bank

Buhler family learns about the life of Palestinian Christians while in Bethlehem

BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent

It isn't easy to distil six months of life in the Holy Land into an hour's conversation. This is evident in the way Jerry Buhler searches for the right words and sometimes stops to rephrase what he's trying to say. He and his wife Kara recently returned from a six-month voluntary assignment at Bethlehem Bible College under the auspices of Mennonite Church Canada Witness.

Bishara Awad founded the college in 1979 in response to a need for leadership training within the Palestinian Christian church. With about 150 students at three sites—the main campus in Bethlehem, Galilee Bible College in Nazareth, and a virtual campus in Gaza—the college offers programs in biblical studies, tour guiding and mass media.

Kara's job as a library assistant was the official placement under which the Buhlers travelled to Bethlehem. The college's library serves students and staff with its predominantly theological collection, and the general public with a selection of fiction, non-fiction and children's books. Donated English-language books make up about 80 percent of the collection. Kara spent most of her time cataloguing these books while her supervisor focused on the Arabic-language collection.

The assignment served as a sabbatical for Jerry, who is area church minister for MC Saskatchewan. Much of his work involved driving. The college's mail goes to a Jerusalem postal address, since mail delivery in Palestine is not reliable. Banking is also done in Jerusalem. Because Palestinians are not allowed across the border into Israel, the college relies on volunteers like him to pick up mail and do the banking. He also drove to the Tel Aviv

airport to pick up or drop off passengers. In addition, he helped write and edit the college's English-language newsletter and worked in the campus guesthouse.

The Buhlers' daughter Laura accompanied them to Bethlehem for the first three months of their stay. Her role was as administrative assistant to Alex Awad, director of the Shepherd's Society, the charitable arm of the college, and a brother to the college's founder.

Among the things that made a lasting impression on the family was "the immense beauty of the country. . . . We were

just astounded by the terrain," says Jerry, noting that the lush growth of plants and trees, and "the constant blooming of this or that," helped them understand why people have fought over the land for millennia.

Political realities also made a lasting impression. Palestinians are aware that North American media portray them as terrorists and their homeland as a place fraught with violence, he says. They would like North Americans to know the stereotypes are not true.

"If there is anything we feel they would want us to bring back, it's, 'Come, see how it is here really,'" he says.

Kara agrees, saying in a phone interview that her experience in the Middle East taught her to "resist the notion that all is violence." Although within walking distance of the wall dividing Israel from the West Bank, the Buhlers never felt endangered, even when walking the streets at night.

Nevertheless, the myth that the area is unsafe is perpetuated. For instance, while Bethlehem is a popular tourist destination, most tours begin and end in Jerusalem. Tourists are driven to the Church of the Nativity or to Shepherd's Field and then

PHOTO COURTESY OF JERRY AND KARA BUHLER



Jerry and Kara Buhler at the Jordan River. 'It could be that the handrails were not there yet when Jesus came up out of the water,' writes Jerry. For more photos, visit the 'Buhlers in Bethlehem' blog at <http://karabuhlerbethlehem.blogspot.ca/>.

whisked away, their guides telling them it's not safe to stay in Bethlehem. Tourist dollars are diverted to Israel and Bethlehem's economy remains depressed.

There are parallels between such stories from the West Bank and stories from the first nations here in Canada. In both cases, people experience a need for validation. Jerry recalls hearing Palestinians talk about their "existence" in a way that struck him as weird, but not unlike that expressed by this country's indigenous peoples: "When

there's been a systematic attempt to get rid of you as a people, how can you help but question your existence." While he says he has always encouraged dialogue between Mennonite churches and their indigenous neighbours, he will do so now with enhanced awareness.

Another lesson that will likely impact his work as area church minister is what it feels like to be a newcomer in a place where everything is unfamiliar. In a sense, said Buhler, "we were pretending . . . because

we knew we would be coming home," but for those who must learn a new language and adapt to a new culture, the challenges can be overwhelming. For that reason, he says, "our sensitivity to newcomers is very important."

In all likelihood, other lessons will also become part of the distillation process in the coming months as Jerry and Kara recall their time in Bethlehem and share it in conversation with others. ❧

A tale of two voyages

STORY AND PHOTO BY HUGO NEUFELD

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
CALGARY

Several years ago, Chau Dang, pastor of Calgary Vietnamese Mennonite Church, enthusiastically recounted for me the Caribbean cruise from which he had just returned. Coming from all over North America, at least 150 Vietnamese friends, 35 from his extended family, had been reunited to celebrate a week of cruising balmy waters.

