

A rich and diverse version of God

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EDITORIAL

First draft

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive Editor



Professionals in the field of journalism have sometimes called their news content the “first draft of history.” News reporting pulls together facts—who, what, where, when, why, how—capturing an event, a moment in time. Sometimes the reporting is accompanied by analysis, sometimes by opinion. But the news gathering, and its dissemination, generally happens in a relatively short time period.

I was reminded of this while watching the online presentation of this year’s Benjamin Eby Lecture by Conrad Grebel University College. Carol Penner, who is an assistant professor at Grebel, presented findings from research she conducted on the topic of sexual violence among North American Mennonites. (See more on page 22.)

Penner’s research focused on content in Mennonite church papers; she counted the occurrence of certain key terms and then graphed them over the past 50 years. A bigger picture emerged that the writers, editors and readers of those periodicals could never have discerned years ago. Reading the individual news events, we could only guess at the larger patterns that would emerge when historians and academics took time later to study and interpret the data.

What will historians say when they study the church periodicals published in 2020? Which stories and themes will stand out and what will our content say about the life and times of those of us who make up Mennonite Church Canada?

Future historians will certainly see the challenges presented by the COVID-19 virus. Over the past months, *CM*’s pages and website have carried many reports on how Mennonites worshipped, worked and socialized while physically distant from each other. There were stories on how organizations adapted their practices to share information and raise funds. Bloggers and opinion writers told personal stories and shared about their struggles. Writers offered insights on faith in the face of this global health challenge. Sadly, none of us knows just how—or when—the coronavirus story will end.

Content in *Canadian Mennonite* also pointed to concerns in the larger society, particularly through reports and reflections on racial injustice and white privilege. Many of us in the church are only starting to learn of the depth of pain present in our own congregations and neighbourhoods. Others of us who have experienced firsthand the effects of racism have more stories to tell—and vital insights to offer. The next chapters in this story depend on willing participants to speak truthfully and to listen carefully.

The feature on page 4 gives some examples of how congregations are working to break down boundaries of culture and race. This story is here in recognition of Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, celebrated on January 24 this year by the Mennonite World Conference communion.

As the staff prepares the rough draft that is *Canadian Mennonite*, we know there is much more to say—and

record—about our life as Christ’s disciples in this place and time.

Reading the magazine’s letters section, one can see that we as a church are still learning how to deal constructively with sexual misconduct among us. And how will we respond to the urgency in regard to climate change? What do our siblings in the LGBTQ+ community want to say to the larger Christian community? What do Mennonites think about medical assistance in dying and about other ethical issues in the medical world? How are we addressing economic inequities in the places where we live? How do our congregations foster faith formation in an era of physical distance and increasing secularization? What will mission look like in 2021 and beyond?

CM’s commitment is to report on these and other stories that give insight into the church’s identity and the reality it is living in. As always, here’s the invitation for you to point to the yet-untold stories for the rough draft of history in

Corrections

- **The caption on page 22** of the Dec. 7, 2020, issue that accompanied the “To keep the faith” article was incorrect. It should have read, “St. Catharines United Mennonite Church volunteers help take down a wall that symbolically separated the church from the community in the early 1980s.”
- **The Mennonite Church Alberta** Zoom check-in meeting ended with brainstorming ideas for Year 2 of the regional church’s E3 (Encountering, Embracing, Embodying Christ) action plan. The 2021 MC Alberta annual delegate sessions will be held online and the 2022 MC Canada gathering will be held in Edmonton. Incorrect information appeared in the “Zoom check-in” article on page 20 of the Dec. 7, 2020, issue.

Canadian Mennonite regrets the errors. ❧



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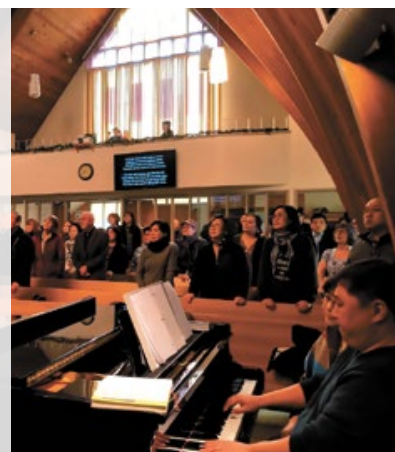
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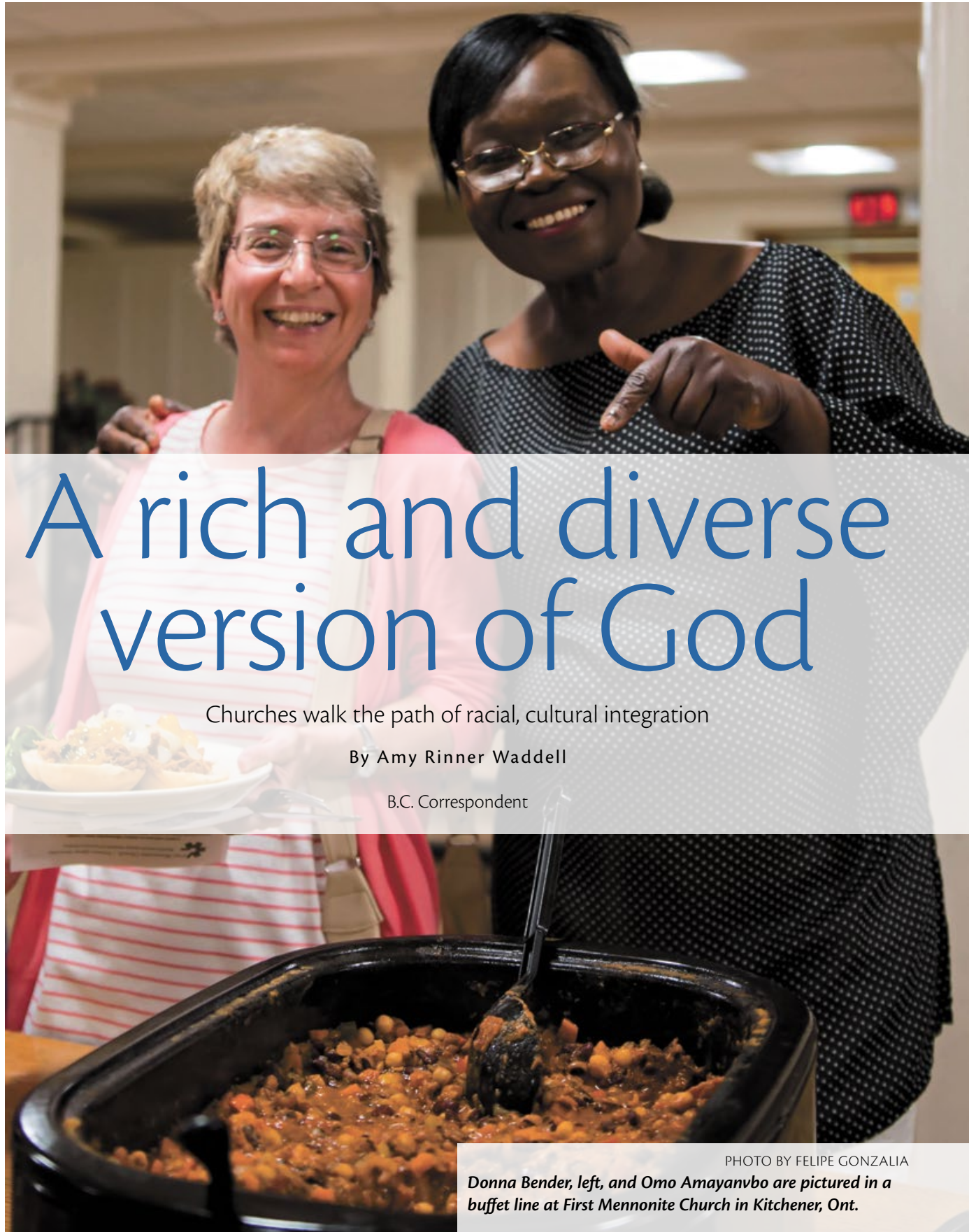
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FEATURE



A rich and diverse version of God

Churches walk the path of racial, cultural integration

By Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent

PHOTO BY FELIPE GONZALIA

Donna Bender, left, and Omo Amayanvbo are pictured in a buffet line at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont.

