

CANADIAN MENNONITE

February 1, 2016

Volume 20 Number 3

Youth invited to join
#thecovenantcrew

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EDITORIAL

Are congregations up to it?

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

With the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process, congregations across Canada were wisely and prudently given seven years to discern the important issues confronting them in an increasingly post-Christendom era of the 21st century: multiculturalism, the state of our peace and justice beliefs and practices, and sexuality, to name the high-profile ones.

By contrast, congregations are given a mere six months to consider the recommendations of the Future Directions Task Force at work for the past two years. This nine-member group was given the formidable task of “discerning how the national and area churches in their current form can be sustainable in the future, exploring whether current programs, structures may need to change to best serve the church moving forward.”

The Task Force sent its final report to congregations late last year to study its findings—its recommendations to be approved at Assembly 2016 in Saskatoon in July. For such a major shift in church structures as is proposed, this is a short window to contemplate its impact on our denominational church life.

Already there is strong resistance from one segment—our Witness workers around the globe, who are objecting in an open letter to the Task Force (see pages 4 to 6). They think the move from long-term assignments to short-term ones would “lead to either more insular thinking, or, ironically to falling victim to perpetrators of colonialism.” This is especially incisive

because we only recently became aware of the injustices of colonialism that have hindered our mission efforts.

Present Witness workers are keenly aware of this history and have carefully looked at where God is already at work in cultures that were once considered “pagan.” There is always a lag between what practitioners comprehend and practise, and what the constituency “back home” realizes.



Which raises the question: Is this one of the underlying dynamics of the Task Force that thinks it is easy and in line with “cultural change” to make this switch? Are financial considerations the primary driver of this recommendation? Hilda Hildebrand, Mennonite Church Canada’s moderator and a member of the Task Force, says the current programs and systems are not sustainable.

But shouldn’t the quality of our international witness be the primary consideration? Is this recommendation short-sighted, more impulsive than deliberate, cutting into the DNA of our faith culture? “Mission” is deeply rooted in us. Tweaking such a core belief should be done with care.

Similar questions apply to the Future Directions recommendations in shifting responsibility for developing worship resources to congregations, something we raised in our last editorial. While some of this looks plausible on paper, it seems to us somewhat unrealistic to expect congregations, overwhelmed in many

cases with their own programs, to take on additional responsibilities.

And who will tend to faith formation and encourage pastors to foster Anabaptist beliefs and practices in their congregations? Already there is evidence our peace position is fraying. In a recent conversation between a western congregation and its area church MCC representative, he was told he could come speak “only if he did not talk about peace work.” The church only wanted to discuss “blankets and band aids.” Our shared identity is something that needs constant nurturing. Leaving this to local congregations is a risk.

And speaking, finally, of underlying dynamics, is it instructive to note the make-up of the Task Force?

Former General Conference churches, largely Dutch North-German Mennonites, have a history in Canada of strong congregational autonomy.

By contrast, the Mennonite Church, comprised mostly of German-Swiss heritage, had a cultural history and infrastructure of bishops and overseers, and looked more to a central authority. In the 21st century we thought these two cultures, now facing common issues together, could easily override their distinctive heritages and work together at common goals.

But have we? Old habits and ways of thinking are not easily diminished. Consider the composition of the nine members of the Task Force: Only three of the nine are from Swiss-German heritage. And only one comes with a non-European heritage, the fastest growing segment of our denomination: April Yamasaki, pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford, B.C.

Does that tell us something of why the congregation is asked to pick up the important roles of witness, faith formation and developing worship resources?

ABOUT THE COVER:

Organizers hope that youth who gather in Saskatoon in July for Mennonite Church Canada’s Assembly 2016 are inspired to participate in future gatherings of the wider church. Read ‘Youth invited to join #thecovenantcrew’ on page 27 for more on this year’s national youth assembly.

PHOTO: MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

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

• Covenantal relationships and mutual accountability

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All 24 MC Canada Witness workers sign a letter calling for more dialogue with them and their overseas partners before the church make changes that would see the growth of short-term mission teams that workers say may 'provide fertile terrain for new acts of empire building and colonization,' two of the things the Future Directions Task Force hopes to avoid. Plus, **ALDRED NEUFELDT** responds on behalf of the Task Force.

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Award-winning
member of the
Canadian Church Press



Witness workers bring forth concerns about 'Future Directions'

The following is an abridged version of a letter sent to the Future Directions Task Force and Mennonite Church Canada leaders that was signed by all 24 Witness workers in light of the Task Force's concluding report (commonword.ca/go/469) that focusses on two central questions: "What is God's Spirit calling us to in the 21st century?" and, "What are the best ways (programs, structures, strategies) for the church to thrive and grow?"

MC Canada has so beautifully demonstrated how 'church' and 'mission' are part-and-parcel of the same entity. We are, therefore, deeply concerned by the way the Task Force once again parcels out and distances the church from the expressions that arise from our being the church.

Given the importance placed on communal discernment within our Anabaptist tradition, we offer some reflections on the Task Force's report and proposals. Our reflections and comments arise from our international experience and cross-cultural engagement. These reflections are offered not in defence of the current reality, but as a way of adding our voice to the discernment process regarding the future of our church:

1. Avoiding violence, colonialism at home and abroad

We affirm the Task Force's desire to avoid structural and systemic forms of violence and colonialism at home and abroad. We are grateful for the determination to be consistent in embodying our desire for, and pursuit of, peace in all that we do, including the way in which we relate with people of other cultures, faiths and contexts.

Indeed, this underscores the work we already do all around the world. It is an approach we have regularly encouraged among our Canadian brothers and sisters in the Canadian context as well, offering lessons we have learned from our cross-cultural experiences.

Unfortunately, throughout the history of the Christian church there have been all-too-common examples of how the church and its mission activity have participated in the colonial legacy. It is important to recognize this history and reality, and we are thankful that the Task Force is concerned in wanting not to participate in such violence as it is at cross-purposes with God's great reconciling project for the world.

This history and colonial legacy is not true, however, of all forms of "mission" around the world. In our experience and involvement with MC Canada Witness, we have been painstakingly careful and deliberate in how we engage those whom we serve with around the world. Although we have undoubtedly not always lived up to

our ideals, recognizing the fact that no matter how good our intentions are, we can and will do both good and harm, we have sought to be deliberate and humble about the way in which we approach other cultures and contexts.

2. Rooted in transformative relationship, partnership

We also affirm the stated desire that our witness/service be rooted in transformative relationship and partnership. Throughout much of Mennonite international involvement, we have been very careful, conscientious and deliberate in the ways we have approached our work precisely because of this history.

3. Task Force proposals questioned

While we affirm the Task Force and its intention to ground its work in relationship and partnership, thereby seeking to avoid paternalism and colonialism, we question whether the proposals offered would, in fact, attain these stated desires.

We find that the report and its proposals do not seem to understand the complexities in putting into practice these desires, and are short-sighted in that its proposals regarding international engagement will perpetuate precisely the practices of colonialism and violence that we do not want to perpetuate, as they contradict the gospel of Jesus Christ and the peace that we are called to embody.

Although the report states its desire to prioritize relationships and partnerships in international ministry, we question how the Task Force thinks such relationships and partnerships can develop out of short-term assignments ranging from a few months to a year in duration. If we truly wish to break from colonial tendencies and habits, we must invest years of learning about the contexts in which we engage, immersing ourselves into the experiences, history and traditions so that we are sensitive to those with whom we are building relationships. It takes time to build the necessary trust for deep and meaningful relationships. It takes time to demonstrate that we are not interested in “doing mission” in the same harmful way that has tainted the whole notion of “mission” to begin with. It takes time to foster

mutually transformative relationships that allow us to walk with one another as we together participate in *Missio Dei* (God’s mission).

Our experience has demonstrated that short-term assignments, although they might be formative for the one who is sent, can be a drain on relationships and partnerships in the host culture. Thus the proposal for shorter terms is terribly short-sighted, in that the desired relationships based on mutual love and respect will not have time to take root, let alone to flourish. At their worst, short-term “assignments” provide fertile terrain for new acts of empire building and colonization when they are not accompanied by a deep understanding of the history and culture of a particular place.

Unfortunately, we already see the tendency towards colonialism in the

is formed by the Mennonite congregations across Canada—has sent us.

The proposal that congregations, clusters of congregations or “regions” would be the ones to “discern a confirmation of call” and send workers, fractures and splinters our witness. It already has been a challenge for the different Mennonite sending bodies in Canada and the U.S. to act in harmony and inform one another. And yet we have attempted to do so, and we have proudly been bearers of that witness. The proposed change in who sends workers does not provide the witness of unity that is so needed in our Mennonite church, in the Christian church and in the world.

The proposed change in how “church” is understood highlights the potential contrast between individual and communal interests and discernment. This

Many of these concerns, we believe, would have been highlighted if the Task Force had chosen to engage with, and hear from, our international partners with whom we serve, as well as MC Canada workers and staff. We could have assisted in the process of discernment.

Future Directions report. Rather than taking the time to listen to, and speak with, the communities around the world with whom we serve, the Task Force unilaterally sets out the future course for how we will relate with our brothers and sisters internationally. Put another way, the Task Force is determining the relationship with others without any form of consultation with them.

The proposal falls victim to the North American preference of short-term involvements and financing trumping our partner preferences of longer-term connections and relationships. Is that not the colonialism that we wanted to avoid?

Another significant concern pertains to the questionable understanding of “church” found in the report, which significantly affects international engagement. Being MC Canada Witness workers provides us with the confidence of knowing that the church—the body that

reminds us of an African proverb: “If you want to go quickly, go alone; if you want to go far, let us go together.” We have a long road ahead of us as we strive for God’s peaceable kingdom. We will need each other as we walk together in this journey. What we see in the Future Directions proposal is a more solitary path.

MC Canada has so beautifully demonstrated how “church” and “mission” are part-and-parcel of the same entity. We are, therefore, deeply concerned by the way the Task Force once again parcels out and distances the church from the expressions that arise from our being the church. It assumes that opportunities for international service can simply be done through other agencies or schools that are connected to the church. What this fails to recognize, however, is the way in which our work—the work of MC Canada Witness—has, in fact, been

different and yet complementary to the work and engagement of other agencies and schools.

For example, Bruce Yoder and Nancy Frey in Benin have been integral in providing connections with, and opportunities for, short-term engagements at both the Benin Bible Institute (sabbatical opportunities) and other ministries with which there have been significant relationships. Nathan and Taryn Dirks in Botswana have been an active part in creating opportunities for Service Adventure and other groups. George and Tobia Veith have been integral in facilitating short-term programs in Macau, as well as engagement opportunities between the Chinese Anabaptist Network and Canadian Mennonite churches. Andrew and Karen Suderman in South Africa have actively helped with the Canadian Mennonite University Outtatown experience, as well with Journey International (previously Radical Journey), a one-year discipleship program through Mennonite Mission Network.