I noticed a picture on the wall and pointed to it, and he knew what I was thinking. "That was a different cruise," he said. "I can hardly believe how richly God has blessed

ravaged by war and injustice.

The 10-storey cruise ship, on the other hand, represented the freedom and prosperity he had found in Canada. Relaxing on the ship, he enjoyed the open decks, the generous amount of space, private bedrooms, luxurious dining rooms, swimming pools and recreation rooms, as well as the freedom to explore and take in the amenities. The only question for the passengers was how to choose from so many options.

For three days and nights on the sea to Thailand, most of the refugees were un-

Chau Dang recounts how on the first voyage he and his sister, separated from family, had no idea where they were going. It was only 'somewhere in the world.'

us!" The picture shows an overcrowded three-storey, 15-metre boat packed with 556 people. "It was this boat that was our escape from Vietnam over 30 years ago."

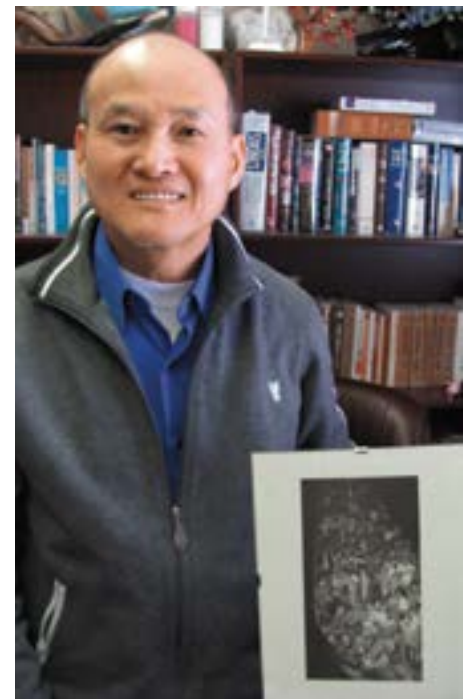
Two voyages, each with their own challenges!

In the first voyage, 19-year-old Dang was jammed onto the lower deck. Tiny portholes on the sides, and a few small circular ducts going straight up to the open third deck were the only means of air circulation. Oxygen was at a premium. The trip was his desperate attempt to escape from a country

able to eat. The few crusts of food they had were left in their bags. There was too much trauma.

On the cruise ship the tables were laden with all-you-can eat luxury dishes. The challenge for them was the temptation of over-consumption, and how to live responsibly in an atmosphere of abundance.

Tossing about on an angry sea in a boat that seemed like little more than a small dingy, the distraught people who were leaving their homeland felt very insecure. They had heard that refugee boats were frequently targeted by pirates who would



Chau Dang, pastor of Calgary Vietnamese Mennonite Church, holds a picture of the tiny boat he and more than 500 refugees crowded onto in order to escape war-torn Vietnam back in the 1970s.

plunder the last of any remaining possessions, especially jewelry. Two pirate boats did come very close, but for some reason they were spared a direct confrontation.

Gliding over the waves of the blue Caribbean in the luxury cruise ship, everything was calm and serene. They enjoyed each other's company on the wide, open decks with no fear of calamity.

Dang recounts how on the first voyage he and his sister, separated from family, had

no idea where they were going. It was only "somewhere in the world."

With the cruise ship, the destination was clear, an anticipated voyage in the Caribbean with extended family and friends in quiet waters. And they knew they could anticipate returning safely to the homes that they had been blessed with for more than 30 years.

On the first voyage, the travellers couldn't even begin to think of the wonderful creation that unfolded in front of them as their tiny boat parted the waters. Until they were rescued by a large Thai commercial liner, the refugees, piled onto that underground deck for three days and nights, felt like Jonah inside the large fish.

For Dang, it was a Psalm 22 experience,

and he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Psalm 23 would be a more fitting description of Dang's experience on the cruise ship: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need.*" From their vantage point high about the water, Chau and his family saw magnificent sunsets and felt the warmth of the gentle breeze.

Although severely challenged with language, education and job-search issues following his arrival in Canada, God led Dang through the adjustments to a new country and to a renewed faith. After an early career as an electrician, Dang returned to school and entered the pastorate, first in an Edmonton church plant and, for


the past 12 years, as lead pastor of Calgary Vietnamese Mennonite Church.

Dang continues to guide the 200-member Vietnamese congregation while mentoring the 55 who attend the English-speaking Vietnamese congregation that meets in the same building. Planting a church in Saskatoon also takes much effort on his part. In addition, his evangelistic efforts take him back to Vietnam from time to time.