In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. stated: “We must face the fact that in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution in America. At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing, ‘Christ Has no East or West,’ we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation.”

Presumably, the same has applied to Canadian churches as well. Now some congregations in Mennonite Church Canada, actively seeking to integrate more than one culture into congregational life, are indicating that racial and cultural separation in church life does not have to be so.

Blending participation in worship services, involvement in church leadership and church community life, and different understandings about how church operates are all affecting not only how these congregations function, but also helping them evaluate and reimagine their very identity.

Fanosie Legesse, intercultural mission minister for MC Eastern Canada, encourages a broader definition of intercultural churches that encompasses more than a white European culture church integrating another culture into itself; rather, people of both or all groups journey together to forge who they are as a congregation.

“Churches of different nations and cultures are encountering each other and they are just starting to open their doors to learning and teaching one another,” Legesse says. “They are working hard to discern the opportunities and challenges of journeying together. The biblical intercultural church, and the one we are stretching to realize, calls for humility in relation to power, wealth, fame and other factors that put one culture in a dominant position.”

An integrated identity

Worshippers of three different backgrounds meet under one roof at Sherbrooke Mennonite Church in Vancouver. Sherbrooke began in 1968 as a German-language congregation. Eventually, English was added and is now the only language for the original



PHOTO BY GARRY JANZEN

Members of all cultures at Sherbrooke Mennonite Church in Vancouver worship together in March 2020, at the last joint service before COVID-19 shut down public worship services.

congregation. Vancouver Vietnamese Mennonite Church began using the Sherbrooke facilities for meeting in 2000, and in 2004 Mennonite Church B.C. also established Sherbrooke Korean Mennonite Fellowship there.

Until the past year’s pandemic, all three groups have taken part in an annual retreat at Camp Squeah, a church Christmas banquet, and an outdoor fall festival for their neighbourhood. A church-sponsored food bank for international refugees is another joint venture.

Combining the different traditions at Sherbrooke has evolved over time. A history of welcoming past immigrants from Russia, Germany and South America has helped long-time members be open to welcoming more recent ones.

“Through the years, there have been various iterations of how we’ve related with both the Vietnamese and the Korean group,” recalls Garry Janzen, a former Sherbrooke pastor who is now executive minister of MC B.C. “We’ve had various music leaders who would try to do [music] together, with all four languages up on the screen: Vietnamese, Korean, German and English,”

While the Vietnamese members meet as a separate congregational entity, the Koreans hold a Korean-language service but are full members of the larger

Sherbrooke congregation. They join with the English congregation once a month for morning worship and a fellowship meal, and there are joint services during the year, including also the Vietnamese congregation.

The Korean group underwent a period of discernment before becoming members of Sherbrooke, considering Anabaptist theology and its concepts of non-military participation and the priesthood of all believers.

Dan Clegg and Kara Shin, a Caucasian-Korean couple who have been attending Sherbrooke for about a year, were attracted to the church’s intercultural nature. “We were pleased to see how the two groups were working together in Anabaptist values,” says Clegg.

Shin says that at some previous churches the couple attended—that advertised themselves as diverse—integration seemed tokenistic and shallow, such as referring to a choir as being diverse with only one person of colour among the singers. But, at Sherbrooke, she says, “We found a church that wasn’t ‘doing’ integration. The identity was integrated.”

Clegg says: “[The Korean church] didn’t knock on the door to claim and have our own service; we came with an attitude to learn the Mennonites’ way.

The whole point was, we were used to [a] top-down system and we learned that [the] Mennonite way is horizontal, where everyone participates. That was very refreshing.”

Unity and diversity

First Mennonite Church of Kitchener, Ont., with a membership of 345, had a pre-COVID attendance of about 135 on a Sunday morning. Approximately 75 percent of the membership are of European background, with the other 25 percent being largely Hispanic, mostly from Central America and Colombia. There are also a few congregants from South Korea, Nigeria, Congo, India and Mauritius.

Openness to newcomers in the surrounding Waterloo Region “is probably built into First Mennonite Church’s DNA,” says lead pastor Rene Baergen. “We are, in some ways, from our beginnings, a refugee people.”

Involvement with newcomers to Canada goes back to the early 1980s, when First Mennonite offered space to a Hmong congregation for worship, then began relating to immigrants from Central America and later from Colombia. The church added the role of pastor of Hispanic ministry in the 1990s, and the congregation now sees it as key that the lead pastor can relate across cultural lines in Spanish. Baergen learned Spanish as a child in Costa Rica and Bolivia and has teaching experience in Peru, Uruguay and Cuba.

Additionally, First has worked hard to establish a sense of shared identity to ensure Hispanic voices are present on the leadership team and as church elders.

“We also seem to have moved beyond a ‘required representation’ to a more fulsome sharing of leadership, with folks born in Latin America a bit more present throughout the system in an increasingly diverse way,” says Baergen.

Sunday services at First are as intercultural as possible, always including elements in Spanish along with English, and sometimes in the languages of the other non-European congregants. Recognizing the need for times apart as

Defining the ‘cultural’ terms

BY AMY RINNER WADDELL

B.C. Correspondent

When defining the intercultural church, Fanosie Legesse, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada’s intercultural mission minister, suggests starting with a broader explanation in which the church admits it is “just scratching the surface.”

He cites Safwat Marzouk’s quotation of Grace Ji-Sun and Kim Jann Alderge-Clanton in his book *Intercultural Church: A Biblical Vision for an Age of Migration* that explains intercultural churches and ministries: “Intercultural church and ministries bring people of various cultures together to learn from one another, giving equal value and power to each culture, preserving cultural differences and celebrating the variety of cultural traditions. Intercultural churches and ministries are defined by justice, mutuality, respect, equality, understanding, acceptance, freedom, peacemaking, and celebration. In intercultural churches people must be willing to leave the comfort zones of their

own separate traditions. . . . They must be willing to embrace different styles of worship. As people from different cultures interact with one another and build relationships, they grow and become transformed.”

Here is how Legesse defines the terms:

- “**Multiculturalism** has to do with letting people of different cultures flourish by their own, with limited engagement in other cultures.”
- “**Cross-culturalism** refers to short- or long-term crossing of cultures for religious, economic or political purposes.”
- “**Interculturalism**, on the other hand, promotes interactions of cultures, engagement of cultures, living and flourishing together of cultures, and, more importantly, journeying together of cultures.”

well as times together, the Hispanic group also meets for its own service twice a month, and organizes fellowship in Spanish at backyard and beach gatherings and other events.

The intercultural road is one of humility, Baergen says. That road includes learning from mistakes, and trusting that relationships built and a shared desire to live out the unity of Christ will continue to bind the whole group together.

As Baergen says: “At our best we’ve attempted to foster a space where we can come together to create something which would not have been possible otherwise, a sort of third space, in which we all contribute something, in which we all accept a certain degree of discomfort in the interest of being transformed into the Body of Christ, no longer ‘Jew’ or ‘Greek,’ or ‘Canadian’ or ‘Colombian,’ but one family of disciples.”

For the membership of First, striving

to be one community is important.

“We trust that we find the necessary unity in our relationships with each other and our desire to follow Jesus together,” says Baergen. “And as a result, I think we’ve all discovered a much richer, more diverse vision of God.”

Bridges of understanding

Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton includes about 100 active congregants, about 40 percent of whom are immigrants from African countries. Holyrood sponsored four young men from Liberia in 2001, and when they, in turn, began sponsoring their family members, the African immigrant population grew. Today, members have also come from Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria and Congo.