We, too, have benefited from other Mennonite agencies as they forged, created and built relationships that have led to our relating with them. For this we are so very grateful! And this is the point: Witness and/or service “exchanges” through different church agencies and schools are valuable just as much as long-term international church engagement. Both are needed. They act as two arms of the same body, two expressions of the same faith.

It is terribly short-sighted to assume that terms of a few months to one year will suffice. It ignores the many ways in which we, as a church, have grown and changed because of our long-term transformative relationships with others around the world and the short-term engagement opportunities that have arisen because of it. And unfortunately we do not see how the Future Directions proposals will not lead to either more insular thinking or, ironically, falling victim to becoming perpetrators of colonialism.

4. Discernment process left out Witness workers, partners

Many of these concerns, we believe,

would have been highlighted if the Task Force had chosen to engage with, and hear from, our international partners with whom we serve, as well as MC Canada workers and staff. We could have assisted in the process of discernment.

We recognize that the Task Force requested and received a draft background paper from the MC Canada Witness Council. And yet there is very little—if any—evidence that any of the proposals and cautions made by the Witness Council were considered or taken into account in the Task Force’s final report and proposals.

Thus we are disappointed that neither we nor our international partners were directly consulted by the Task Force. While we acknowledge the potential for conflicts of interest, we believe that our exclusion from the process has resulted in a serious misunderstanding of the ways in which we work and the desires of our partners.

Following this logic, no one directly involved with the Future Directions process could, therefore, continue in his or her same position with MC Canada going forward. We therefore question why a conscious decision was made not to consult Witness workers and international

partners in the process of exploring the future direction of our church, especially regarding proposals pertaining to international engagement.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, we humbly suggest and would welcome:

- **FURTHER CONVERSATION** with the current MC Canada Witness workers as we wrestle with the ways in which we relate to, and engage with, our brothers and sisters around the world given the changing Canadian realities.
- **FURTHER CONVERSATION** with those with whom we serve around the world, as many of our local partners are as troubled as we are, and are anxious to be part of the conversation and discernment process. Their voice is valuable and it would be worthwhile listening to them as it would help us in our discerning process.
- **FURTHER CONVERSATION** and discernment with the broader Mennonite family in Canada and beyond, so that we can together decide how we can continue along the journey in seeking to be a people faithful to the ways of God’s kingdom. ☸

/// For discussion

1. What have been your experiences in connecting with the global Anabaptist church? Do short-term mission trips do a good job of connecting the church in Canada with other parts of the world? How is this different from the connections fostered by longer-term Witness workers?
2. Whose interests do short-term mission assignments primarily serve? What about longer-term Witness workers? Do you agree that short-term stints that ignore the preferences of global partners perpetuate a kind of colonialism?
3. On page 7, Aldred Neufeldt points out that the people of Mennonite Church Canada are “wealthier, more educated and more connected than ever,” yet funding to the national church keeps declining. Given this reality, should MC Canada try to maintain the work it does around the world? How do you explain this erosion of support for national programs?
4. The MC Canada Witness Council quotes the proverb, “If you want to go quickly, go alone; if you want to go far, let us go together.” Is this good wisdom for the church? How might churches work at improving cooperation?

—BY BARB DRAPER

VIEWPOINT

Witness workers' concerns acknowledged

ALDRED H. NEUFELDT

FUTURE DIRECTIONS TASK FORCE

On behalf of the Future Directions Task Force I express sincere thanks for the thought and time you've put into the open letter received last week from Norm Dyck, Mennonite Church Canada's Witness Council chair.

The questions and concerns you raise regarding international Witness work are important, welcome and timely. We agree it's a topic bearing further conversation and discernment, something we sought to recognize in our report (commonword.ca/go/469) when we said: "We envision a review of current programs and partnerships to discern funding support or to transition to other arrangements as needed." Our intent was not to limit such review to a conversation on funding, though financial sustainability is important. Rather, it was the broader question of our role abroad that should be given careful thought along the lines set out in the conclusion to your letter.

Before elaborating, I'd invite you to consider the context of the Task Force's work. Specifically, I refer to how churches of all denominations in Canada have been impacted by the shift from what some speak of as "Christendom" to "post-Christendom" times—some more than others. We're grateful to be among those less impacted, yet the impact is real.

There are a variety of indicators, but the one most immediately relevant to our conversation is in funding by congregations for work we do together on behalf of the whole—whether at area or national church levels, and by extension the work you carry out as our representatives. For more than a generation there's been a gradual but persistent decline in funding.

Arguably we're wealthier, more educated, more connected than ever. Yet there has been a growing gap between assumptions about the kinds of work that should be done—reflected in budgets—and the extent to which people in our congregations are prepared to fund them.

The looming issue was recognized in 2003, and again in 2006, and good servants of the church sought different ways of coping, but the gap continued to grow. Cuts to staffing and programming provided temporary relief. By 2010 it was clear more substantive changes were needed. Assumptions about what we should do, and how we should organize ourselves to do it, seemed not to hold anymore. It's not that we didn't have good people doing good things. We did and we have. It's a question of whether we're doing the right things for this time in history—one of realigning ourselves with where God already is—to cite Vincent Harding in our report.

For some, the times are troubling. For our part, we choose to believe these new times, while challenging, are filled with opportunity to witness to the truth of our faith in Christ Jesus as Lord and Prince of Peace, as your greeting puts it.

But the times do require us to change. So when we propose that congregations and regional bodies be involved in discerning international ministry commitments, it's about closing the gap between what we do together and congregations, in order to rebuild a relationship and trust once there. The same argument applies to other aspects of our report. That's not to say there shouldn't be safeguards in place to avoid the kinds of concerns you raise about short-term assignments. There should be. Nor do we

under-estimate the importance of a national body as the face and representative of the whole. MC Canada will continue, not disappear.

Of course, the church is larger than all that, but we work at what we can. The changes proposed speak to more closely tying together national, regional and local expressions of our body—all in ways that enable our expression of the church to be spiritually vital and healthy in witness and mission in a sustainable way.

So, back to the desire for further conversation and discernment.

We are aware of the many changes in approach that have been made over the past several decades, and the importance of partnerships you speak to. Yet the question lingers: Just what is it that MC Canada is particularly called to do abroad at this time, and how to do it?

I don't expect any of you feel our current approach, good as it is, necessarily is the final word. We have faith that if we can articulate a 21st-century reset of our vision of how to engage God's mission internationally, congregational support would follow. Towards that end, consideration is being given at several levels to how such conversation might best be carried forward once the Task Force concludes its work.

Again, our sincere thanks for your letter and the points you raise. In our view, it should help stimulate the kind of conversation that we would benefit from. ❧

Aldred H. Neufeldt is chair of Mennonite Church Canada's Future Directions Task Force. This is an abridged version of the letter sent to MC Canada's Witness workers.

VIEWPOINTS

/// Readers write

We welcome your comments and publish most letters from subscribers. Letters, to be kept to 300 words or less, are the opinion of the writer only and are not to be taken as endorsed by this magazine or the church. Please address issues rather than individuals; personal attacks will not appear in print or online. In light of the many recent letters on the topic of sexuality, we will edit any letter on this topic to a paragraph and post the rest online at www.canadian-mennonite.org. All letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Send them to letters@canadianmennonite.org and include the author's contact information and mailing address. Preference is given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

✉ Evolutionary theory attacks Christianity

SOME TIME AGO there was a letter to the editor promoting evolutionary theory as strengthening faith. This is not Christian or scriptural.

Since evolutionary theory is atheistic, we as Christians do well to believe in God as our creator. True science does not support evolutionary theory, even though evolutionists have hijacked the word "science."

For a wealth of helpful, biblical information and literature, visit creation.com or call 1-888-251-5360. Creation Ministries International (CMI) is a non-profit, non-denominational, Christ-centred group of evangelistic ministries. CMI provides scientific, scriptural answers to evolutionary attacks on Christianity. DANIEL M. MARTIN, ST. CLEMENTS, ONT.

FROM OUR LEADERS

Do we need saving?

TIM FROESE

The word "saviour" doesn't often come up in conversation. Could it be that we are not in need of saving? Perhaps we face no imminent danger. Or perhaps there is nothing in recent history that reminds us of rescue, liberation, redemption or salvation. Maybe we can save ourselves through our own devices. Or maybe we are so inclined to view everything in shades of grey that a concept like salvation draws a line where we think there shouldn't be one.



Considering the state of the world, we are indeed in need of salvation. Whether we recognize it or not, our quest for God's saving grace takes various forms and motivates us to do many wonderful things:

• **WE ARE** moved to pray and to care: I recently lost two friends prematurely to cancer. During their illnesses, pray-ers for them and their families invited

rescue from aggression, pain and death. Although their bodies were not saved, they and their families received significant support during suffering and grief.

• **WE ARE** moved to solidarity and generosity: As I write, Syrian and other refugees are fleeing destruction and violence. In shared efforts to save lives, people are praying, advocating, inviting, donating and helping to resettle refugee families.

• **WE ARE** moved to thankfulness: I recently visited the dentist for the first time in a very long time and was more than a little uncomfortable about what a check-up would reveal. Although I was not saved from a mild scolding, I am thankful to God, as genetically strong teeth saved me from unwelcome dental work.

Is salvation needed only in times of physical crisis, or are we generally in need of being saved? While we may be cautious about practices and words that condemn or judge others, or suggest that our particular interpretation is the only way to

salvation, we might reflect again on our personal and collective need for salvation.

Ironically, the western middle class desire for material security and financial "savings" reminds us of our innate need to be saved. Our pursuit of that kind of security reveals our misplaced trust. And our individual and collective sins reveal the woeful inadequacy of our own efforts. Recognizing and confessing this is one of our responsibilities as truth tellers.

A second responsibility is to reflect on Scripture and the coming of Christ. If Jesus only came to help us get along with one another, or to teach, make disciples, heal the sick, give hope to the marginalized, or correct those in authority, would the cross have been necessary? Grace, hope, mercy, forgiveness, gentleness and love save us from revenge, despair, judgment, condemnation, brutality and hate. We are saved through the cross of Jesus.

A third responsibility is to share our salvation with others. Salvation must move us towards courageous witness. Scripture is full of salvation stories. We need to accept our own place in this ongoing salvation story, and share it in our communities, across the country and around the world.

Tim Froese is Mennonite Church Canada's executive minister of Witness.

✉ A prayer for healing mercy: Do not give up hope

RE: "MORE TRANSPARENCY please," Dec. 14, 2015, page 2.

After reading the editorial from Dick Benner, I was left sitting in my chair wishing I could scream loud enough for all my Mennonite brothers and sister to

hear one word: "Stop."

Take a deep breath and remember that we are all raised and taught well in God's Word. We have to accept the times in which we are living. The devil is working overtime on our brains, especially with all the talk about sexuality.

I'm glad that the John Howard Yoder case and the

(Continued on page 10)

FAMILY TIES

A transformational moment

MELISSA MILLER

"I wonder where my wrapping paper is," my mother mused. "I know I'm not supposed to go to the attic, but I did. Maybe it's up there." (The attic is a garage loft, accessible by a pull-down ladder.) I was the only witness to my mother's "confession" as we sat together in her home; at the time, I had been savouring a sweet little dish of ice cream.