Dang sums up his journey well: "As I look back, the challenges seemed big at the time, but God always had a way to meet me. All along there was a plan for my life. All I needed to do was respond." ❧

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ARTBEAT

FILM REVIEW

A flood of bleak images

Noah.

Directed by Darren Aronofsky. Written by Darren Aronofsky and Ari Handel. Starring Russell Crowe, Jennifer Connolly, Emma Watson, Anthony Hopkins. A Paramount Pictures release, 2013. Rated PG.

REVIEWED BY VIC THIESSEN

Those who miss the days of Hollywood biblical epics will be happy to see that one of the first stories we hear in Sunday school has come to the cinema as a grand, big-budget spectacle. Darren Aronofsky's *Noah* has opened to widespread critical acclaim and blockbuster status, defying the expectations of those who thought it was too controversial to succeed.

The controversy centres on the film's anachronistic environmentalism and its lack of faithfulness to Scripture. Personally, I think Aronofsky, who comes from a conservative Jewish family, was trying to be faithful to Scripture. My own struggle is with the film's biblically faithful themes of justice versus mercy and the goodness and evil in human hearts.

Aronofsky is known for his disturbing, thoughtful and surreal indie films (*Requiem for a Dream*, *Black Swan*). We catch glimpses of his unique style in *Noah's* bleak landscapes and the flashback stories of the Garden of Eden and the subsequent history of human violence. But for this epic tale, Aronofsky has focused on awesome special effects and violent action. As spectacle, I found *Noah* both engrossing and exhausting, but as storytelling I found it wanting.

In the film's earliest scenes, it looks like the story is set in a post-apocalyptic future, with obvious allusions to how the industrial revolution paved the way for humanity's destruction of God's beautiful creation. Aronofsky says he reads the story of the flood as a call for humanity



to be stewards of creation and not to just take dominion over it. Through Noah and his descendants, God gave humans a second chance to take care of creation, but we are again failing in that task.

I can appreciate Aronofsky's desire to draw attention to the mess we are making of our planet, but within the framework of this story of God's judgment, it only exacerbates one of the story's dilemmas: Does it make any more sense for God to utterly destroy the environment to punish humanity for destroying the environment, than for God to violently slaughter almost every human on earth as judgment on an earth filled with violence?

(Continued on page 32)

The Recycled Orchestra in concert!



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Steinbach Mennonite Church, 7pm

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Winkler MB Church, 7pm

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Vancouver, B.C.
Friday, May 9th
Willingdon Church, 7pm

White Rock, B.C.
Saturday, May 10th
Peace Portal Alliance, 7pm

Abbotsford, B.C.
Sunday, May 11th
Central Heights Church, 3pm



All events are free with a
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more information, and to
watch a video of the
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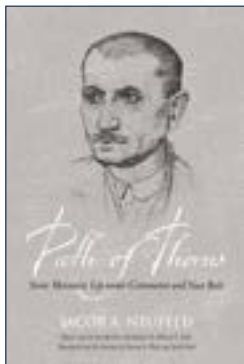
New from University of Toronto Press

Path of Thorns

Soviet Mennonite Life under Communist and Nazi Rule

by Jacob A. Neufeld

edited and translated by Harvey L. Dyck

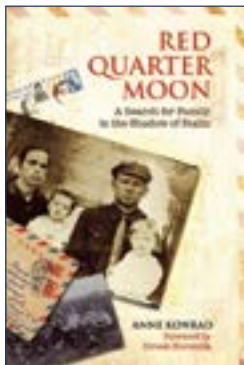


Path of Thorn narrates the life and suffering of Soviet Mennonites through the story of survival of Jacob Abramovich Neufeld, a prominent Soviet Mennonite leader and writer.

'Beautifully written, masterfully translated and meticulously introduced. A copy belongs in every Mennonite home.' - John B. Toews, *Univ. of Calgary*

Red Quarter Moon

A Search for Family in the Shadow of Stalin
by Anne Konrad



A gripping account of Anne Konrad's search for her family members lost and disappeared within the Soviet Union.

'Anne Konrad keeps you glued to the pages as she becomes the spokesperson for the silent, for the sufferers, indeed for the faithful.' - Dick Benner, *Canadian Mennonite*

(Continued from page 31)

Genesis tells us that Noah was a righteous man who walked with God and did all that God commanded. In *Noah*, Russell Crowe does a great job playing a righteous man trying to be faithful to God. And yet, because of that unquestioning faithfulness, Noah becomes the least sympathetic character in the film. Why? Because he believes God wants him to ensure that the genocide is complete, that his sons are to be the last humans on earth, thus forever ending the consequences of the evil inclination of human hearts.