“Holyrood has been intentional in seeking to integrate the gifts our African brothers and sisters bring to our congregation,” says Pastor Werner De Jong.

“When I first arrived as pastor in 2006, I asked one Liberian man, ‘Why have all of you stayed at Holyrood?’ He answered that they had visited other congregations in Edmonton and were welcomed wherever they went, but only Holyrood was quick to invite them to use their gifts. ‘We don’t just want to attend church,’ he said, ‘we want to be involved.’”

Worship services are fully integrated. Members of both cultures deliver Sunday sermons and serve as worship leaders, Scripture readers and ushers. An African worship team leads congregational singing every three to four weeks, singing African choruses and using African instruments, and the congregation added a New Year’s Eve service to its calendar at the request of the African members.

Church committees are also integrated; the current church council chair is from Liberia and the elders board chair is from Ghana.

Because people naturally feel at home with, and gravitate to, those of their own culture, De Jong acknowledges there are challenges in integrating more than one culture into a congregation. “It takes intentional effort, and much time spent in common activities, like worshipping or eating together, to build bridges of understanding,” he says.

Preference in musical styles is one example. “At Holyrood, some of our white members can find the African choruses repetitive and their instruments too loud,” De Jong says. “On the other hand, some of our African members can find the traditional Mennonite hymn singing too quiet and lacking in passion, as it is unaccompanied by clapping and dancing.”

Although Holyrood seeks to be inclusive with all voices heard, this can be difficult. Members must ask and listen carefully to what others say cross-culturally, as at congregational meetings. Whereas Mennonites of European background are comfortable with meetings at which people speak up and give their opinions, De Jong explains that most of the African members come from churches whose decisions were



PHOTO BY HELENA BALL

Enjoying a potluck at Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton are, from left to right: Guenther and Ruth Toews, and Jeremiah, Leila and Rachel Chokpelleh.

made by leaders, and members may not feel comfortable voicing their opinions in a large group.

As a congregation, Holyrood is still learning about building bridges of understanding between cultures. Members don’t see the challenges they face as negatives, but rather as opportunities to learn and grow together.

“To be serious about integrations

requires humility and a teachable spirit,” says De Jong. “The importance of such inclusion is that we live into the promise of God’s peace and become a witness to the reconciliation that is ours in Christ.”

Read “Interculturalism and expectations,” a personal reflection by Mollee Moua, on page 14.

/// For discussion

1. Have you ever found yourself immersed in a foreign culture? Aside from language, what were some of the differences from your own culture that challenged your comfort zone? What do you think are the biggest challenges for intercultural churches? Should this be a goal for all congregations?
2. In the sidebar, Fanosie Legesse describes the difference between multiculturalism, interculturalism and cross-culturalism. How would you explain the differences between them? Can you think of experiences or communities that depict each of these types of relationships?
3. In her viewpoint on page 14, Mollie Moua reflects on the challenges of having one foot in Hmong culture and one in mainstream Canadian society. What do you think will happen in the next generation? Is assimilation and loss of language inevitable for immigrants to Canada? How have traditionalist Mennonites managed to hold on to their own culture and language?
4. Werner De Jong, pastor of Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton says, “It takes intentional effort, and much time spent in common activities, like worshipping or eating together, to build bridges of understanding.” What other common activities would help to strengthen these bridges of understanding? What are the blessings that come from intercultural relationships?

—By Barb Draper

See related Intercultural Church resources at www.commonword.ca/go/2214

CommonWord
Bookstore and Resource Centre

/// Readers write

✉ Relationships, not rituals, are what's important

Mennonite Church Canada's online study conference, "Table talk: Does the church still have legs," had thought-provoking talks.

In Sara Wenger Shenk's talk, she asked, "Why do instructions about how we do communion become more important than its meaning?"

Theologians N.T. Wright and Bruxy Cavey remind me that one of Jesus' goals was to end religion and what all that entailed for his day and for ours. God, in Jesus, was, and is, demonstrating and advocating for deeper relationships with God and within the church and society. In typical God-like accommodation of humanity's frailty, Jesus participated in temple ritual even as he pointed out its inadequacy.

When our rituals and traditions become ends in themselves, we have created idols. I have seen this too often and probably contributed to it. Too often, I have observed how Mennonites, whose ancestors rejected the rituals of the other churches, have done just that.

Baptism, communion, foot washing and church all imply important and practical relationships. I do not believe that Jesus intended to make religious rituals out of his illustrations or ancient Jewish memories. But they have become institutionalized or made into sacred rituals.

In our inconsistency, Jesus' invitation to emulate him in washing feet has not become a common practice or sacrament. It is spiritualized, ignored or appropriately practised in daily servanthood living.

Church is another example. Jesus' primary reference was made to church (Mathew 16 and 18) in conjunction with "two or three gathered in my name" (as believers assembled with the consciousness of Jesus' Spirit being present). How often does Paul's image of church as interdependent body parts express itself in humble mutuality? Sadly, what contrasting images of church first come to mind?
IVAN UNGER, CAMBRIDGE, ONT.

✉ Patriarchy breeds both domination and victimhood

Re: "Credentials terminated for theologian-academic-pastor, Nov. 9, 2020, page 18.

In response to the Mennonite church and Conrad Grebel College's actions of public shaming and retribution toward John D. Rempel, it is important to recognize that the repeated incidents of sexual

violations are a symptom of a patriarchal system that is based on domination, submission and the abuse of power. This system exists overtly and in more subtle forms in the many different Mennonite communities.

The male privilege to dominate women and men who do not fit into the traditional masculine mould is alive and well in our world, in spite of heroic attempts to eradicate it by some women, some men and now children.

Mennonites have historically set themselves apart from this world by adopting a nonresistant stance to life and by living in closed communities to achieve this. There are many different Mennonite groups, but one thing they all have in common is that the social structure is patriarchal. Men, women and children have been deeply wounded by this patronizing, hierarchical structure of domination and submission.

Until the wider Mennonite community begins to recognize that our social structure is largely responsible for the abuse of power, and begins to create revolutionary changes, there will be harmful sexual relationships that consist of a perpetrator and a victim. The manner in which church officials have chosen to deal with this situation is a prime example of a patronizing, hierarchical, patriarchal system.

Using public shaming and supporting victimhood does not promote healing. An effective way to promote healing is for both parties to become empowered in a way that allows justice to be the major source of healing. The perpetrator is as powerless as the victim in a different way. Domination is not empowerment. Neither is victimhood.
SUSANNA KLASSEN, TORONTO.

The writer attends Toronto United Mennonite Church.

✉ MC Eastern Canada clarifies church membership rules

Re: "How did sexual misconduct become the unforgivable sin?" letter, Dec. 7, 2020, page 8.

Walter Klaassen writes, "Lay people, on the other hand, are not normally subject to exclusion from church membership for sexual misconduct," implying that when a minister's credential is terminated due to ministerial sexual misconduct, the pastor's membership in their congregation is also terminated.

In Mennonite polity, only a congregation can decide who is a member; the action to terminate a credential is about the credential alone. It is the Leadership Council of Mennonite Church Eastern

Canada, made up of seven pastors and lay leaders, which oversees the processes of ministerial accountability and makes the decisions about a minister's credential. We encourage congregations to maintain their relationship with the disciplined minister. We support congregations as they seek to walk with the person and hold them accountable.

Safety for all in the congregation is the first priority, but it is within the congregation, where the person is known and loved, that they can come to terms with the harm they have done and begin to walk the path toward their own healing and reconciliation with the church.

RICHARD RATZLAFF,
CHAIR OF LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
MARILYN RUDY-FROESE,
CHURCH LEADERSHIP MINISTER
KITCHENER, ONT.