Instantly my mellow mood vanished as a tumultuous force erupted inside of me. I later named the force fear, panic and anger—residuals from my mother's falls the previous year that had resulted in multiple broken bones and an extended stay in nursing care. Quelling the hot words that threatened to pour out of me, I put my hands over my ears—even knowing how ridiculous I looked—and said, "I cannot listen to this." I then put my treat down, excused myself and walked to another room of the house, where I took deep breaths and counted to about a thousand. With the volcano under control, I returned to the living room and we resumed our visit. We had no further words about the attic.

Within 24 hours of the incident, I glimpsed new terrain in the family system landscape. It took a friend's insights,

however, to make visible what I sensed: It was a transformational moment opening a path to new, healthier interactions. Amazing, I thought, after six-plus decades of being a daughter that significant change is still possible.

The emotional tenor of my first family could be described as open and lively. I grew up with lots of expressions of nurture and love, laughter and playfulness, and for that I am grateful. The emotional atmosphere could also be volatile and, on occasion, destructive. There were plenty of tears, angry screams, slammed

Within 24 hours of the incident, I glimpsed new terrain in the family system landscape.

doors and some physical violence. Taking the two extremes together, I learned the value of open expression of conflict.

I also learned that our powerful interactions were part and parcel of the bonds of connection. "If I care enough about you, I will fight vigorously with you," seemed to be the unwritten code. Unfortunately, the fierce loving sometimes destroyed more than it built. Over time, I have tried, and to some degree succeeded, to moderate the more intense, harmful patterns of my childhood home.

Apparently, we keep on getting chances to step away from a dysfunctional interaction towards one that is healthier and more productive. In this case, several thoughts emerged to coax me towards a different response. As I stood deeply breathing a few rooms away from my mother, I thought, "Yelling would solve nothing." Even though I desperately wanted to give voice to my hurt and fear, I realized with great clarity that nothing would be improved if I did so.

I also thought, "There is not one thing I can say or do that will change the past or that will prevent her from returning to the attic." And, "Thank you, God, that she did not fall and break her bones." I even, in the tiniest way, saw a bit of my mother's courage and spirit.

It took a friend closer to my mother's age, though, to expand on that vision. "You should say to your mother, 'Good for you!'" she admonished. That was a new thought. Overall, after my time-out

I confess that I did feel lighter and more hopeful; there was a way through that didn't require mindlessly repeating old, futile patterns of the past.

The Apostle Paul promises us that "*in Christ, we are new creations*" (II Corinthians 5:17 paraphrased). Might that be true in our family interactions?

Melissa Miller (familyties@mymts.net) has a passion for helping people develop healthy, vibrant relationships with God, self and others.



(Continued from page 9)

Vernon Leis story are being talked about. It is now healing time for the victims and for all those affected by these situations.

The cross is still there for each and every one of us. And the blood of Jesus heals all wounds. How about starting to prayerfully run the path into our Father's loving arms, because his heart has been waiting for us

for a long time already.

My prayer is healing mercy for all my Anabaptist Mennonite brothers and sisters in Christ, and do not give up hope.

MARLENE HIEBERT, ALTONA, MAN.

GOD, MONEY AND ME

Busted budget

DARREN PRIES-KLASSEN

There once was a congregation called Peach Blossom Community Church. It was approaching the end of the year with a significant financial shortfall, needing \$60,000 to meet its annual budget. The finance committee jumped into action. Bulletin inserts used graphs and charts to illustrate the shortfall. Weekly announcements encouraged people to give generously to avoid a deficit. There was much concern. And then, at the 11th hour, several members of the church offered sizeable cheques to cover the shortfall.

On the first Sunday of the new year, the head of the finance committee announced that, due to tremendous generosity, the budget had been met. There was applause, and that was that.

When a newcomer to the church asked how the financial crisis had been averted, she was told, "Don't worry. This happens every year."

Peach Blossom Community Church is mythical, but this scenario is far from fictitious. In fact, it happens regularly in too many churches. Thankfully, there are ways to avoid this, but action needs to start now, at the beginning, not the end, of the year. Here are a few suggestions:

• **SAY PLEASE** and thank you.

Charities routinely ask for donations, but in a pleasing way. They share stories

of success, changed lives and the positive difference they are making. When gifts are made, donors receive a thank you, either by phone or mail. Churches, on the other hand, rarely make the case for receiving a gift and even more rarely say thank you when donations are received. In most churches, the only acknowledgment is a charitable receipt. A thank you letter with the annual receipt could tell people about all the things the church is doing and how their support makes a difference. Showing gratitude helps build community.

• **SET IT** and forget it.

It's easy to forget that the church has monthly expenses. Cash flow can be a problem if donors make only a lump sum gift at the end of the year. Many of us want to give monthly or quarterly. Churches can encourage donors to set up regular

electronic fund transfers. The donations happen automatically so the church can stay on top of those monthly expenses.

• **MAKE IT** easy.

Many of our younger churchgoers don't write cheques. Some don't even know how to write a cheque. They use electronic transactions and plastic. Is

your church set up to accept debit- and credit-card donations? For a minimal charge, there are several online services available to help congregation make this happen. If you want the younger generation to give, your church needs to accommodate their way of giving.

• **JOIN THE** joy of giving club.

At Peach Blossom, no one is responsible for inviting new members and attendees to participate in the joy of giving. No one explains why giving is part of the worship service, that it is an intentional act of giving thanks for all that God provides. No one explains the practical side of giving, the expenses associated with operating the church and its mission and outreach programs. This information should be shared periodically with all who participate in the church.

An honest and open conversation about church finances may be awkward, but will likely lead to more insights on why some people support the church and others don't. It may also reveal new ways of reaching out to those in the pews and openly invite them to experience the joy

If you want the younger generation to give, your church needs to accommodate their way of giving.

of faithful generosity.

Darren Pries-Klassen is the executive director of Mennonite Foundation of Canada (MFC). For more information on impulsive generosity, stewardship education, and estate and charitable gift planning, contact your nearest MFC office or visit MennoFoundation.ca.



✉ **Honest, accurate reporting sought from *Canadian Mennonite***

RE: “A MOMENT from yesterday,” Dec. 14, 2015, page 11.

Highlighting archival photos is interesting, but I did not appreciate the personal opinion that condemned the “oil industry’s use of water in fracking” as it pertains to global water issues. All too often *Canadian Mennonite* and other periodicals send messages that reflect badly on industry.

I spent childhood summers and many weeks as an adult living on Shoal Lake, bordering Manitoba and Ontario. I still drink the lake water right off my paddle and enjoy swimming, diving and skiing in its waters. Yet there are those who cry for the injustices of a first nations group that has faced the plight of undrinkable water from the lake for the past 17 years. It’s all about information as it is sold or marketed. Telling an honest, complete and accurate story is what journalism should be about, particularly a journal such as *Canadian Mennonite*.

There is so much hypocrisy that too many people are afraid to expose. Being Christian—and even Mennonite—should be about helping people, rather than putting ourselves on a soap box, invoking others to understand who we are as Mennonites, and debating social media issues until we are so tired we can’t open our hearts to the needs of others.

HAROLD FUNK, CALGARY

✉ **Where is a ‘differing view’ on same-sex marriage in *Canadian Mennonite*?**

RE: “CLEAN OR unclean” feature, Jan 4, page 2.

This is typical of the journalism that is polarizing the church on the issues surrounding the same-sex marriage debate.

Why does *Canadian Mennonite* continue to portray this issue as one-sided and never offers a voice from the many who have a differing view?

Doug Klassen uses great Scripture and a powerful story from our history. It’s just that neither have anything to do with the issue he addresses. Peter’s encounter with the sheet was simply the Lord releasing the transforming gospel to go outside the Jewish world to the gentile world. Klassen is correct in stating that it’s about bringing down walls, but there’s no presence in this event at defining how gentiles who follow Christ would live.

Klassen is fair in defining this issue as either a disputable matter (Romans 14) or a sin issue. If this issue is a disputable matter, then there should at least be recognition and hearing of the dispute, and not

painting the other side as unthinking bigots. If it falls into the sin category—along with gossip, gluttony and greed, as the author suggests—then it still begs for an answer as to what we believe about sin and what it means to live holy lives.

I suggest that we get Jesus’ perspective from Revelation 22:14-15 and then answer the excellent questions listed in this article from the Voskamp blog and the “For discussion” questions at the end of the feature.

KEN FUNK (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ **Disarming Conflict ‘not silent about the immorality of war’**

RE: “WAR IS ‘development in reverse,’” Jan. 4, page 26.

I found the review of *Disarming Conflict* by Ernie Regehr rather muted. The book holds out some quite dazzling prospects. For example, we may be witnessing the end of centuries of wars between sovereign states. Since the end of the Cold War, they have become rare, and what has become much less rare is that many contemporary political leaders have lost faith in the practical utility of war. After “a succession of spectacularly failed wars” over the last 25 years, any western political leader who has not lost faith in war now finds himself squarely among the lunatic fringe.

Civil wars, however, continue to rage—29 of them, by Regehr’s count—with horrific carnage. But even here, as reviewer Barb Draper points out, the evidence is overwhelmingly against the utility of war as a “last resort” in resolving conflict. Wherever a conflict has been successfully resolved, argues Regehr, it has been resolved by political negotiation, not by military force, even when the military capability of one side far exceeded that of the other.

Regehr does not beat his breast about the slaughter of thousands of people being morally wrong, and Draper rightly hints that this makes his argument stronger, not weaker. But the book is not silent about the immorality of war: “A secure society relies ultimately on the active consent of a population confident that its laws are just and fairly applied.” That sounds like a moral statement to me.

Nowhere in this book does Regehr claim that a half-century of concerted peace activism has begun to bear fruit. During much of that time, he himself has been one of the most prominent peace activists in Canada, so perhaps he felt it would be immodest to make that claim. But I have no reason to be squeamish about making it.

ERWIN WIENS, OTTAWA

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

The pursuit of truth (Pt. 1)

TROY WATSON

I've had a number of conversations recently where the topic of truth has come up. Without exception, someone inevitably says, "There is no truth with a capital T. You have your truth and I have my truth. But there is no absolute Truth."



believe the seeds were planted with the Renaissance in the 14th century, watered with the Reformation in the 16th century, and harvested with the Enlightenment in the 18th century. Modernity was essentially a shift in authority, epistemology (how we know what we know) and meta-narrative (the "grand story" that brings universal meaning).

In modernity, the authority of traditional institutions and divine revelation

This is what many people believe postmodernity claims. I want to begin a series of articles on the "Pursuit of truth" by briefly unpacking the impact of postmodernity on how we think and talk about truth. I realize the topic of postmodernity has been dialogued to death, so I will keep this brief, but I do think it's important to revisit this subject on occasion. We can't bear witness to truth in our time and place if we don't understand our context, which, for most of us, is increasingly postmodern.