At one point in *Noah*, Noah's daughter-in-law, Ila, says to him: "God chose you because you saw the wickedness of man and he knew you wouldn't look away. But there is goodness, too."

Ila and Naameh, Noah's wife, try repeatedly to convince Noah that there is goodness in people, not just evil. But Noah sees only the evil. In the film's climax, he must choose between the way of mercy and the way of justice (and final judgment).

Spoiler alert

The audience, which is hopefully weighing these options, is supposed to side with mercy and cheer when Noah chooses that option. I commend Aronofsky for

leading us in that direction, but it leads me to two critical questions:

- **ARE PEOPLE** more merciful and compassionate than God? If so, what do the evil inclinations of our hearts say about God's heart?

- **ARE WE** really supposed to think that Noah—and, by implication, God—is merciful because he has spared a few lives after horrifically killing every other person on earth? Is genocide merciful if a life is spared?

In the end, *Noah* focuses too much on the evil in the hearts of the male figures to allow the wise words of the film's women to shine through. If viewers leave the theatre discussing the questions raised by Ila and Naameh—mercy versus justice, blind obedience, and the nature of good and evil in human hearts—then the film has performed a valuable service.

Alas, I fear viewers will only remember the thrill ride, which, by the way, is not suitable for children. *Noah* is a dark, deeply disturbing, violent film that should never have been rated PG. ❧

Vic Thiessen, Mennonite Church Canada's chief administrative officer, is Canadian Mennonite's regular film reviewer.

❧ Briefly noted

Who Are the Mennonites? video translated into American Sign Language

Five Core Media, a video production firm in Goshen, Ind., has produced an American Sign Language (ASL) version of *Who Are the Mennonites?*, a DVD/video originally produced by a predecessor agency of MennoMedia. The production company worked with a translation team organized by Sheila S. Yoder, long-time deaf ministries advocate. Providing a visual translation for a medium that was originally produced using both audio and visual was a challenge. "As a team, we decided to keep the basic structure of the original piece," Yoder says. "So we have translators signing on screen, and then we switch to visual segments of the original video, some of which had to be edited or shortened because of the length this technique adds to the production." The ASL-translated video is currently online and available free at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/2273. Yoder obtained two grants for the project from the Schowalter Foundation, Newton, Kan., and Anabaptist Deaf Ministries. MennoMedia also provided production consultation to Yoder for the project, in addition to providing access to the original DVD released in 2010.

—MennoMedia



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PHOTO BY LEN REMPEL



Menno Youth Singers perform at their 10th anniversary coffeeshouse at Breslau Mennonite Church, Ont., on March 7. The choir, part of the Menno Singers family of choirs, is directed by Janna Lynn Cressman and accompanied by Sophia Werden Abrams.

God at work
through music

Snapshots

CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY PHOTO



Winners of Canadian Mennonite University's 2014 Verna Mae Janzen Music Competition pose with Peter Janzen, who named the competition in memory of his late wife, who died of cancer in 1989. From left to right: pianist Breanna Heinrichs and soprano Anna Bigland-Pritchard (tied for third), lyrical soprano Deidra Borus (second), and pianist Rebecca Klassen-Wiebe (first). 'I'm super excited that I won the money [\$700], but it's more meaningful because it means I succeeded in my musical goal of touching people,' said Klassen-Wiebe after the March 20 final competition that included eight finalists from among 19 original competitors.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RACHAEL PETERS



Cooking up a storm: Rachael Peters and Ellery Penner are the creators of The Cookbook Project.

A recipe for success

Longtime friends create cookbook to help celebrate church's anniversary

BY AARON EPP
Young Voices Co-editor

Recipes are typically the key ingredient in a cookbook, but when Ellery Penner and Rachael Peters put together one to celebrate their church's anniversary, including stories was equally important.

The longtime friends created *The Cookbook Project: Celebrating 75 Years of Meals and Memories* as part of the festivities surrounding the 75th anniversary of Niagara United Mennonite Church in

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont. The duo released the book late last year, and have sold 600 copies so far.

The 186-page book includes more than 150 recipes submitted by members of the church, including recipes for everything from yerba mate to buffalo wings, as well as various soups, stews, quiches, cookies and cakes. Penner and Peters, who are both 23, chose to divide the sections not by



The table is set at Niagara United Mennonite Church, which celebrated its 75th anniversary last year.

recipes, but according to the stories people submitted. They are labelled “Heritage,” “Journeys,” “Friends,” “Family,” “Seasons” and “Community,” with related recipes, stories and photos filling the pages.