✉ **Victim advocate critical of letters supporting John D. Rempel**

Re: “Church overreacts in John D. Rempel case,” “How did sexual misconduct become the unforgiveable sin?” and “When is forgiveness in season?” letters, Dec. 7, 2020, pages 8-9.

As a victim advocate, I must address the flaws in these letters about the Rempel matter.

No one outside of Rempel and those who have been subjects of his abuses of power are entitled to any details in this investigation. Institutional leaders have an obligation to inform their constituency of breeches in moral and ethical expectations of the institution. In fact, the institution has an obligation to protect Rempel and his victims by not sharing details that simply promote shaming of either the victims or the perpetrator.

Walter Klaassen's comments are particularly dangerous and caustic. He is attempting to delegitimize the seriousness of abuse of power by reducing the abuse to “a sexual blot,” a stain on a coat.

One does not own one's job title. When one crosses the line of institutional expectations, one's title is revoked and one is asked to leave. Rempel knows what he did, and he alone is responsible for accepting the consequences of his choice to abuse his power and harm others.

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and Conrad Grebel University College are not interested in dividing or harming people. They do have an obligation to hold their employees, pastors and professors to a higher standard, as these are positions of power where trust is of utmost importance.

When pastors, professors or theologians abuse

their power, they betray all of us. I would suggest that the letter writers find productive work in dealing with the betrayal by their friend rather than working to minimize or delegitimize those who were victimized or those who took swift and proper corrective action.

JEFF ALTARAS, BELLEVUE, WASH., U.S.A.

✉ **Churches were ‘never safe for some’**

Re: “A church once sacred and safe is now suspect,” Dec. 7, 2020, page 14.

The author is struggling to make sense of the church he loves. He might want to start by acknowledging that the church, like our schools and other institutions, were never safe for some.

JUDITH DYCK (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ **MAID provider thankful for MB leader's words on assisted death**

Re: “He asked if it was okay for him to die,” Dec. 7, 2020, page 29.

I am not a person of faith but I am a medical-assistance-in-death (MAID) provider in British Columbia. Apart from my thanks to John Regehr's family (and to John, of course) for sharing the story about his choice to have a medically assisted death, I would also like to thank Jason Dyck, director of church ministries for the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba, for his words:

“I don't know what it's like to experience the last stage of life. I don't know the pain, I don't know the loss, I don't know what questions I'll ask. While we Mennonite Brethren aspire to believe that all life is subject to God's sovereignty, John's story reminds me that nothing in life or death is simple.

“. . . I'm grateful that we serve a Saviour who welcomes us into his loving presence in spite of all of my inadequacies and imperfections.”

Dyck's comments will be far more helpful to the religiously affiliated people who are interested in MAID that I meet, but who are conflicted because of their religious leaders who offer little in terms of acknowledging the complexity of the decisions to be made at this point in their life, and almost nothing in terms of humility regarding their own position—or that of their church—regarding this complexity and the possibility that a “one-size-fits-all” approach is correct.

I feel it is important that MAID providers should be alert to the possibility of moral distress in a person seeking MAID whose religious community

teaches that seeking MAID is sinful. Dyck's acknowledgment of the complexity of the issue, and his final reassurance that the Christian God is full of forgiveness despite the person's frailties, will help me in my discussions with people of faith.

JONATHAN REGGLER (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ Send free copies of *CM* to Steinbach and Altona

Re: "Choir perseveres through pandemic," Nov. 24, 2020, page 22.

I'm trying to reconcile reading *Canadian Mennonite's* cover story with recent stories in Postmedia about "anti-mask protests" in Steinbach and Altona, Man.

I thought Steinbach and Altona has the highest

concentration of Mennonites of any municipality in Canada. Now they have the highest concentration of novel coronavirus infections in Canada. Their hospitals are so full, patients are found in hallways, in ambulances outside the hospital, and in cars.

Maybe we need to provide some free distribution of *CM* to those communities!

JOHN PIERA, CALGARY, ALTA.

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. 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.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Peters—Ambrose Philip (b. Oct. 20, 2020), to Zack and Julie Peters, Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Wiebe-Driedger—Nora Dot (b. Nov. 6, 2020), to Alisa Wiebe and Bucky Driedger, Charleswood Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Wiens—Robin Louise Olfert (b. Nov. 1, 2020), to Jill and Curtis Wiens, Aberdeen Mennonite, Sask.

Marriages

Bergen/Redlich—Bradley Bergen and Rachel Redlich, at North Star Mennonite, Drake, Sask., Dec. 12, 2020.

Diller Harder/Furness—Micah Diller Harder (St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont.) and Molly Furness, in Collingwood, Ont., Sept. 19, 2020.

Deaths

Baergen—Jacob, 85 (b. Dec. 5, 1934; d. Nov. 11, 2020), First Mennonite, Edmonton.

Boschman—Margaret, 68 (b. Aug. 29, 1952; d. Nov. 16, 2020), Grace Mennonite, Steinbach, Man.

Cornies—John Henry, 80 (b. March 23, 1940; d. Oct. 22, 2020), Waterloo North Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Cressman—Richard, 67 (b. Jan. 8, 1953; d. Nov. 23, 2020), Nith Valley Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Falk—Arthur, 93 (b. Sept. 26, 1927; d. Nov. 18, 2020), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Froese—Herman, 85 (b. April 18, 1935; d. Oct. 20, 2020), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Funk—Hans, 95 (b. Sept. 19, 1925; d. Nov. 23, 2020), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Janzen—Lillian Katherine (Willms), 84 (b. Dec. 7, 1935; d. Nov. 29, 2020), Vineland United Mennonite, Ont.

Jutzi—Robert, 83 (b. Aug. 24, 1937; d. Nov. 18, 2020), Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Penner—George, 89 (b. July 17, 1931; d. Nov. 20, 2020), Grace Mennonite, Steinbach, Man.

Penner—Helen, 87 (b. Aug. 20, 1933; d. Nov. 14, 2020), Douglas Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Penner—Jacob, 86 (b. Jan. 5, 1934; d. Nov. 16, 2020), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Reimer—Donald H. (Don), 88 (b. June 18, 1932; d. Nov. 14, 2020), Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Rellinger—Dianne, 69 (b. March 15, 1951; d. Aug. 27, 2020), Poole Mennonite, Ont.

Snyder—Vernice, 89 (b. July 2, 1931; d. Nov. 17, 2020), Shantz Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Strom—Jay, 83 (b. Feb. 1, 1937; d. Oct. 23, 2020), Wanner Mennonite, Cambridge, Ont.

Thiessen—Bernard M., 81 (b. Oct. 5, 1939; d. Nov. 23, 2020), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Troester—Hans, 88 (b. July 8, 1932; d. Aug. 8, 2020), Poole Mennonite, Ont.

Unruh—Anna, 89 (b. March 13, 1931; d. Nov. 24, 2020), Vineland United Mennonite, 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.

FROM OUR LEADERS

Church needs to be like a choir

Darryl Neustaedter Barg

Happy New Year. In reflecting on the church for 2021, I've been impacted by my experience creating virtual choirs—those videos where choristers sing at home, into their phone, and the video and audio from that phone recording get put together into one cohesive choir.

I have had a lot of interaction with choristers on how this experience has been for them. Actually, I've often had to convince them to participate while they're in the process of creating their recording. Below are some of their reflections:

- **Trying to undertake** the work of a choir, by myself in my living room, reveals a lot about my personal skills. I'm not nearly as good as I thought I was, and maybe it's not worth submitting my part.
- **Doing my part** by myself isn't the same as being in a real choir. I don't get the sense of being on the journey, or participating in that glorious, God-revealing work with others. Maybe it's not worth submitting my part.
- **Not getting together** for choir regularly makes it difficult to

practice—to do the things that make me a strong, contributing member of a choir. Maybe it's not worth submitting my part.

• **Why would I** embarrass myself in this choir, when there are people who are much, much better at this than me? I'm probably not going to submit my part.