A friend of mine named Myron Penner first introduced me to Mennonite theology and postmodernity about 23 years ago. My life hasn't been the same. He has written several books on postmodernity and Christianity since then, and defines postmodernity as "a kind of self-reflexive condition that emerges as modernity becomes conscious or aware of itself as modernity."

Many describe postmodernity as more of an attitude about a worldview than a worldview itself, stemming from an awareness of the problems of the modern claims to rational superiority. With the risk of oversimplifying, we are postmodern when we become critically aware of our modern worldview and lose faith in the superiority of empiricism and logic.

To understand postmodernity, we must first understand modernity. The timeline of modernity is a matter of debate, but I

diminished, and the authority of empirical science and human reason expanded and increased. Modern epistemology was marked by suspicion and criticism of the supernatural and religious claims to truth, and a growing faith in human ability to know and explain reality. Logic and empirical science together were exalted as the way of knowing truth.

The metanarrative or "grand story" of the modern world was no longer revealed to us by God through divine revelation, but was discovered and created by us via reason, science and technology.

The postmodern shift, or "postmodern turn" as Penner calls it, is generally believed to have begun shortly after the Second World War, but there are differing timelines. In a sense, postmodernity is a disillusioned modernity. The Second World War epitomized the great disappointment in human reason, science and technology, and what they were capable of. The modern project had failed.

The result was a widespread critical mistrust of the authority, epistemology

and metanarratives of modernity. Postmodernity suspiciously views all authority, hierarchy and power as social constructs that, although unavoidable, ought to be diffused as much as possible. There are no metanarratives or "grand stories" that explain existence and reality. Rather, meaning is a local, communal and personal enterprise. The postmodern epistemology is essentially pluralist, meaning there are many ways of knowing.

One postmodern perspective is extreme relativism. It believes truth is whatever a person or group decides. Very few people actually live this way for obvious reasons. This is not the "official" postmodern position on truth. In fact, I view it as the "fundamentalism" of postmodernity.

One postmodern perspective is extreme relativism. It believes truth is whatever a person or group decides.

The basic postmodern attitude towards truth is a mistrust of certainty. The modern idea that reason is objective, universal and neutral is an illusion, thus certainty in knowing is impossible. Postmodernity doesn't necessarily believe there is no absolute truth, or that truth is unknowable; the postmodern critique is, we can't know if we know the truth. We cannot know truth with certainty because we can never get outside our own epistemological framework to examine or test our "interpretative structure." You cannot be both inside and outside your worldview at the same time to objectively analyze it.

So our pursuit of truth as Christians has been influenced by the postmodern shift and ought to relate to the postmodern context we find ourselves living in. However, the notion "there is no Truth" simply isn't true. If it was, it would be a self-refuting idea.

To be continued. . . .

Troy Watson (troydw@gmail.com) is pursuing truth in the postmodern context.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Falk—Shiloh Autumn (b. Oct. 8, 2015), to Cody and Jaime (nee Fehr) Falk, Blumenort Mennonite, Rosetown, Man.

Friesen—Rowan Hayes (b. Nov. 18, 2015), to Ryan and Jodi (nee Hildebrand) Friesen, Blumenort Mennonite, Rosetown, Man.

Hildebrand—Skylar Jae (b. Oct. 9, 2015), to Travis and Ashleigh (nee Penner) Hildebrand, Blumenort Mennonite, Rosetown, Man.

Mialano—Zaina Charlie (b. Jan. 6, 2016), to Mialano and Esther Sungura, Ottawa Mennonite.

Peters—Kaley Breann (b. Nov. 19, 2015), to Michael and Janel Peters, Blumenort Mennonite, Rosetown, Man.

Marriages

Bishop/Schmidt—Dawn Bishop and Kevin Schmidt (Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.), at Niagara United Mennonite, Jan. 3, 2016.

Hildebrandt/Peters—Jeremy Hildebrandt and Meagan Peters at Blumenort Mennonite, Rosetown, Man., Oct. 10, 2015.

Jantzen/Mayers—Karen Jantzen and Matthew Mayers, First Mennonite, Edmonton, Aug. 15, 2015.

Kuehne/Morasch—Maegan Kuehne (First Mennonite, Edmonton) and Paul Morasch, in Edmonton, Sept. 5, 2015.

Rodríguez Arango/Toews—Isaías Rodríguez Arango (Mennonite Church Colombia) and Kristina Ruth Toews (Eben-Ezer Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.), at Eben-Ezer Mennonite, Dec. 30, 2015.

Deaths

Albrecht—Erma (nee Roes), 83 (b. July 17, 1932; d. Jan. 4, 2016), Crosshill Mennonite, Millbank, Ont.

Bueckert—Peter J., 97 (b. Feb. 16, 1918; d. Jan. 2, 2016) Blumenort Mennonite, Rosetown, Man.

Gascho—Wendy Anne (nee Black), 68 (b. Sept. 15, 1947; d. Dec. 27, 2015), Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

Janzen—Rudolf H. (Rudy), 84 (b. Aug. 10, 1931; d. Jan. 4, 2016), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Kehler—Abram F., 94 (b. Nov. 18, 1921; d. Jan. 2, 2016), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

Kanai—Hilde, 73 (b. March 15, 1942; d. Dec. 26, 2015), Erb Street Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Reimche—Bill, 87 (b. Jan. 22, 1928; d. Jan. 7, 2016), Zion Mennonite, Swift Current, Sask.

Ropp—Ivan William, 92 (b. Aug. 24, 1923; d. Dec. 29, 2015), Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

Sawchuk—Ethel Darline, 79 (b. Aug. 12, 1936; d. Dec. 26, 2015), First Mennonite, Edmonton, Alta.

Shantz—Eral (nee Cressman) Brubacher, 92 (b. June 3, 1923; d. Jan. 11, 2016), St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont.

Wagler—Miriam (nee Sauder), 89 (b. Oct. 31, 1926; d. Jan. 14, 2016), Riverdale Mennonite, Millbank, Ont.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones

announcements within four months of the event.

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

A moment from yesterday



This is a photo of Mennonite writer Katie Funk Wiebe and her family driving to church circa 1940. Katie's father, Jacob J. Funk, took the picture in front of Eigenheim Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan. Pictured from left to right: Jakie, Katie, mother Anna with her Sunday hat, Frieda, Annie and Susie. The Eigenheim church began services in 1892 and formally organized in 1894. Its first meetinghouse was constructed in 1896, and then rebuilt in 1902. The Eigenheim church was the first Mennonite church built in what was then called the North-West Territory, later called Saskatchewan when the region became part of the province by that name in 1905.

Text: Jon Isaak, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies

Photo: Katie Funk Wiebe Collection



archives.mhsc.ca

GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

VIEWPOINT

Do church and journalism mix?

WILL BRAUN

SENIOR WRITER

Journalism is a tense and often misunderstood business, especially within the church. Readers get riled, interviewees feel gyped, church leaders squirm. But in many ways the tension is the essence.

I distinguish between “newsletterism”: straight up churchy news with no probing of deeper layers (“Relief sale has record year”); devotional articles (“How relief volunteering deepened my walk with God”); opinion articles (“Why I think relief sales need to be reinvented”); and journalism (“Experts debate pros and cons of relief sales”). The latter is the diciest.

Good journalism should identify important issues, provide context, ask good questions of appropriate people—especially decision-makers—and present the essential perspectives of those people as clearly as possible. Each step is fraught with discretion. It is as much art as science.

Of course, it has its limitations: print space, readers’ attention spans, the inadequacies of language, the inadequacies of journalists.

While no one is truly objective or unbiased, a good journalist will calmly open vital conversations while leaving readers—or listeners or viewers—to arrive at their own conclusions. That is why I like Jim Brown better than Anna Maria Tremonti or Carol Off on CBC Radio. The leftward bias of the latter two is predictable and often evident. But



I usually can’t tell where Brown stands on an issue. That’s good. He trusts the listener. He challenges me to think for myself.

Journalism is not about pinning down truth. It is not the last word, but part of a sometimes testy back and forth that includes letters to the editor, opinion articles,

church foyer discussions and subsequent articles. At its rare best, journalism believes truth involves some push and pull. It believes in nuance. It believes people should think for themselves. It takes seriously a range of perspectives. It believes in asking questions and listening.

Of course, journalism itself has a built-in, although imperfect, accountability mechanism in the form of letters to the editor and opinion responses.

There is a part of all of us that wants articles to just bolster whatever we believe already—or bolster the nasty things we believe about the “other side”—but that is where journalistic inquiry can nudge us towards greater maturity.

I have interviewed many people I disagree with. A key turning point for me was when I stopped doing such interviews with the intent of cherry picking quotes that would make them look bad and started simply trying to understand them. That was freeing both as a journalist and a person.

Polarization is a great threat in our world. Lines of division are drawn ever

clearer. People are ever-more addicted to having enemies. Self-righteousness flourishes. And today’s media environment allows people to drift ever further into info-enclaves of the incestuously like-minded. Good journalism leads readers beyond their chosen niches, across boundaries.

Another key role of journalists is to question authority figures. This is one of the imperfect pillars of democracy, providing a means of public accountability.

None of this makes journalism an obvious fit for the church. Some people see church as precisely about narrowing down the truth, which leaves little room for varying perspectives. As for questioning leaders, this can also cause tension in the church, especially when the national church body is a key funder of a publication, as is the case with *Canadian Mennonite*. Can you publicly scrutinize your funder? Does a funder have the right to direct content? It’s a constant tension.

Frankly, some public church figures understand the important, if sometimes uncomfortable, role of journalism. Others bristle, although that is rare.

I believe leaders should be treated with respect. I also believe we are all adults capable of adult conversation. Accountability has always been an element of faith. Of course, journalism

itself has a built-in, although imperfect, accountability mechanism in the form of letters to the editor and opinion responses. I take all criticism seriously. There is always something instructive.

On occasion, people I interview will ask to see the article before it is published. Sometimes journalists will allow sources to verify their quotes, but not see the whole article. These are fundamental journalistic no-no’s, for two reasons:

- **THERE IS** an unwritten understanding between readers and journalists that when, for instance, the *Globe and Mail* prints an article about Justin

Trudeau, Trudeau hasn't first massaged the wording behind the scenes. The same applies in church: journalists need independence.

• **PLUS, IF** I interview four or five people for an article, it is simply unworkable for me to have them all review drafts.

I believe there is room for a blend of newsletterism, devotional writing, opinion and journalism in *Canadian Mennonite*. And, of course, sometimes styles merge. I often present information in a journalistic fashion, but add my own opinion, devotional angle or analytical

question at the end, sometimes because I feel the people I have interviewed missed vital angles.

In the end, it's all part of the winding path to growth. ☸

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No dust gathering here!

An inside look at the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Archives

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alberta Correspondent
CALGARY

Hearing the word “archives” may conjure sneeze-worthy stereotypes. However, a visit to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Archives in Calgary quickly dispels any dusty images.