“We wanted to do something that reflected the stories we received, because, for us, the stories were just as important as the recipes,” Peters explains.

Penner says that serving with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) for six months in Indonesia, as well as taking a “Food, Culture and History” course at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo,

food connects us as Mennonites, as a body of believers and as a church family”

Penner and Peters insisted on eating whenever they met together to work on the project, and spent countless mornings eating pancakes as they edited recipes, formatted pages, brainstormed ideas and coordinated photo-shoots. It was a six-month process that ended up being more work than they had initially expected, but it strengthened their friendship and gave them a new appreciation for their brothers and sisters at Niagara United Mennonite.

“Having the support of our community

‘Food can divide us, but I believe that more often it unites us.’
(Ellery Penner)

Ont., during her final undergraduate term, helped her appreciate food in new ways.

“Food can divide us, but I believe that more often it unites us,” Penner writes in the cookbook’s preface. “Food opens opportunities for conversation as it is prepared, served, eaten and cleared. It helps us understand others, relate to others and be in community with others. It is a medium through which to extend and receive generosity and hospitality. Food nourishes our bodies, but just as important, it nourishes our souls.”

“All of us, at some point or another, have experienced a meal from an oma’s kitchen, a potluck in the church gym, or the rollkuchen and platz served at springfest,” she adds later. “We don’t have to think very hard to come up with examples of how

at church was really incredible, especially as people pre-ordered the book and shared with us how excited they were,” Peters says.

“It was a community project,” Penner adds, noting that more than 200 people contributed to the book in some way. . . . It couldn’t have happened without people contributing. We’re so grateful that it turned out how we wanted—as not just a cookbook, but a memoir of our community.” ❧

Proceeds from the sale of The Cookbook Project: Celebrating 75 Years of Meals and Memories go to Mennonite Central Committee. To order a copy, e-mail ellery.penner@gmail.com or rachaelpeters@live.ca.



Printed in full colour, The Cookbook Project includes more than 150 recipes, as well as stories and photos related to the history of Niagara United Mennonite Church.

Young Mennonites demonstrate ‘spirit of generosity’

BY RACHEL BERGEN
Young Voices Co-editor

The Mennonite Foundation of Canada (MFC) recently honoured 17 youth and young adults for work they did in the spirit of generosity.

The Spirit of Generosity Award is given to one student—or group of students—in each of the Christian secondary and

post-secondary schools, colleges and universities in MFC’s participating conferences across Canada. Students are chosen who demonstrate a generous nature and have expressed their generosity in a remarkable way during the year. Winners

(Continued on page 36)



The cast of the Conrad Grebel University College Anne of Green Gables production. Rachel Dyck, Rachel Pauls, Rachel Urban-Shipley and Sarah Brnjas were nominated for the Spirit of Generosity Award because of their involvement in it.



Canadian Mennonite University nominated music student Dennis Giesbrecht for his generous spirit.

(Continued from page 35)

gets \$450, with half of it going to a charitable organization of their choice. This year, \$6,300 goes to charities across Canada and around the world.

“It is our hope that the Spirit of Generosity Award program will nurture faithful joyful giving among today’s young people in the church,” says Darren Pries-Klassen, MFC’s executive director.

Four University of Waterloo students

what I’m doing and put even more effort into being generous, not just with my time and energy.”

Giesbrecht is donating his money to the Global Family Foundation, a charity in Paraguay that provides education to low-income youth to keep them away from violence. He hopes to work with the organization in the future when he moves back to Paraguay.

The Mennonite Educational Institute

*‘This [the award] just made me aware of how much of an impact my life can have on others.’
(Dennis Giesbrecht)*

who are affiliated with Conrad Grebel University College won the award for their role in orchestrating the successful production of a musical version of *Anne of Green Gables*. Rachel Dyck, Rachel Pauls, Rachel Urban-Shipley and Sarah Brnjas worked tirelessly for a year to organize the musical and were nominated by Grebel for being generous with their time.

Dyck, 21, is an English major at UW. On behalf of the group, she says organizing the musical was very rewarding: “We started talking about it a year before it happened. That’s how much time it takes. It was worth it because it was a really significant community event.”

Students from a variety of programs at Grebel came together to put on the show.

Dyck says the four are donating their money to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario because they all believe MCC’s mission and values align with their own.

Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg nominated music student Dennis Giesbrecht for his generous spirit. The Paraguayan-born 25-year-old worked in Low-German ministry for the last few years. He was even part of a group that recorded a Low German CD, toured Low-German-speaking churches in Western Canada in 2012, and used the proceeds to buy radio equipment for a Bolivian radio station.

“This [the award] just made me aware of how much of an impact my life can have on others,” he says. “At the same time, it was a big encouragement for me to keep doing

(MEI) in Abbotsford, B.C., nominated 18-year-old Raina Cameron for the award. She went on a school mission trip to Thailand when she was 16 and on a church mission trip to Guatemala the following year. Both trips involved working with children’s camps.

Cameron says MEI has lots of opportunities for students to get involved in the community, and she tries to volunteer as much as she can. “Whenever I had free time, I started going and seeing what things were all about,” she says. “And quickly I learned how amazing it is to volunteer and see so many different projects that really help in the lives of people in our community.”

Cameron is now living in Alsace, France, where she continues to serve with a youth group, a refugee camp and other initiatives.

“It was a real honour to receive the award because it is often service like this that gets unnoticed,” she says. ❧



The Mennonite Educational Institute in Abbotsford, B.C., nominated 18-year-old Raina Cameron for the Spirit of Generosity Award.




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.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Important reminders

BY AARON EPP

YOUNG VOICES CO-EDITOR

How would I act differently if I carried a Bible in my hand everywhere I went?

Since *A Year of Reading Biblically* began, I've kept my Bible in my bag along with my notebooks, pens and whatever magazine or book I happen to currently be reading, so that I can do my daily Bible reading on the bus or during lunchtime at work if I don't manage to do it first-thing in the morning.

One Sunday evening in mid-February, I was waiting for the bus downtown, Bible in hand because I had been reading it on the previous bus I was on. A man, dishevelled in appearance, approached me.

He asked if I was holding a Bible, and if I was a Christian, and why I was a Christian, and he told me a little bit about his own life. Eventually, he asked me if I had any money I could spare, as he was raising \$15 so that he could get a bed at a nearby Salvation Army shelter.

I'm always extremely suspicious of these requests. I always think the person is going to use the money for drugs, so I either lie and say I don't have any cash on me, or I hand them a bit of change—some inconsequential amount—and then lie and say it's all I have. Then I quickly go on my way. (Of course, sometimes I really don't have any cash on me, in which case I tell them that and it's the truth.)

As I listened to the man that evening, and as I stood there in the frigid Winnipeg winter holding my Bible, I knew I couldn't lie. Well, I suppose I could have, but lying with a Bible in my hand would have felt like an all-new low for me, and I didn't want to go there. I reached for my wallet. I had at least \$20 in bills and handed him a fiver.

We chatted some more; he told me about how he had fallen on hard times, and how this had led to a crisis of faith. He was wrapping up the conversation

and about to move on—he had to find another \$10 if he wanted that bed at the Salvation Army, after all—and I stopped him. I pulled out my wallet again and gave him another \$10. He thanked me and moved on.

I'm not telling this story to highlight a kindness I showed to someone who was down on his luck. This story is an example of how I acted differently in one situation because I was holding my Bible.

Holding my Bible in that moment, I couldn't ignore all of the things I've read about Jesus's concern for the poor. I couldn't ignore the fact that I had money in my wallet, money that I could spare to give the man, whether or not he truly needed it for a bed at the Salvation Army.

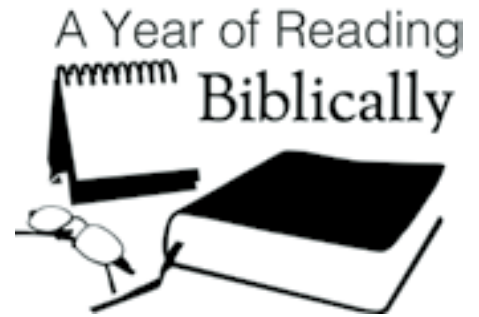
Holding the Bible then and there reminded me of who I am: someone who wants to follow God and help others. It seems weird to think I need the reminder, but I suppose in that way I'm like the Israelites who so often needed Moses to remind them that they should be faithful to God.

"Why do people who work in offices have pictures of their family on their desk facing them?" comedian Jerry Seinfeld once asked during a stand-up routine. "Do they forget that they're married? Do they say to themselves, 'All right. Five o'clock. Time to hit the bars and pick up some [women]. Hold it a second, look at this picture. I got a wife and three kids. I completely forgot! I better get home.'"