The good news is that I know almost every contribution is going to be helpful. If the singer was relatively able to stay with the musical program, I did not turn their volume down. A mixture of sounds blends well and makes a good virtual choir.

What really struck me was how much encouragement was required from me (putting the project together) and from the conductor/director, so that people would follow through and participate. When they did, they were always pleased, and the result was much better for it. Often these virtual choir pieces served as encouragement beyond the immediate audience, to people whom the singers didn't even know.

Church choirs create a special environment where a range of gifts can contribute, space is made for learning to work together, and there is motivation

for improving—but the beauty often lies in the sharing with others.

Now, substitute the word “church” for “choir.”

While you may want to take this as an encouragement toward more choral singing (which I do advocate), I think the church needs to be more like a church choir—working together—not just the choir director loving the music. This means letting “singing” be a daily joyful practice in many settings, and being encouraged to “sing” your part and contribute your gifts to the whole. As we move past COVID-19, will we have the time and energy to encourage people to love “singing” enough to participate freely? How can we help people meaningfully “sing” for the reign of God?

I believe the future of the church will be in Jesus-following communities that create opportunities for involving all gifts, singing (metaphorically and literally) God's beautiful, reconciling, past, present and future, together. ☸



Darryl Neustaedter Barg is director of communications for MC Manitoba.

A moment from yesterday



The 1973 motto for the annual Conference of the United Mennonite Churches of B.C. was “Evangelism that cares.” Sessions were hosted by two churches in Vancouver: First United Mennonite and Mountainview Mennonite. The opening speaker asked, “Are we evangelists who care about people in the city? Often we see the city as a place to escape from rather than a place to serve.” Have our views on evangelism changed over the years?

Text: Conrad Stoesz
Photo: Conference of Mennonites in Canada Photo Collection.



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THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

Year of wonders

Arli Klassen

I read with great interest the many articles about how different churches are responding to the pandemic and government restrictions. There are many! Because there are many ways for churches to respond both to the pandemic and to the restrictions.

I have divided the various Canadian responses into two broad strands in my mind, although I'd love to discuss this with those who see this differently.

There are the congregations (and ministers) who emphasize God's command to love our neighbour as ourselves. These congregations strongly encourage wearing masks, physical distancing, and following government restrictions.

There are the congregations (and ministers) who talk about protecting the church from religious discrimination, commenting on who is allowed to be open while churches are prevented from gathering. These congregations are focused on religious freedom in an era that seems overly focused on economic freedom.

Both groups remind me of stories that have touched my heart in this last month.

In my work with Mennonite World Conference I talk regularly with Jeremiah Choi, a Mennonite pastor in Hong Kong.

Christians in Hong Kong are very afraid of the new hand of government that is bringing increasing limitations to personal freedom and human rights. They are very worried that the restrictions on the church in mainland China will soon be implemented in Hong Kong. Many Christians are talking about leaving Hong Kong as soon as the pandemic travel restrictions are lifted. As I listen to their fears, I understand a bit more the fears of Canadian congregations who want to make sure our precious religious freedom is protected here in Canada. Let us pray for the Mennonite church in Hong Kong.

Then there is the congregation in Eyam, a village in England in 1666. The bubonic plague entered their village through a delivery of cloth from London. The new Church of England rector and the exiled Puritan minister combined forces to encourage the entire village to quarantine itself. They agreed, in order to protect the surrounding towns and cities. No one went in or out beyond the Boundary Stone. They worshipped outdoors. The dead were not buried in the church's cemetery but in people's own fields.

BBC reports, "In just over a year, 260 of the village's inhabitants, from no fewer

than 76 different families, had died. Historians have placed the total population of Eyam at between 350 and 800 before the plague struck" (BBC, Nov. 2016). That is a death rate of 33 percent to 75 percent within the village.

Through author Geraldine Brook's fictional depiction of the story, I encountered the fear and despair experienced by the inhabitants. But they stuck to their plan until the plague disappeared from within their community, while protecting neighbouring communities.

I remain intrigued by the novel's title, *Year of Wonders*. "Annus Mirabilis" is the Latin title of a poem published by John Dryden in 1667. It recounts the year 1666, marked by the plague, the Great Fire of London, and war with the Dutch, as the year God saved England from destruction. Brooks explains the book title as connecting back to God's words to Moses "Thou shalt do my wonders," as well as bringing to mind an old hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way [God's] wonders to perform."

Year of Wonders. Is that how we will remember 2020? How we tell the story of 2020 will shape our memories, our children and our understanding of God's presence through the many ways of being the church. As we remember our fears in a challenging year, let us find ways to tell the stories of God's wonders in 2020. ❧



Arli Klassen works from her Kitchener home for Mennonite World Conference.

Et cetera

Prof gets grant to study Anabaptist martyrs

Jennifer Otto, a professor of religious studies at the University of Lethbridge, Alta., who served Mennonite Church Canada as an International Witness worker in Germany from 2012 to 2018, has received a grant from Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to study Anabaptist martyrs of the Radical Reformation. She plans to examine how martyrs interpreted their own experiences and how being part of a martyr tradition has influenced Anabaptists over the past 500 years.

Source: University of Lethbridge, Alta.



LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

The joy connection

Troy Watson

In 2013 I went on a pilgrimage to Scotland to explore my family roots and the “thin places” and sacred sites in the land of my ancestors. I arrived at the Glasgow airport shortly after 8 a.m. After landing, I immediately picked up my rental car and headed to my first destination. I hadn’t been able to sleep on the overnight flight, so I hadn’t slept in 30 hours. Probably not the most prudent occasion to drive on the left hand side of the road for the first time, but it’s amazing what enthusiasm and coffee can accomplish.

My first visit was to the ruins of Lochmaben Castle. I was excited to visit this site as my fifth great-grandmother was allegedly born here. The castle was given to the Johnston clan by Robert the Bruce in the 13th century. Now, like many castles in Scotland, it lies in ruins.

Lochmaben is in a very remote area in southern Scotland. There wasn’t another soul there, so I had the place completely to myself. It was a beautiful summer afternoon, so I took my time wandering around. After exploring the grounds for a while, I sat down and basked in the picturesque atmosphere of isolated solitude.

During my silence, something powerful happened.

It began with an awareness of the abiding sorrow deep within me. This great sadness has been with me as long as I can remember. It had always felt like it was part of me, part of who I am.

Yet here, under the shadow of these ruins, this sorrow felt like it had found home. For most of my life I had felt the weight of this sadness as a burden, as something I needed to work on or get rid of or hide from others. But the



The ruins of Lochmaben Castle

PHOTO BY TROY WATSON

strangest thing happened here. I felt joy intermingled with the great sadness in my heart. I felt what I can only describe as joyful contentment. Not because the sadness was gone. Not because I had been liberated from the shadow of sorrow. No. I found joy in the midst of the great sadness, because it finally felt like it belonged. It no longer felt like something that needed to be fixed or cast out. Here my sorrow was welcome. It was understood. It was a bridge to something bigger than me.

For the first time in my life I realized this was not my sorrow. It was our sorrow. This great sadness belonged to this place, to the ruins and history of Lochmaben Castle. It belonged to all the places of my ancestors. It belonged to my clan, my people. I was simply sharing in it.

A profound shift happened with this new realization. My sorrow was no longer something that made me feel alone; it was now a source of connection. Indeed, it was now part of my bond with my family, my clan. It was no longer mine to bear alone; it was something beyond me that I participated in. This great sorrow was

something passed on from generation to generation, and now it was my turn to share in the sacred responsibility of being a wound bearer—and to take my own journey towards becoming a wounded healer.

Then my awareness expanded. I realized this great sadness was a shared burden with all of humanity—all of creation—not just my clan. “For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers...” says Paul in Romans 8:22. I had a momentary understanding of Jesus’ invitation to share in his suffering and sorrow so that we may share in his glory

and joy.