A crowd of lively volunteers surrounded by history laugh around the lunch table, sharing discoveries made during their weekly volunteer stint to preserve the history of Mennonites in Alberta.

One day last fall, that work included sorting through a wealth of Mennonite Church Alberta files donated by Henry Goerzen of Didsbury; reading and organizing sermon notes from Peter Schellenberg, pastor of Coaldale Mennonite church in the 1930s; eliminating duplicate copies of old publications; organizing financials and files on the computer; and taking

one wide-eyed, question-filled *Canadian Mennonite* reporter into the vault.

A temperature- and humidity-controlled room, the vault is filled with sky-blue, acid-free file boxes neatly organized on rolling shelves.

“This is heaven,” Ted Regehr joked.

The vault is where files come after having languished in “purgatory,” a crammed storage room where boxes and files of material await evaluation. Regehr, a volunteer archivist for the Historical Society, has a wealth of experience with archives both as a published historian and having worked at the National Archives in Ottawa for eight years.

The largest collections currently housed by the Historical Society Archives are those of MC Alberta, the Northwest Conference

and Mennonite Central Committee. While there are a number of congregations represented, the collection is far from complete. Regehr would love to make a tour of Alberta churches to search for materials, but staffing, volunteer time and available space are limiting factors.

“We haven’t really solicited things,” Regehr said. “We take what people offer.”

The Archives also house a number of family histories and letters. Exciting recent acquisitions include several small collections of letters from the 1920s and ’30s, sent by people in Russia to their relatives in Alberta. The letters present a special challenge, as many are written in Gothic German script that few volunteers can decipher. Such collections can be valuable additions to the Archives.

“There’s a good reason that archivists are sometimes known as hearse chasers,” Regehr said. It is “a critical time when people die, to find out what materials people have. Children often don’t know what to do with those.”

Among the materials people are often at a loss about what to do with are things like sermon notes from years gone by, which, Regehr said, “provide a window into issues that concerned people at that time. It is also important to note what was never mentioned,” he added.

Peter Dyck, tasked with sorting some of these notes, commented: “I have an interest in our history that I’ve had for a long time. . . . A lot of times you get to reading this stuff and it’s very interesting. I know a lot of the people!”

Occasionally stories surface that seem hilarious today. A documented discussion of the perceived ethical trespass of a pastor allegedly reusing a postage stamp is “the most ridiculous one I’ve found,” said volunteer Bill Janzen.

Of impact of the digital age on the preservation of history, Regehr said, “I’m not sure anyone in archives has gotten a good handle on it. . . . A lot of things can be preserved digitally, but then we constantly have to update [the technology] because everything gets obsolete.”

“Everything today seems to move so quickly,” Janzen added. “We seem to be losing connection with the past. This is very important.”



Ralph Dahl and Ted Regehr are pictured in the vault at the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Archives in Calgary. The temperature- and humidity-controlled room with the light blue boxes is jokingly referred to as ‘heaven’ by the Archives’ volunteers.

Pictures, although valuable, can be particularly difficult to archive. For photos to be archive-worthy, the source, date, occasion, place, image quality, reason for interest and the names of subjects are all important considerations.

Volunteers at the archives have compelling reasons for giving their time every Thursday.

Alice Unrau is interested in history and loves working with computers; when she heard computer skills were needed at the archives, the fit was right for her.

The vault is where files come after having languished in 'purgatory,' a crammed storage room where boxes and files of material await evaluation.

Lil Bartel is interested in family history, and enjoys inspiring the same interest in others by working with Grade 9 student projects at Menno Simons Christian School in Calgary.

Ralph Dahl said, "For me, it's fascinating. . . . Anybody that likes history would have a good time here. This is my mission work." But while the work of the Archives is both important and rewarding, "we can't keep up," Dahl said.

A current need is for volunteers with library experience. Jim Bowman, previously hired once per month as a consultant in this area, now volunteers his time. "It was his Christmas gift," according to Regehr.

Current needs are for individuals and churches to send historical materials to the Archives, for more volunteers, and for donations to bolster the very small budget for this church work. ❧

The Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Archives (mennonitehistory.org/archive) are open Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Special appointments are also available on request.



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Learning a language not governed by grammar

A Paraguayan volunteer learns about communication and love through her work alongside people living with developmental disabilities.

Canadianmennonite.org/language-not-grammar



Colombian churches call for prayer

Mennonite partners working for peace and justice in Colombia request prayer for a community facing guerilla violence.

Canadianmennonite.org/Colombia-prayer



Worship plans connect churches across continent

With the help of written worship resources, Mennonite congregations across Canada and the U.S. share a common worship experience.

Canadianmennonite.org/Mennonite-worship-plans



Looking back with MCC

The work of Mennonite Central Committee in Canada was the topic of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta fall meeting.

Canadianmennonite.org/looking-back-mcc



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Another necessary conversation: Mental illness and addictions

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
BADEN, ONT.

Helping those in lay and paid pastoral care roles better minister to their congregations, some of whom deal with issues of mental illness and addictions, was the goal of “Mental wellness,” Mennonite Church Eastern Canada’s annual pastors, chaplains and congregational leaders event held Jan. 16 at Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden.

Brice Balmer, now teaching at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and with a history in pastoral and chaplaincy work, spoke about the nature of addictions. With addicted behaviour—alcohol, tobacco, drugs, work and sex—often covering up, or responding to, trauma of various kinds, including abuse, he encouraged caregivers to speak of “people with an addiction,” instead of “alcoholics or drug addicts.

His presentation was followed by David Gingerich, a psychologist who works in private practice in Kitchener, and as a consultant with the Waterloo Region District School Board, who spoke more broadly on the nature and statistics around mental health.

With one in five Canadians experiencing a mental health or addiction problem in their lifetimes, he said that many in Mennonite congregations will experience such needs, either personally or as someone in their family, friend or care circles struggles with addiction or mental health issues.

A change taking place within the mental health field is that religious behaviour is moving from being seen as a pathology to an aspect of health, according to Gingerich. Balanced religious behaviour and spirituality is actually being prescribed by some mental health practitioners in order to grow health in their clients, he said, adding that both the community and healthy behaviour aspects of religious groups are seen as helps to wholeness.

A panel discussion moderated by Wanda Wagler-Martin, executive director of

Shalom Counselling Services in Waterloo, tackled questions of how congregations can balance empathy and care with good boundaries around the needs of those with mental illnesses and addictions, as well as the needs of the rest of the congregation. Questions about counselling or medications, when to refer a congregant to clinical care, and language around “commit suicide” or “died of/by suicide,” were posed to the panel. Several participants shared poignantly of their struggles with personal mental health issues. ❧



Wilf Yantzi, an elder from the Poole Mennonite Church, left, makes a point to Brice Balmer, one of the presenters at ‘Mental wellness,’ the 2016 Mennonite Church Eastern Canada annual pastors, chaplains and congregational leaders event held at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont., on Jan. 16.

A change taking place within the mental health field is that religious behaviour is moving from being seen as pathology to an aspect of health, according to Gingerich.

❧ MC B.C. transitions

Japanese congregation closes

Surrey Japanese Mennonite Church, a Mennonite Church B.C. congregation since 1992, has disbanded. The church was founded by Anna Dyck as a ministry serving the needs of Japanese immigrants. Differences in vision for ministry led to the founding of Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship a year later; that congregation remains active. Surrey Japanese Mennonite Church was the smallest MC B.C. congregation, with only four members and no pastor. The group had been meeting in the home of congregational chair Hiroshi Takeda since 2011.

Transitional minister in Kelowna

JERRY BUHLER, Barriere, B.C., is serving as transitional minister at First Mennonite Church, Kelowna, replacing Kevin Barkowsky as lead pastor. Buhler was the former area church minister of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan. Buhler, originally from Burns Lake, B.C., is a graduate of Canadian Mennonite University with a bachelor of theology degree.

—BY AMY DUECKMAN



Jerry Buhler

GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

A town that welcomes refugees

Altona-based charity and local churches help bring five Syrian families to southern Manitoba town

BY J. NEUFELD

Manitoba Correspondent

The Manitoba Prairies have a reputation for icy winters, but they should also be known for their warm hearts. This winter, the town of Altona embraced 45 new refugees from Syria, increasing its population by 1 percent.

It has been a community effort. An Altona-based charity called Build a Village spearheaded the project by sponsoring five families. Four of them have already arrived and a fifth family is expected any day.

Jay Siemens, an Altona photographer

PHOTO BY CINDY KLASSEN



Hasan Hamam receives a stuffed animal at the Winnipeg airport. He arrived with his mother, father and his 10 siblings on Jan. 18. The Hamam family is the fourth family of Syrian refugees to arrive in Altona.

raised \$20,000 for the refugees by selling a calendar of his photos. And Friesens Corporation offered to print the calendar for free. Recently, CBC Radio featured Altona's mini-refugee boom on its Saturday afternoon show, *DNTO*.

Volunteers from five Altona churches have taken on the responsibilities of helping the newcomers figure out life in strange, snowy Manitoba: chauffeuring family members around, helping with childcare, getting children enrolled in school and shopping for groceries that meet the Muslim families' Halal needs.

"I didn't know what to expect, but I sure didn't expect to feel such warmth and love and openness and trusting from them," says Angela Loepky, who attends Altona Berghthaler Mennonite Church. "I mean, they get into our van and we take them places and they don't even know where. They allow us to play with their children."

The family Loepky's church adopted arrived on New Year's Eve. Since they don't speak English yet, she communicates with them using a combination of hand gestures and a translation app on her iPhone. "You can do two-word sentences at a time before it gets all muddled up," she says. "We have a great time. It's unbelievable how we can communicate."

Ray Loewen, the founder of Build a Village, says people in Altona have responded with open hearts. "I think it's a combination of a heightened awareness for the plight of refugees, and I totally believe it's a 'God thing.' He's tapping people on the heart and saying, 'I think it would be good for you to be involved.' . . . Jesus calls us to love our neighbour and walk with the stranger. Our faith is a strong reason for us, as Mennonites, to be involved. I think it's our history as well. Many of us are either the children or grandchildren of refugees."

Loewen started Build a Village in 2001 after his daughter returned from a trip to Guatemala with Canadian Mennonite University's School of Discipleship. A local family had hosted her for three weeks with immense generosity. "I thought, if there is a family with almost nothing in Guatemala who is willing to share what they have with our daughter, I should be willing to share a little more of what I have as well," he says.

Since then, Build a Village has sponsored

VIEWPOINT

Don't forget Syrians still in the Middle East

JOHN LONGHURST

CANADIAN FOODGRAINS BANK

25 refugee families to come to Altona from places like Colombia, Iraq, Sudan and Tanzania.

Loepky says that when her church heard that five Syrian families were coming to Altona, it didn't take much discussion for it to agree to help. That was just before Christmas, and Loepky was feeling frustrated by the racism and fear she was seeing in the news and on social media directed towards refugees and newcomers to Canada. The response from her church and her town heartened her. "Gone were racial slurs, hateful phrases and talks of banning a certain faith community to a certain country," she posted on her blog. "Gone and replaced with God's grace, love and a can-do attitude."