It seems like a ridiculous scenario, but I think Seinfeld's on to something there. If anything, *A Year of Reading Biblically* is a daily reminder of what I think is important and how I want to live my life. ☘



See the online version of this reflection for links to the rest of the *Year of Reading Biblically* series.



PHOTOS BY MATTHEW SAWATZKY



How would you act differently if you had a Bible in your hand everywhere you went?

Calendar

British Columbia

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) Willingdon Church, Vancouver, at 7 p.m.; (10) Peace Portal Alliance Church, Surrey, at 7 p.m.; (11) Central Heights Church, Abbotsford, at 3 p.m.; all concerts with Calvin Dyck and Abbotsford Youth Orchestra.

May 17: Mennonite Men's breakfast, at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond.

Alberta

May 4: 2014 Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools Music Festival, at Ambrose University College, Calgary, at 3 p.m.

May 10: Camp Valaqua spring work day. Volunteers needed to help get the camp ready for summer by splitting

wood, installing docks and setting up tipis. For more information, call 403-637-2510.

May 23-25: "Pause, a weekend away" women's retreat at Sunnyside Christian Retreat Centre, Sylvan Lake. Speaker: April Yamasaki, Emmanuel Mennonite church, Abbotsford, B.C. For more information, visit Pause2014.blogspot.ca or e-mail Kate Janzen at kajanszen.13@gmail.com.

Saskatchewan

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.

May 24: RJC fundraising golf tournament at Valley Regional Park.

Manitoba

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

May 9,10: Theatre of the Beat

presents *A Bicycle Built for Two: A Playful Reflection on Marriage*; all shows at 7:30 p.m. (9) Home Street Mennonite Church, Winnipeg; (10) First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg. For more information, visit www.theatreofthebeat.com.

May 14: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate work day.

May 28: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Grade 7-9 spring concert, at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m.

May 29: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Grade 10-12 spring concert, at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m.

Ontario

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

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 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

UpComing

Peacekeeping school announces international mix of instructors for 2014

WINNIPEG—Canadian School of Peacebuilding (CSoP), an annual summer peace and justice program of Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), hosts eight instructors from around the world as faculty for its 2014 school.

• **CSOP'S FIRST** session runs from June 16 to 20 and features three courses: "Peace Skills Practice," led by Natasha Mohammed, a founding member of Winnipeg Mosaic, a collective of local peacemakers who foster understanding of the role of religion and culture in life and conflict; "Exploring Indigenous Justice and Healing," by Rupert Ross, an Assistant Crown Attorney for the District of Kenora, Ont., for more than 20 years; and "Food, Farming and Faith: Living in God's Creation," by Norman Wirzba, a professor of theology and ecology at Duke Divinity School.

• **COURSES IN** the second session, June 23 to 27, feature: "Restorative Justice with Youth and Schools," led by Alana Abramson, who is completing her doctorate on the topic of transformational learning and restorative justice, and John R. Wiens, the recently retired dean of education at the University of Manitoba; "Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience," led by Elaine Zook Barge, who worked in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala with Mennonite Central Committee in the '80s and '90s; "De-colonial Theology: Thought and Practice," by Terry LeBlanc, the founding chair and director of the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies; and "Arts Approaches to Community-Based Peacebuilding," by Babu Ayindo, the founding artistic director of Amani People's Theater, Nairobi, Kenya.

For more information, visit csop.cmu.ca.

—Canadian School of Peacebuilding



PROUDLY PRESENT

A BICYCLE BUILT FOR TWO

a Playful Reflection on Marriage

the Comrad Centre (36 King St. Kitchener)

Saturday May 3, 2014

@ 8:30am (Shalom Spring Breakfast) & 7:30pm

Tickets: \$25 (\$15 for students/subsidized)
at kwsymphony.ca or 519-745-4711

Made possible with funding by MCEC's Legacy Initiatives Fund and Paul & Darlene Wideman

416-491-8542 or e-mail boxoffice@paxchristichorale.org.

April 27: Silver Lake Mennonite Camp annual general meeting, at Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener, at 1 p.m.

April 28: New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale promotion dinner at Bingemans in Kitchener, at 6:30 p.m. Speaker: Eileen Henderson, MCC Ontario restorative justice coordinator. Topic: "Finding God in unexpected places." For tickets, call 519-745-8458.

April 28,29: Spring Seniors Retreat at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp (same program offered both days). Speakers: Martin Buhr and John Neufeld. Topic: "Building hope and community: Responses to poverty." Each day includes, worship, learning and fellowship. For more information, call 519-625-8602 or e-mail info@hiddenacres.ca.