On that grassy hillock, the great sadness within me became a point of connection rather than isolation. It was now strangely mingled with joy. In that moment I realized the secret to joy is not the absence of sorrow or suffering or hardship. The secret to joy is feeling connected and understood. On my pilgrimage I realized that the thing I was looking for most in life was connection. That was why I was in Scotland. To feel connected to my ancestors, their history and the spiritual energy of the land where they lived.

These temporary, meaningful moments of connection are what we all live for. To feel connected to the earth, friends, an animal, a moment, one’s ancestors, one’s true self, to God. This is joy. To experience connection...to sense the Great Communion. ☸



Troy Watson is a pastor of Avon Mennonite Church in Stratford, Ontario.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Interculturalism and expectations

Discovery at the crossways between cultures

Mollee Moua

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

Expectations. We all have them. We have expectations of others, and expectations placed upon us. Meeting expectations can be especially conflicting when navigating between different cultures.

I was born in Canada, where I have lived my whole life. I was also born to Hmong parents, so, consequently, I have been Hmong my whole life. Additionally, I grew up in a Mennonite church, attended a Mennonite high school and university, and now work for a Mennonite organization. Therefore, I also consider myself Mennonite. Wow, talk about embodying a mishmash of different cultures!

One definition that I found from the Spring Institute defines “intercultural” as “communities in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures. Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms, and the development of deep relationships.”

How do interculturalism and expectations intersect? One intersection lies at the crossways between our inherited culture and the western Canadian culture in which we live. For example, in the Asian culture there is preference for submission or obedience, a strong sense of group harmony and being reserved. Whereas the western Canadian culture encourages self-expression, equality, and telling the truth even in difficult situations.

What do we do when the different cultures we are a part of expect us to act differently? How do we respect both cultures?

Just like when we approach an intersection with caution while driving, we should also approach different cultural expectations with care. When we rush in too quickly, we can cause accidents—miscommunication leading to unnecessary conflict. For example, in a church council or board meeting, if a concern has not yet been raised, my

Asian cultural preference would be to remain quiet and not voice my concern, whereas my western Canadian cultural side would encourage me to speak even if it might cause some debate. Before speaking or choosing what to do, I first need to consider a few things:

- **What is at stake?** I need to decide if this is something that is worthwhile for me to address or if is this something that I can let go. I need to be wise in choosing my battles. Sometimes choosing to be silent, to keep the peace, can be beneficial, so I do not appear as a disruptive and disobedient person. This way, when I do voice a concern or issue, I am taken more seriously.

- **Who is present?** Word choice is an important consideration when dealing with people from both the first and second generation. The way I would address and speak to those in the first generation is quite different from those I speak to in the second generation. My explanation might need to differ for those in the first generation because the ways they process and understand things are also quite different.

Being intercultural means respecting all cultures of all peoples of all ages. Developing deep understanding, respect and relationships with other cultures begins with accepting and figuring out our own cultural battles within ourselves. ☺

Mollee Moua provides support to the mission office of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. She and her family live in Kitchener, Ont.



VIEWPOINT

The importance of patience in settling marital conflict

Helmut Lemke

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

Conflicts seem to occur even in the best marriages, and sometimes even church policies can become the cause of a marriage conflict.

There are different ways of solving them. Sometimes patience is more effective than “fighting it out.”

I was married for 51 years. During the first years we were very much in love, which helped us steer around conflicts. My wife and I were involved in church activities, we led a church youth group together and she taught a women’s Bible study. This was during the hippy and Jesus People time, when the younger generation was searching for new ways to solve life problems and sought to try religion.

The church we had joined was inclusive and open-minded, with a very caring pastor. And it attracted many people. The pastor eventually had to ask for an assistant pastor, who noticed that the church was mainly led by women.

Not many men were involved. He wanted to draw men into the church by applying an Old Testament method, teaching that “the man is the head of the family.” Women were told to submit and not speak up in church, voicing their contributions only through their husbands. This did not sit well with many women.

My wife tried to follow these new ‘laws’ for a while but then told me, “I cannot stand it any longer.” She left the church and also the faith of her fathers—her “father’s house,” as she called it.

It was a shock for me to lose this connection with my life partner, and at first I asked her to reconsider. This was the biggest conflict we had experienced in our marriage. I prayed, asking God for the right decision on how to

respond. I heard the answer, “Your wife is deeply hurt by the church and it will take time for her to heal. Do not try to persuade or pressure her. I will be with her; you just love her.”

Although it was hard for me at first, I tried to follow that advice.

We were respectful with each other, but the intimacy of our marriage had faded, and only our original vows, which we had given before God, family and friends, held us together. My wife was searching for a new identity and affirmation in feminism, New Age theology, psychology, mysticism and even astrology. She was supported in that by our

I had been at the new church for about 12 years when my wife turned to me with a smile and said, ‘You know, it is difficult to sing four-part harmony alone.’ She seemed to be longing for fellowship again.

neighbour, who had also left the church.

I could not follow her in that direction. We had been house-group leaders, and I was a member of the church council. I felt that I could not leave my responsibilities that easily. But soon I, too, felt that I had become an outsider in the church because I could not honestly follow its new directives to “control” my wife.

So I left and joined a newly established Mennonite church near the University of British Columbia campus in Vancouver.

In time, my wife noticed that I had become very involved in the new church. Occasionally, she would ask who led the service and what the sermon was about. I gladly told her, adding that members had asked about her.

I had been at the new church for about 12 years when my wife turned to me with a smile and said, “You know, it is difficult to sing four-part harmony alone.” She seemed to be longing for fellowship again.

Some time later, on a Sunday morning at breakfast, she unexpectedly said to me, “I would like to come to church with you.” My heart jumped. She was very kindly welcomed by everyone and soon felt again a sense of belonging. It did not take long for her to be invited to participate actively in the service. We were joined together again.

God had taught me patience and how

to listen intently. This was a conflict that required a gentle, peaceful approach, and I had to give my wife the time she needed to find a resolution.

We had five wonderful years together after this, which ended when my wife unexpectedly died of lung cancer. I was able to hold her in my arms until she took her last breath. Although it is now 13 years later, I still have many wonderful memories of our life together. ❧

Helmut Lemke is a member of Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship, Vancouver.

(This Viewpoint piece was inspired by Christina Bartel Barkman’s “Marriage and conflict” column, Nov. 23, page 11.

VIEWPOINT

Pandemic denies us shared rituals of grief

Carl DeGurse

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

By everything that is right and good, Helen Penner's life should have been celebrated with singing.

Singing was a passion for her and her late husband John, and they ensured their eight children found their melodic voices at an early age. The kids grew up singing in church, blending their voices in the four-part harmony that is traditional at Douglas Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. The gift was passed from generation to generation, and Helen and John's 23 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren were also encouraged musically from a young age. Old enough to talk, old enough to sing your part.

When Helen passed away on Nov. 14, there was only silence where singing should have been. Pandemic restrictions muzzled her family and friends, preventing them from gathering to pay their respects in the way that would be most fitting.

The Penner clan is certainly not alone in its powerlessness to grieve properly. Approximately 900 people die in Manitoba every month, from a variety of causes, and each deceased person has a circle of family and friends who are now prevented from coming together to process the loss.

Death rituals of all different cultures and faiths vary in many ways, but all involve family and friends uniting in person to grieve collectively and find strength in each other. It's as if the death of someone close to us is too big a blow to absorb alone.

Manitoba's current ban on in-person gatherings of more than five people has prompted some alternatives, such as livestreaming religious services and sending virtual condolences, but those makeshift substitutes are cold comfort

compared to sharing real hugs and real tears.

The Penners have given me permission to write about Helen, using their family as a reminder of what is lost when communities can't be allowed to gather to say goodbye to a loved one.

Had it been allowed, Helen's funeral would have been heartwarming. Douglas Mennonite, which was her hub of spiritual and social life, would have been packed. It would have gone like this:

Before entering the sanctuary, mourners would have had opportunity to console Helen's large family in the foyer with handshakes, hugs, murmured words of support and shared sobs.