Ray Hamm is part of the volunteer committee at Altona Mennonite Church, another congregation helping to host a Syrian family. He says he hears the occasional negative comment in a coffee shop, but mostly people are greeting the newcomers in grocery stores with hearty handshakes. "It feels pretty decent," he says. "It's great to be part of that."

The families are adjusting to the new culture and climate, and are grateful to be here, according to Loewen, who says, "The other day I was standing outside with one of the guys and it was snowing quite heavily and a little on the cold side . . . and he said, 'I understand we get cold here and we get snow here, but at least we have no guns and we have no bombs.'"

A few days ago Loewen was driving one of the newcomer families to Altona after picking them up at the airport in Winnipeg. One of the children, a four-year-old boy, looked out the window and said something to his father. "I could hear in his voice there was some anxiety," says Loewen. "His comment was, 'Daddy, look, there's an airplane. They're going to drop bombs now.'"

Loewen assured the boy he didn't have to worry about bombs in Canada.

"When we hear about our air force continuing to be involved in bombing in Syria and then you talk to someone who's lost everything because of a bomb, suddenly it becomes a little more real," says Loewen, "a little more personal." ❧

It's been an amazing thing to watch over the past few months—across Canada, churches from all denominations have decided to sponsor Syrian refugees.

It's a big commitment. It can cost between \$30,000 and \$50,000 to sponsor one refugee family for a year. But many congregations are not deterred; some are signing up for more than one family.

This response is a good, right, proper, Christian and Canadian thing to do. Everyone who is stepping up to help bring Syrian refugees to Canada is to be commended.

But while Canada has committed to resettling as many as 25,000 Syrian refugees, there are millions more from that country who are in desperate need of help in places like Lebanon and Jordan, or within Syria itself.

These are people who don't want to move to Canada or Europe. They want to stay closer to Syria, so they can go back home when the war ends. But they are in danger of being forgotten.

These are people like Omar (a pseudonym), who escaped Syria three years ago with his wife. They settled in Amman, Jordan, where Omar found work as a chef in a local restaurant. But when he was reported for working illegally, he was fired. Now the 31-year-old is jobless and unable to cover the basic needs of his wife and their two-year-old son.

"I feel so desperate and helpless," he told the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. "If my wife or child gets sick here, I can't even afford to take them to the hospital. Imagine how it feels not being able to take care of your family."

Now Omar feels that they have no other choice but to join the almost one

million others who have made the perilous trip to Europe.

But with almost all the attention in Canada focussed on helping to bring refugees here, it's hard for international aid organizations like the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to raise awareness and funds to help meet the needs of the millions of Syrians in desperate situations in the region.

This doesn't mean Canadian churches should stop helping to bring Syrian refugees to Canada. Far from it! But perhaps there is a way they can do both.

If your church has generously decided to sponsor Syrian refugees, consider adding an extra 10 percent to the amount you need to raise to that total. In many cases, this could be an additional \$3,000 to \$5,000.

Since it costs the Foodgrains Bank just \$13.50 to provide supplemental food for one Syrian refugee in Lebanon or Jordan for a month through its member agencies, or \$67.50 a month for a family of five, the extra money your church raises would be enough to "sponsor" another three to six families for a year.

And for those churches that are too small, or lack the resources to sponsor a refugee family, they can do something, too: Make a donation to help Syrians who need assistance in the Middle East.

The Canadian government has extended its Syria Emergency Relief matching fund until Feb. 29. All donations given to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank or one of its member agencies by that date will be matched 1:1 by the Government of Canada. To make a donation, visit foodgrainsbank.ca. ❧

John Longhurst is the Canadian Foodgrains Bank's director of resource and public engagement.

GOD AT WORK IN US

Remade from the inside out

From conservative Christianity questioner to pastor of Warman Mennonite

BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent
WARMAN, SASK.

When Josh Wallace survived a serious car accident at age 10, his father said, “God saved your life in that accident, and he must have done so for a purpose.” Since then, he has tried to figure out what that purpose is.

Josh grew up near Bozeman, Mont.,

in a conservative Christian milieu. As a teenager, he tasted leadership in his youth group and in the Bible club at school. These experiences helped him overcome awkwardness and focus on the needs of others. He remembers thinking, “Instead of being fearful about what everyone else thinks,



I’m going to take care of other people.”

He attended Cedarville University, a fundamentalist Baptist university in Ohio. He didn’t know how conservative Cedarville was before applying. “I was a naïve kid,” he admits. But he appreciates the time spent there. “Cedarville was a great place to learn and study Scripture because there was a passion, earnestness, urgency in all the classes,” he says. “There was this spirit that everything we were doing is, in the end, for the glory of God and for spreading the good news, and that all of our lives should be given to that.”

But the more time Josh spent at Cedarville, the more he questioned this form of conservative Christian faith. He found himself thinking, “Maybe it’s not just handing out tracts and giving three-minute gospel presentations.” He concluded, “Following Jesus should be something that manifests itself in all of your wants, hopes and assumptions about the world. It should thoroughly remake you from the inside out.”

At Cedarville, Josh met and eventually married Cindy Rich, an English major from Detroit, Mich. As married students living off campus, they opened their home to fellow students for Bible study, conversation and shared meals. These friends challenged each other to live out their faith. Many pursued mission assignments after leaving Cedarville.

The Wallaces themselves spent seven months in Macedonia doing short-term mission work. They worshipped and worked with believers in an impoverished community. Recalling the experience, Josh says, “This is what faith looks like when it’s practised, when you need to be community because that’s the only way your faith’s going to survive.”

On returning to the United States, the Wallaces enrolled in graduate studies at Loyola University in Chicago. He undertook a master’s degree in theological studies, while she began doctoral studies in

PHOTO BY RICHARD RICH



Josh Wallace, the new pastor of Warman (Sask.) Mennonite Church, his wife Cindy and daughter Miriam enjoy a meal out.

English literature. They rented an apartment and searched for a church within walking distance. They found Living Waters Community Church, a Mennonite Church U.S.A. congregation.

“At that point I didn’t know anything about Mennonites,” says Josh. “I vaguely knew they weren’t Mormons, and I knew they weren’t Amish.” But that was all he knew.

They found in Living Waters an expression of faith they had been longing for. They were drawn into the church and its programs—potluck suppers that were open to the community, work with refugees, anti-racism activities, an after-school program for children—and they developed an appreciation for Mennonite Anabaptism.

Yet as with his experience in Cedarville, Josh felt himself uneasy. “I continued to [think], ‘I love this, but I feel a little bit out of place,’” he says, noting a tendency to “lose sight of the spiritual side of all of this good work that we [were] doing.” It’s easy to forget, in the drive to do good, that “it’s all being done because of Jesus and only in his power,” he adds.

Josh completed his master’s degree, and enrolled at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago. But, he says, “I signed up knowing my future would take me in a Mennonite Anabaptist direction.”

When Cindy completed her dissertation, she accepted an offer to teach at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon. Josh contacted Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, submitting his resume to Jerry Buhler, then area church minister. Buhler said that Warman Mennonite Church was searching for a pastor and suggested Josh might be a good fit. This proved to be the case, and the congregation hired him.

Josh refers to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship* as one of the most important books he has read: “Jesus is calling us to something infinitely more joyful and infinitely more costly, an obedience that is both more free and more demanding than what we’ve experienced. If you dig down to the heart of Josh Wallace’s faith, that’s [what you find], that Jesus is calling us to himself, which should change our lives dramatically.”

So what is the purpose for which God saved Josh’s life when he was 10? “For me,”

/// Briefly noted

Robert Kreider dies

Robert S. Kreider, a Mennonite educator and historian, died on Dec. 27, 2015, at the age of 96. Kreider taught at Bluffton College, Ohio, and at Bethel College, Kan., where he also directed the Mennonite Library and Archives. Kreider played a key role in acquiring 23 printing plates that illustrated the 1685 edition of *Martyrs Mirror*. He also curated the *Mirror of the Martyrs* exhibit that toured throughout Canada and the U.S. in 1990. In 2000, *The Mennonite* magazine included him in its list of the Top 20 most influential Mennonites in the 20th century. Kreider believed that different branches of the Mennonite family should work together and he served many inter-Mennonite organizations, including Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite World Conference. He wrote many articles for Mennonite periodicals, especially on topics of peace and Mennonite history. He and his wife Lois had celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on Nov. 28.

—*Canadian Mennonite*

he says, “it’s not a question to answer, it’s a challenge to always hold out in front of me. It provokes me to critically reflect on any given day and to ask again, ‘Jesus, is this your purpose for me today?’” //

/// Briefly noted

Vietnam Mennonite Church ordains 26

HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM—After six years of training and preparation, the Vietnam Mennonite Church (VMC) ordained 26 pastors in Ho Chi Minh City on Dec. 5, 2015. Pastor Nguyen Quang Trung, VMC’s president, officiated, charging the 26 pastors, most of whom had gained their ministry certificates and were serving in pastoral positions in Mennonite churches, to commit themselves fully to the work of the Lord; he also urged them to share the gospel with godly passion, take care of the people, be a role model and carry on the work of the church. Approximately 120 Mennonite leaders and believers joined the festivities.

The Ministry Certification Program was taught by VMC pastors Palmer Becker of Mennonite Church Canada and Gerry Keener, a non-resident missionary with Eastern Mennonite Missions. Among the ordained people were three Kor, two Bahnar and 10 Stieng pastors, all from minority tribal churches. Eleven pastors were from Kinh or ethnic Vietnamese churches. “It is most gratifying to see these pastors with whom I have worked over the past six years take this next step of commitment in ministry,” Keener said. “My prayer is that God will provide for them and bless them richly as they seek to put into practice what they have been learning.”

—Eastern Mennonite Missions

PHOTO COURTESY OF GERRY KEENER AND TUYEN NGUYEN



Prayers are offered for newly ordained Pastor Lung from Hai Phong, Vietnam.

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Students in STEM programs thrive at Grebel

STORY AND PHOTO BY JENNIFER KONKLE

Conrad Grebel University College
WATERLOO, ONT.

Conrad Grebel University College is home to a diverse mix of students studying in all six faculties at the University of Waterloo (UofW) in Ontario. In partnership with UofW, Grebel aims to boost female student participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) programs, thereby increasing the potential for future female leaders. Grebel is well-positioned to support students in these traditionally male-dominated disciplines.

While attending university, many students are pleased to have space at Grebel to grow their faith through chapel services, Bible studies and service trips.

"I've found God in unexpected places," says Amanda Enns of Leamington, Ont. "I've felt God's presence during impromptu worship jam sessions with friends, in the kindness and generosity of others, and outside, especially walking to class in all of this beautiful snow."

"What drew me to Grebel was its peaceful and community-oriented atmosphere," says Charly Phillips, a first-year biomedical engineering student. "I think it's important to surround yourself with a diverse crowd of people, especially if you're in engineering, since we need to cross inter-disciplinary boundaries."