May 1: Deadline to apply for participation in Silver Lake Mennonite Camp's new Navigate program for young adults aged 18 to 20. For more information, visit slmc.ca/navigate.

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.

May 3,23-24,30,31: Theatre of the Beat presents *A Bicycle Built for Two: A Playful Reflection on Marriage*; all shows at 7:30 p.m. (3) Conrad Centre for the Performing Arts, Kitchener; (23-24)

Nineteen on the Park, Stouffville; (30) St. Catharines United Mennonite Church; (31) Danforth Mennonite Church, Toronto. For more information, visit www.theatreofthebeat.com.

May 3-4: Bethel Mennonite Church, Elora, youth homecoming event. For registration information, call the church at 519-846-0180.

May 4: Inter-Mennonite Children's Choir presents "When the Spirit Says Sing," at Floradale Mennonite Church, at 3 p.m. Tickets are available at the door.

May 7: "Healthy Pastoral Relationships": an MC Eastern Canada workshop.

May 10: Paddle the Grand fundraiser for Silver Lake Mennonite Camp.

May 10: Menno Singers presents "Explorations: Concert No. 4—South," with Debbie Lou Ludolph and Inshallah, performing *Missa Criolla* by Ramirez, at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m.

May 10: Hidden Acres hosts the 19th annual Road Hockey Tournament for players 18 year old and up. Register by May 5. All proceeds help send children to summer camp. For more information, visit www.hiddenacres.ca e-mail roadhockey@gmail.com.

May 16-19: MC Eastern Canada youth spring retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp. For more information, visit slmc.ca/retreats or mcec.ca.

May 23-25: MC Eastern Canada junior youth retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite

Camp.

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.

Classifieds

Student Housing

University Student Housing in Winnipeg
Inspired by an Anabaptist Christian faith perspective, Emmaus House is a residential community where university students in Winnipeg, Man., will find support academically, spiritually, in lives of service, healthy living and relationship. Go to emmaushousewinnipeg.ca for more information and the Fall 2014 application form.

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

Employment Opportunities

Community Mennonite Fellowship in Drayton, ON seeking a full time Lead Pastor. Position available Summer 2014. For more details contact Henry Paetkau, MCEC Area Church

Minister at:
hpaetkau@mcec.ca or visit communitymennonite.com
Please submit applications to Henry Paetkau by April 15th.

UpComing

Heritage Village turns 50 with grand celebration

STEINBACH, MAN.—The signature event of the Mennonite Heritage Village's 50th-anniversary celebrations will take place on July 5 and 6. The weekend will begin on July 5 with a fund-raising Schmeckfest Jubilee gala featuring traditional cuisine as guests stroll through the outdoor village, and a dessert bar and entertainment by improvisational violinist Rosemary Siemens, originally from southern Manitoba, in the auditorium. July 6 will be a day to worship together, enjoy guided tours of the village, sing together in a traditional saengerfest and eat together around the fropa/vesper table. Further celebratory events will take place throughout the year and will be posted online at www.mhv.ca.

—Mennonite Heritage Village



Employment Opportunity

UMEI Christian High School invites applications for the position of RECRUITMENT & ADMISSIONS DIRECTOR.

- Post-secondary college diploma or university degree.
- Experience and/or education in the area of marketing, business and community relations will be given preference.
- The successful applicant will have a passion for Mennonite School Education and be aware of the distinctiveness expressed from a Mennonite & Anabaptist perspective at UMEI.
- The applicant must be a self-starter and be willing to take initiatives on his or her own, and be able to engage in effective teamwork with staff, board and parents.
- Responsibilities include implementation and supervision of all Recruitment & Admission initiatives.
- Full-time equivalency of the position will be determined in consultation with the successful candidate.
- Remuneration will be commensurate with experience and education.
- UMEI Christian School is a privately funded Mennonite Church secondary school offering a full complement of Grade 9-12 courses, fully recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

For a more complete job description and to submit applications, contact Sonya Bedal, Principal, UMEI Christian School, 614 Mersea Road 6, Leamington, ON N8H 3V8. 519-326-7448. office@umei.ca, www.umei.ca. Applications accepted until March 28.

God at work in the World Snapshot



KAIROS PHOTO BY SARA STRATTON

Willard Metzger, executive director of Mennonite Church Canada, left, joins 'honour walkers' in making an expression of reconciliation—a copy of Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry, a book edited by Steve Heinrichs, indigenous relations director for MC Canada—towards Canada's indigenous peoples at the final Truth and Reconciliation event in Edmonton last month. For full coverage of this historic event, see the April 28 issue of Canadian Mennonite.