People, mostly dressed in black, would have arrived at least 30 minutes early to get one of the 370 places in the sanctuary—they would come early even though they knew wooden pews get uncomfortable after long sitting—because they didn't want to be among the latecomers relegated to the basement, where the overflow crowd could only watch the funeral on a video feed.

The funeral would have started when the coffin bearing Helen's body was wheeled slowly to the altar, with her immediate family walking solemnly behind to the pews reserved for them at the front of the church. A few family members would have spoken from a microphone at the front, recounting Helen's life story. A pastor would have preached a message of hope and gratitude for Helen's life.

The service would have been rich with congregational singing as hundreds of mourners opened their hearts to sing for one of their own. How they would have sung! They would have sung their grief, sung their support for the Penner family,

sung their inner trepidation as the service reminded them that their own turn in a coffin is coming up.

With the walls still resounding from the closing hymn, everyone would have been invited to an adjoining room for the light meal called *faspas*. Aproned church ladies—working out of the same kitchen in which Helen had volunteered countless times—would have served sandwiches, borscht soup and a type of fruit pie called *platz*. After the meal, people would have been invited to an open microphone to share memories of Helen, and many stories would have been light-hearted. Listeners would have laughed and cried, letting loose their emotions because they felt safe among church family.

The funeral and its intricate customs would have been of no benefit to Helen, of course. She has already transitioned to the destination she had long anticipated. The ceremony and the display of communal support were all aimed at her family and friends.

The American cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker, author of the 1974 Pulitzer Prize-winning work, *The Denial of Death*, said a vital role of culture is to help us deal with death. He said, "[T]he basic motivation for human behaviour is our biological need to control our basic anxiety, to deny the terror of death."

Yes, gatherings must be banned to stop the spread of COVID-19. But some of us rue the necessity of denying Manitobans our traditional ways of confronting the terror of death. ❧

This opinion column was published Nov. 28 in the Winnipeg Free Press, where the author works as a senior copy editor. Reprinted with permission.

VIEWPOINT

Our stories keep us connected

By Ruth Bergen Braun
Mennonite Church Alberta

We Mennonites often refer to ourselves as a “faith community” or a “family of faith.” Both of these descriptors suggest community, yet our congregations may be many kilometres from each other and many of us do not live in close proximity with those we worshipped with before the pandemic. During this year of restrictions and isolation, we may not have even seen our fellow congregants for months, except on a screen. We are longing for connection again.

And so, during this time of isolation, perhaps we need more storytelling. We know relationships grow by getting to know each other, by sharing who we are. We know that oral cultures have long used narrative to teach, inspire, and build connection. Could it be that, even if we’re not sitting beside the communal fire, more stories could build a stronger community in our wider faith families?

Our stories tell us what we value. We are our stories. Our stories have staying power. Our stories become our histories. When we ask for each others’ stories, we are saying: We value you and your journey with us.

Those of us who work as communicators are often simply dispensing information. So much of our communication right now is purposeful. We always have a timeframe—the Zoom timer is ticking. And you, the reader, need to know what I’m telling you in this news release, in this newsletter, on this website. And yet, when we’re the readers, do we remember what we’ve been told, what we’ve read? Often we don’t. But we do remember if there is a story attached.

As I began to feel my way into my new role as Mennonite Church Alberta’s communication coordinator, one word

kept coming to the forefront—storytelling. The day I saw the ad for this position I had done a re-en-vision-your-future exercise as part of a webinar and one of my focus words was “storytelling.” In my first week, I wrote a short piece to illustrate my vision for the position, focusing on storytelling.

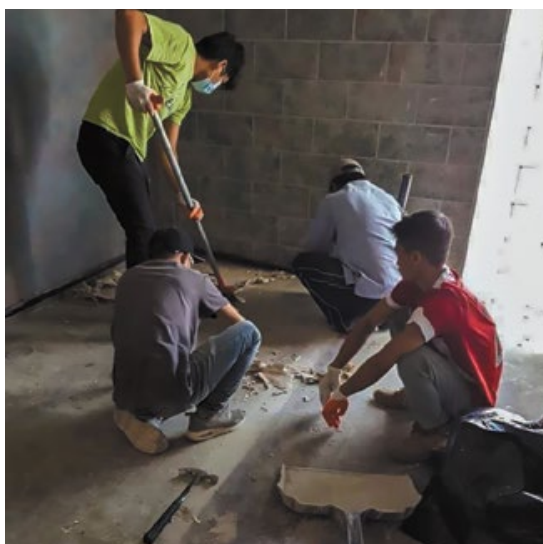


PHOTO BY: PETER SENG

A story from Alberta involves volunteers from the Calgary Chin Christian Church preparing their new space for flooring.

Much to my delight, the MC Alberta Community Building Committee was already working on gathering congregational stories. They had a plan and a schedule and they just needed to figure out the mechanism for gathering and sharing these stories. June Miller, the previous communications coordinator, had inspired the group by encouraging them to build on the connections they already had and to make our weekly newsletter, “The MCA Communiqué,” as reflective of who we are as possible.

This idea fit into the MC Alberta three-year action plan, E3, which

encourages us all to live out our mission as “Encountering, Embracing, Embodying Christ in life, in community and in the world.”

Where are we now? “Our Stories” is a monthly feature in our weekly newsletter and on a dedicated page on our website: mcab.ca/ourstories. The first three stories have been published, with more on the horizon. We invite you to come for a visit.

Would you, the rest of Mennonite Church Canada, join us around the fire? Maybe next year we can meet literally, but for now, join us online. Share your stories from your congregations and regions. Share them via your weekly newsletters, your websites, and *Canadian Mennonite*. Your regional church communications coordinator and your *Canadian Mennonite* correspondent would love to hear from you.

What are the stories in your congregation? Who is telling them? Who is hearing them? Who is writing them? During a time when much of our interaction is online, how can we create visual stories? (I’m also a photographer so I’m always thinking about photos.)

Does your congregation have that certain someone who pays attention, who is noticing and listening to how others are living out their faith? Could you interview someone?

Our project is just beginning but we hope, in time, that the collection of “Our Stories” becomes how we introduce ourselves to each other and to those outside of our MC Alberta family. Let us tell you our stories. And we want to hear yours. ❧

NEWS

Riverton Fellowship Circle's legacy lives on

Closed church donates building and funds to community

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
RIVERTON, MAN.

When the soft cloud of an expired dandelion explodes, the flower is gone, but the seeds that have spread far and wide soon erupt into new life. So it is with the recently closed Riverton Fellowship Circle. After 35 years of worshipping together, the church decided to close its doors. But its legacy will live on.

On June 24, when the congregation and its partners passed a motion to dissolve the church corporation and its assets, they also decided to give their building to the Riverton and District Friendship Centre, an urban-based Indigenous organization providing programming and services to all people.

Riverton Fellowship Circle began meeting in 1985 in Riverton, Man., around 100 kilometres north of Winnipeg, and joined Mennonite Church Manitoba in 2006. They constructed their own building in 1997, after gathering in the Friendship Centre's basement for over a decade.

The congregation was initiated by a group of Indigenous people in Riverton who approached Neill and Edith von Gunten and expressed a desire for a church. The couple worked for Mennonite Church Canada's Native Ministries in Matheson Island and Pine Dock, and many in the group knew of them through relatives in these communities north of Riverton.

Neill and Edith had many long conversations with the initiators about why they wanted a church and what services should look like, because "it needed to be their church . . . it needed to come from them," Neill says.