Defying the trend of a 75-percent male program, Katrina Sikkens chose to study nanotechnology engineering because of the program's co-op job opportunities and reputation. "I really enjoy nanotechnology because of the small classes and the broad range of subjects taught," she says. "It has smaller class sizes with the opportunity to get to know your classmates." And when looking for a place to live on campus, it was the welcoming community at Grebel that first piqued her interest.

Over her four years of school, Sonya

Dyck of Milverton, Ont. has held several leadership positions, most notably Orientation Week leader and don. "Each September I'm so excited to meet a new group of students who will fill the halls with laughter and fun."

As a biomedical science student, Dyck has pushed her comfort zone by taking courses that sounded daunting, like molecular biology. As she prepares for her next step after graduation, she is applying to become a nurse practitioner.

"At Grebel, we are committed to caring for the physical, social, emotional and



STEM students Charly Phillips, left, Katrina Sikkens, Sonya Dyck and Amanda Enns find themselves thriving at Conrad Grebel University College and the University of Waterloo.

academic needs of our students," says Mary Brubaker-Zehr, director of student services. "STEM students thrive in our environment because they readily find the right balance between hard, disciplined, focussed study and nurturing their emotional, physical and social needs." ❧

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FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Rockway reduces stigma one tweet at a time

Rockway Mennonite Collegiate
KITCHENER, ONT.

Four Grade 11 students at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate have taken an innovative approach to a class project, and it has been making a difference in their community and beyond.

As part of a unit on mental health, Tara Vojinovic, Abbey Young, Veronica Li and Hanna Liu were given the assignment of somehow helping to reduce the stigma around mental health challenges. In response, they created a social media campaign entitled "Stop Stigma" that went around the world. Averaging 77 new followers a day, their campaign garnered more than 500 followers on Twitter and Instagram in just a few weeks.

"Stop Stigma" posts consisted of important facts about mental illness, as well

as encouraging statements, videos and photos. Every post was geared to educate and empower those dealing with mental health challenges. They attracted followers from many countries, including the United Kingdom, India, France and Spain.

"Much of their material came directly from our course notes," says Sara Wahl, their human behaviour class teacher. "It was exciting to watch them apply their faith and learning in the real world, and to have such an immediate impact."

Mental health was also the focus of this year's Spiritual Emphasis Week at Rockway, a time where the school community intentionally focusses on a topic that is salient to the student body. During this week, an off-campus speaker provides



Rockway Mennonite Collegiate's 'Stop Stigma' campaign team members are, from left to right: Veronica Li, Hanna Liu, Tara Vojinovic and Abbey Young.

input for three extended chapels, class visits and a parent session. This year's speaker was Dr. Melissa Hofstetter, a clinical psychologist and licenced therapist. A highlight of the week was the evening parents session that provided a unique opportunity for parents and constituents to dialogue together. The week also provided students with the opportunity to explore mental health through biblical study as well as through practical education and discussion.

While their class project has now officially ended, the "Stop Stigma" team members plan to continue with their campaign.

"It's been very rewarding," says Tara. "It grew beyond what we ever expected!" ❧

"Stop Stigma" can be followed on Twitter at @Stampout_stigma. To learn more about the campaign, visit rockway.ca.

Because we're neighbours

Mennonite Collegiate Institute
GRETNA, MAN.

Buhler Hall, on the campus of Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI), played host to a very special coffee house last December. The event was motivated by compassion for a multitude of displaced Syrians; further inspiration came from Mennonite Central Committee and the bold steps taken by Build a Village, a



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local charity, to welcome five new families to Altona, Man.

Grade 11 student Madelyn Mierau Friesen and her teacher Bernie Loepky organized the event, entitled “Because we’re neighbours.” It was a delightful synergy of musical arts, fellowship and hospitality in anticipation of the arrival of newcomers to Canada and their neighbourhood.

Local performers filled the bill of musical talent, including Marilyn Houser Hamm, Winkler’s Warren Friesen, MCI student siblings James and Sarah Lynn Bergen, and alumnus Annika Enns-Dyck. Even the organizers themselves performed some favourite seasonal songs and original compositions.

Approximately 100 guests gathered around hot tea, a mountain of baked goods, and a shared commitment to hospitality in southern Manitoba in the name of Jesus Christ.

“I love what MCC does to help newcomers to Canada,” said Mierau Friesen. “So we wanted to help MCC and Build a Village make it easier for the new families to settle



James and Sarah Lynn Bergen perform at a fundraiser for Syrian refugees at Mennonite Collegiate Institute’s Buhler Hall before Christmas

here. I can’t translate English into Arabic. I can’t drive anyone to get groceries or to appointments. I can’t help out during the day because I’m in school. But we could gather the community, play some music, and share some food and money. . . . So we did.”

Last November, Arisnel Mesidor, MCC

Manitoba’s resettlement coordinator, visited MCI to tell students about the organization’s work in refugee resettlement in Canada and around the world. Students learned that a mere 1 percent of displaced people ever find permanent resettlement.

“We have to help . . . because we’re neighbours,” said Mierau Friesen. ☸

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/// Staff change

EMU announces new MBA program director

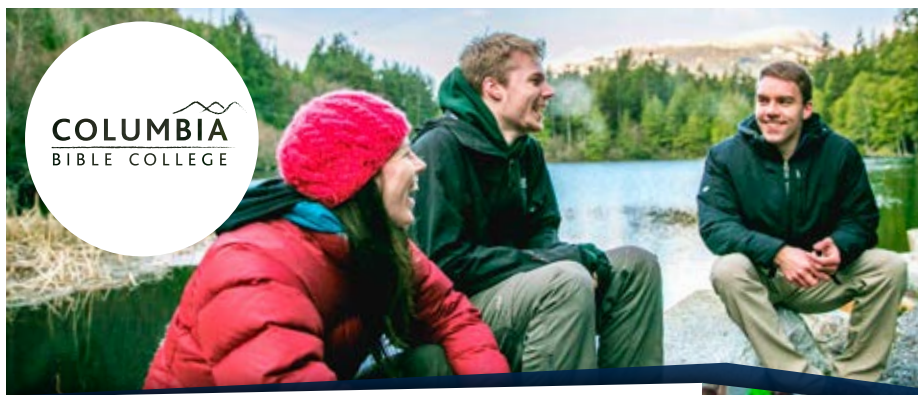
• **DAVID BRUBAKER**, who joined the faculty of the Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (CJP) in 2004 with a specialty in organizational development, will become the new director of EMU's MBA program, where he has taught a course in organizational behaviour for each of the past nine years. In recent years, the MBA program has been developing a defined identity around its long-held emphasis on business leadership that looks beyond profits to measure success. Over that same period, CJP and the MBA program have been collaborating more closely in response to interest from CJP students who, as Brubaker once did, want to improve their leadership skills. In his new role, Brubaker will work closely with Sue Cockley, who directs the master of arts in organizational leadership program, now in its second year. More than 40 students are enrolled in the two programs this fall. —Eastern Mennonite University



David Brubaker

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Programming at Assembly 2016 to include worship, workshops, social activities and integration of youth with adult sessions

BY AARON EPP
Young Voices Editor

Kirsten Hamm-Epp has fond memories from past Mennonite Church Canada assemblies. When she was growing up in Altona, Man., her family planned their summer vacations around such gatherings.

"[My parents] always sort of instilled in me that it's important to be involved, and that part of being the church is gathering with your church family," she says. "That was really formational in terms of my faith . . . seeing that the Mennonite world was bigger than the southern Manitoba world I knew."

The 26-year-old is eagerly anticipating "God-Faith-People," the 2016 MC Canada assembly happening in Saskatoon from July 6 to 10. Hamm-Epp is serving as youth programming coordinator for the event, organizing the speakers, workshops and social activities that the more-than-200 youth who are expected to be there will experience as they unpack the theme scripture from Jeremiah 31:33: *"This is the covenant . . . I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people"* (paraphrased).

Adopting the title #thecovenantcrew, the youth programming at assembly will explore what the theme scripture means through biblical covenant stories and characters. The speakers are two pastors from Abbotsford, B.C., who focus on youth and young adults in their ministries: Chris Lenshyn from Emmanuel Mennonite Church, and Reece Friesen from Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church.

"They bring a lot of creativity and energy

to this," Hamm-Epp says. "We're hoping to model covenant, not just talk about it but be a part of living [it] out."

The assembly's location at TCU Place in downtown Saskatoon lends itself to the array of social activities Hamm-Epp is planning as part of the youth programming, including a pool party and movie night, opportunities to play Frisbee in a nearby park, and morning activities like yoga and Zumba.

Between sessions, youth will have the chance to play board and card games, as well as chat informally at a central space in TCU Place that organizers have dubbed the Hub. Youth will also spend an evening at Shekinah Retreat Centre, 45 minutes north of Saskatoon.

In recent years, youth assemblies have taken place every second summer, alternating years with adult assemblies. MC Canada leaders felt that with the topics the assembly will look at in July, including the final paper from the Becoming a Faithful Church process and the latest findings of the Future Directions Task Force, as well as boycott divestments and climate change, it was an ideal time to host an assembly that integrated both youth and adults.

While some of the worship, sessions and activities will be specific to youth, they will also integrate with adults for some discussion times, activities and meals.

"Being intergenerational is a meaningful way of expressing our faith," reads a newsletter about the youth programming that MC

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young
voices

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MC CANADA



Kirsten Hamm-Epp is coordinating the youth programming at the 2016 MC Canada Assembly.



Adopting the title #thecovenantcrew, the youth programming at Assembly 2016 will unpack the theme scripture from Jeremiah 31:33.



More than 200 youth are expected to attend Assembly 2016 in Saskatoon.



Chris Lenshyn, a pastor from Abbotsford, B.C., will speak to youth at Assembly 2016.

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Canada sent to churches in early December. “We want youth to know that they are not just the future of the church—they are an important part of the church today.”

Organizers want youth to be an integral part of the proceedings, and not merely an add-on. “The adults need to hear what the youth have to say this year,” Hamm-Epp says.

MC Canada hired Hamm-Epp to coordinate the youth programming after she helped organize activities for Canadian youth at the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) assembly in Harrisburg, Pa., last summer.

“Those were long days, but they were fun,” says Hamm-Epp, who also led a group of 35 youth and seven leaders to Harrisburg in her role as area church youth minister for MC Saskatchewan.

After her experience at MWC, she was eager to get involved with the assembly in Saskatoon.

“The chance to plan something that can be meaningful and impactful for our national church family is [humbling],” she says. “It’s a little intimidating sometimes to think about all the people you’re planning

for and the impact your planning can have, but, for me, it’s a really big opportunity and not the kind of thing you want to turn down when it comes your way”

The good work Hamm-Epp did at MWC made her a natural fit for the role of youth programming coordinator for the upcoming assembly, says Coreena Stewart, chief administrative officer and director of church engagement-administration at MC Canada. “She has a zest for youth and youth ministry, and the role youth play,” says Stewart, who is leading the planning for assembly. “She’s positive, upbeat and she’s plugged in as a young person.”

Hamm-Epp hopes the youth programming at assembly sparks a desire in the youth to attend future gatherings of the wider church.

“[My hope is] that the whole package can come together and offer an experience that [makes] people want to do it again.” ❧

Assembly 2016 registration began on Feb. 1. To find out more about the youth programming at assembly, visit <http://on.fb.me/1P0Rv24>.

VIEWPOINT

Stop hiding behind the jokes

We can't laugh at or dismiss the negative views our words can communicate

DARIAN WIEBE NEUFELD

SPECIAL TO YOUNG VOICES

PHOTO COURTESY OF DARIAN WIEBE NEUFELD



Darian Wiebe Neufeld

During high-school band camp last fall, I was in a cabin with a bunch of teenage guys who discussed stereotypical teenage-guy things. They began talking about all the “b**ches” at school—relationship gossip, who’s got a better booty than who—things along those lines.

I was uncomfortable with the lack of

respect shown for our female classmates in the way they were talking. Eventually, I couldn’t sit and listen to the degradation any more, and I voiced my objections. The guys looked at me strangely and said, “Come on, man, we’re just joking. It doesn’t mean anything.” Then they continued on the same topic in the same manner.

In retrospect, this conversation is one of the scariest things I have heard in a long time. By ignoring their values for the sake of this conversation, my peers were affirming and legitimizing their sexist statements.

Sexism is everywhere. Examples abound in the way different genders are portrayed in advertising, in movies and in other forms of media. Granted, things seem a lot better than they used to be. Today there is, at the very least, an awareness of the negative effects of sexism.

In my everyday high-school life, most people are respectful and treat everyone more or less equally. Even the guys in the cabin that day are good people, and they typically regard the females in their lives as more than good-looking conversation starters. So where did that insensitive discussion come from?

I believe the answer lies in their response to my objections: “We’re just joking.” This talk of “b**ches” and booties was an easy way for them to have a discussion while hanging out together. From my experiences with these particular guys, they are caring individuals who believe in equality. They just set aside their values for this bit of bonding among “bro’s.” The way they talk in these discussions leaves me with the impression of inconsistencies between their beliefs and their behaviour.

The dismissal of the sexist nature of what they were talking about is dangerous. How do the words they use reflect or influence what they truly believe? If they are not carefully considering the meaning of what they say, they affirm sexist views. It becomes easy to start believing the expressed opinion, even if deep down they know it’s not right. In addition, those who object to these views are shut down, because no one involved is taking the matter seriously.

Unconsciously setting aside values to talk in a sexist way isn’t exclusive to young men. I have heard people of all ages, even people devoted to gender equality, making offensive jokes that use gender stereotypes for a cheap laugh. From an older man I respect and admire: “Why are second-hand female brains cheaper than male brains? Because the female brains have been used.” Jokes like this present a sexist view and expect you to laugh. It’s the same

principle as the male bonding discussion, albeit with a slightly more socially acceptable vocabulary. These are just two examples of sexism that can infiltrate any conversation, no matter the values of those involved, because the jokes are seemingly innocuous.

We all have a responsibility to resist the insidious propagation of stereotypes. We can’t laugh and dismiss the negative views our words communicate and encourage. It is difficult to object to what our friends and family say, but it is much better than saying nothing and offering silent affirmation. With care and caution, hopefully our protests can provoke discussion and encourage others to consider the implications of what they say.

On the flip side, considering what we say before we say it is important to make sure we aren’t fuelling the issue ourselves. Everyone makes mistakes, and I know I’ve said things without thinking. It is essential that we are open to the concerns of others, and allow them to challenge us on what we say.

By speaking out in a caring way when we hear jokes that come at the expense of others, and by being open to being confronted about our own behaviour, we can stop encouraging sexist stereotypes. Consciously and unconsciously, what we say should be loving to all people wholly and equally. ☸


Darian Wiebe Neufeld, 17, attends First Mennonite Church in Edmonton.





PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY TIMOTHY JOEL DYCK

Although there is a growing awareness of the negative effects of sexism, conversations that make jokes at the expense of women still abound.

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Calendar

British Columbia

Feb. 20: "Worship in Colour: Exploring Visual Creativity as a Church" workshop led by Shari Laurie at Columbia Bible College, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Feb. 26: MC B.C. LEAD conference, "Leadership in a Broken World: Walking in God's Mission of Reconciliation" at Level Ground Mennonite Church, Abbotsford, 1:30 p.m.-5 p.m. (sign-in at 1:15 p.m.).

Feb. 27: MC B.C. annual meeting at Level Ground Mennonite Church, Abbotsford, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (sign-in at 8:30 a.m.).

March 5: LifeBridge Ministries fundraising concert at Level Ground Mennonite Church, Abbotsford.

March 5-6: Lenten Vespers with Abendmusik Choir at 7:30 p.m. at Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, Abbotsford (5), Knox United Church, Vancouver (6). Offerings to Menno Simons Centre.

March 17: Pastors and leaders conference, "Leadership Lessons from David," with Mark Buchanan at Columbia Bible College, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Alberta

Feb. 26-28: Senior-high snow camp at Camp Valaqua, Water Valley. For more information, call Jon Olfert at 403-637-2510.

Saskatchewan

Feb 21: MCC fundraising concert featuring baritone Matt Pauls (CMU music professor) at Grace Westminster United Church, Saskatoon, at 2:30 p.m., sponsored by the MCC sale committee.

Feb. 28: RJC/CMU concert, at RJC.

March 11: Youth Mega Menno Barn Dance. For more information, visit smy.ca.

March 11-12: Mennonite Church Saskatchewan annual delegate sessions, at Osler Mennonite Church.

Manitoba

Until March 26: Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg features "The Alchemy of Life" exhibition with works by painter Margruite Krahn and composer Andrew Balfour, and

"Typoems" with works by printmaker Norman Schmidt.

March 11: Open house at CMU. For more information, visit www.cmu.ca/campusvisit.

March 13: Mennonite Community Orchestra presents its spring concert at the CMU Chapel, at 3 p.m., featuring works by Glinka, Jacob and Brahms.

Ontario

Until April 23: "As the women sew: Community quilts of Mampujan, Colombia," art exhibit at the Grebel Gallery, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo (grebel.ca/events).


Until Dec. 26: New exhibit at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo: "Conchies speak: Ontario Mennonites in Alternative Service."

Feb. 5: Janneken Smucker will deliver the 2016 Bechtel Lecture at Conrad Grebel University College's Great Hall, at 7 p.m. Topic: "Unexpected intersections: Amish, Mennonite and Hmong textiles and the question of authenticity."

Feb. 26-27: "Jingle Dress" film and story circle, part of MCC Ontario's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, at Bloomingdale Mennonite Church. For more info go to mcco.ca/events.

Feb. 27: Menno Singers present "Bach and his Contemporaries" with soloists and the Nota Bene Baroque Players, at St. Peters Lutheran Church, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m.

To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send **Calendar announcements eight weeks in advance of the event date by e-mail to calendar@canadianmennonite.org**. For more **Calendar listings online, visit canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar**.



Classifieds Travel

Visit Europe the Mennonite Way! Faith based Hotel Tours to Holland, Switzerland, Germany, Poland and Ukraine, focussing on the Mennonite-Anabaptist heritage. More information online: mennoniteheritagetours.eu

Employment Opportunities



Springfield Heights Mennonite Church Employment Opportunity

Springfield Heights Mennonite Church is seeking candidates for a full time YOUTH/CHILDREN'S PASTOR. This position includes working with junior and senior youth, occasionally working with the young adults, and working closely with the Kids Club program to minister to the children. We are looking for someone who is passionate about working with youth and children. We need a strong spiritual leader who will engage our young people in spiritual growth and faith formation.

Contact: Dietrich Klassen, Search Committee Chairperson at dietk@mymts.net or (204) 995-1372

<http://www.springfieldheightsmennonitechurch.ca/>




Mennonite Central Committee EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY
Executive Director – MCC Saskatchewan

The Executive Director provides overall leadership to the work of MCC in Saskatchewan. This position bears responsibility for upholding and implementing vision, purpose, and values of MCC as well as the work of MCC in Saskatchewan as set by the MCC Saskatchewan Board of Directors.

Interested candidates should apply by February 15, 2016 at: <http://mcccanada.ca/get-involved/serve/openings/executive-director-mcc-saskatchewan>

Inquiries regarding salary, benefits or any other information about the role are to be addressed to Karen Grace-Pankratz at karengracepankratzen@mcccanada.ca or 204-261-6381.

MCC requires all workers to have a personal Christian faith, be active members of a Christian church, and be committed to the teaching of non-violent biblical peacemaking. MCC is an equal opportunity employer, committed to employment equity. MCC values diversity and invites all qualified candidates to apply.



Erb Street Mennonite Church Lead pastor



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- within the social, academic, and cultural setting of Waterloo Region
- and to a larger post-modern world searching for meaningful connections to the sacred

We invite inquiries from qualified pastors who wish to partner with us in this leadership challenge. Contact Henry Paetkau, MCEC Area Church Minister, at hpaetkau@mcec.ca

MCI
MENNONITE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

Mennonite Collegiate Institute, located in Gretna, Manitoba, is searching for a principal to start in August 2016.

Our mission is to educate young people in an Anabaptist-Christian context, seeking to develop each student's God-given potential, providing a practice ground for maturing faith in Jesus Christ, in thought and love and action.

Our principal must be passionate about our mission, provide effective leadership, promote a vision for Christian education and build community—both within the school and its supporting constituency. We are seeking a person with a strong calling to serve within this dynamic context.

MCI continues to build upon a strong heritage of Christian education, which began in 1889. Our current enrolment includes 127 students in Grades 7-12. Approximately one-half live on campus in the school's residence.

To find out more about this exciting position or to submit a resume, please contact the search committee at searchteam@mciblues.net. Applications close March 31, 2016.

www.mciblues.net

LEAD PASTOR
Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church
15 George St., Waterloo, Ontario

Jesus sent out the apostles saying:
"Proclaim the good news, 'the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." (Luke 10:7-8)

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Henry Paetkau
MCEC Area Church Minister
50 Kent Ave.
Kitchener, ON
N2G 3R1

In addition to incubating vision, this position includes preaching, pastoral care, worship planning, weddings, funerals, baptisms, dedications, administration. Preferred start date, June 1, 2016.

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Peter Epp

Student, Graduate School of Theology and Ministry

“ Mennonite education matters to me. At CMU I've been opened to think critically and ask challenging questions in a supportive context. My professors have consistently encouraged me to keep the bigger picture in mind—to think through a theological lens as I study biology, chemistry, peace and conflict transformation studies and psychology. My Mennonite education is holistic. It connects my academics with my heart and my living, as I study, explore and practice what it means to live as a Christian, and a Mennonite, in our world.

Katrina Woelk

Student, Arts and Science



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