The von Guntens and Barb Daniels, a member of Peguis First Nation and a Riverton resident, led the congregation of mainly First Nations and Métis members from many different denominations. They worshipped in a circle around a centrepiece of sweetgrass, a candle and a Bible, sharing stories instead of sermons. "We've been



Riverton Fellowship Circle began meeting in 1985, when a group of Indigenous people in Riverton expressed desire for a church.

preached at too much in our lives," Edith remembers them saying. "There's lots of stories in the Bible. We want to hear those stories and what that means for us today."

They also shared food and fellowship together after their services. "To me it was just like going to family and it became my church family," says Daniels. "[We] could talk about anything, share our joys and sadnesses."

For many years, 40 to 50 active participants regularly attended Sunday services, even increasing to 100 on special occasions like Christmas and Easter. But as dozens of core members died or moved away, the group shrank to only a remaining handful in the last several years.

After the von Guntens moved to Winnipeg in 2005 to co-direct MC Canada's Native Ministries program, several pastors cycled through the congregation, but eventually there weren't enough people or energy to sustain the fellowship.

"It was hard, very emotional at times, [but] we knew that it couldn't carry on as a congregation," Daniels says.

"It hurts to build the church . . . and then to dissolve it," Neill says. "But as I look back, so much good has come out of it and is still coming out of it. And that just makes it all so worthwhile."

The congregation gifted their building to the Friendship Centre to help this good work continue. The two organizations have had a close partnership; the church provided the centre with space to run programming, while the centre helped the church pay its bills.

"We feel we were truly blessed for them to give us the building. Now we can continue offering the many programs that we had started in the church," says Tanis



MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES PHOTO

Riverton Fellowship Circle always met in a circle, around a centrepiece of sweetgrass, a candle and a Bible.



Neill von Gunten (left) and Barb Daniels (right) were two of Riverton Fellowship Circle's leaders, along with Edith von Gunten. Here they are pictured in 1997 at the church.

Grimolfson, executive director of the Riverton and District Friendship Centre. Some of these include a weekly supper club, beading, pottery, drumming lessons, making medicine bags and summer day camp.

The congregation also donated \$30,000 to JoinHands, a program of Mennonite Men, paying back a grant they received from the organization for their church building project. By fundraising and setting aside money over the years, they wanted to help another church come to life as their chapter ended.

Other leftover church funds were used to set up bursaries for Indigenous young people. A bursary of \$1,000 per year will help students attend Canadian Mennonite University. A bursary of \$500 per year will give children the opportunity to experience summer camp at Camp Assiniboia. It was established because of the personal connection with the camp that many congregants had and wanted to continue.

"So in other words, the Riverton Fellowship Circle will live on," says Neill.

The fellowship circle will also live on in decades of memories: fundraisers with hoop dancing and Red River jiggling, Christmas pageants with trappers instead of shepherds and all of Riverton coming together to help raise the church.

The community was hoping to share memories together and celebrate the church at a closing service last summer, but it was postponed because of COVID-19 and will take place at a future date. ❧

Photos from the Mennonite Heritage Archives

News brief

Foodgrains Bank named one of Canada's top-impact charities again



Andy Harrington

For the third year, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank is included as a "top-10 impact charity" by Charity Intelligence Canada for 2020. "This repeated public affirmation of our work, and the work of our members and partners, is truly welcome and celebrated," says Andy Harrington, the Foodgrains Bank's executive director. "We realize that people who support the Foodgrains Bank place a great deal of trust in us when they make a donation. Unlike a local charity, it's difficult for everyday Canadians to see the impact of our work firsthand, so this affirmation from Charity Intelligence is particularly meaningful." Charity Intelligence is a third-party independent organization that examines different Canadian charities annually and assigns ratings based on donor reporting, financial transparency, funding need, cents to the cause, and demonstrated impact. The "top-10 impact charity" list is a subset of the larger list, and examines only one thing: for every dollar donated, what is the impact? "We realize that we are only able to achieve this level of impact and accountability thanks to the relationships we, as the Foodgrains Bank and its members, have with churches, individuals, local partners and government, in Canada and around the world," says Harrington. "I'm deeply grateful for the way we're able to work together for a world where no one goes to bed hungry."

—CANADIAN FOODGRAINS BANK

News brief

Langley Mennonite extends its table



MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE PHOTO

This church in Venezuela was among those benefitting from Mennonite World Conference's COVID-19 Relief Fund. Langley (B.C.) Mennonite Fellowship supported this fund through a virtual campaign in November.

LANGLEY, B.C.—In past years, Langley Mennonite Fellowship held a goods and service auction to raise funds for an international and a local need. To replace the event during the COVID-19 pandemic, an online appeal was promoted. Last year, the auction raised \$7,200, and a goal of \$6,000 was set for 2020. As of press time, though, the total had ballooned to \$9,300. The annual campaign is called "Extending Our Table," as the funds go to programs outside of the normal church budget. To add interest and a possible incentive to the fund drive, door prizes were solicited, and 11 were received. Langley Mennonite chose three recipients this year:

- **Mennonite Central** Committee's Emergency Food Relief program.
- **Mennonite World** Conference COVID-19 Relief Fund.
- **The local** 5&2 ministry in the Langley community, which provides a weekly meal to the homeless. Langley Mennonite is responsible for providing one meal a month. In addition, various goods are donated and money is made available for a shelter and other costs.

—BY WALTER PAETKAU

'A matter of principle'

As green group gets going, MC Canada backs words with money

By Will Braun
Senior Writer

Mennonite Church Canada is backing up the establishment of a new Sustainability Leadership Group (SLG) with a \$220,000 upgrade to its head office in Winnipeg.

The goals of the new group were approved by MC Canada's Joint Council in January 2020. Based on a report to Joint Council in October, the volunteer group will make suggestions to improve sustainability of programs and ministries across MC Canada.

Tim Wiebe-Neufeld, MC Alberta's area church minister and one of the driving forces behind the initiative, describes a two-prong approach. One is a focus on operations and activities of MC Canada; the other is a focus on animating congregations to take action.

The nationwide church office is leading the way. In early December, MC Canada wrapped up a renovation project that will improve the energy performance of its headquarters in Winnipeg. The building also houses Mennonite Church Manitoba. According to Doug Klassen, MC Canada's executive director, five 30-year-old HVAC units were replaced with units that are about 20 percent more efficient in their task of heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

At the same time, MC Canada replaced the roof, with substantial upgrades to the insulation (up to about R40) and a vapour barrier. Roofing materials with a longer life were chosen, thus reducing lifetime waste.

While Klassen says additional insulation makes financial sense, it is also "a matter of principle."

The cost of the project is expected to come in at about \$220,000, with MC Manitoba covering 40 percent.

Klassen says the next phase of the project is to install programmable thermostats for the electric baseboard heaters



PHOTOS BY DOUG KLASSEN

The roof of the Mennonite Church Canada headquarters in Winnipeg before, top, and after, bottom, a \$220,000 upgrade to the building's energy efficiency.

found in various parts of the building, in order to reduce energy used for heating overnight and on weekends. The building also needs new siding, and that would be

an opportunity to improve insulation and energy performance.

Wiebe-Neufeld notes that, while many energy retrofits make financial sense in

the long term for a congregation or regional church, they still require significant up front capital. He would love to see the creation of a fund that could fill that gap.

In addition to buildings, he says the SLG hopes to introduce practices for measuring and tracking environmental performance, to provide congregations with resources that will make it easier for them to take practical steps, and to look at ways to reduce the impacts of MC Canada meetings and nationwide gatherings.

While decisions have yet to be made, Klassen expects virtual meetings over Zoom to be part of the 2022 national gathering. This would accommodate both people who would like to be there but can't, as well as those who want to avoid the impact of travel. The logistics of serving as a delegate remotely are an outstanding question.

Klassen also expects MC Canada to look at the frequency of in-person meetings of Joint Council and the Executive Staff Group. The Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada already conduct half their national meetings online.

Klassen also notes that the executive office travel budget has been significantly trimmed, not only because of the pandemic.

As for motivation, Wiebe-Neufeld links environmental responsibility to care for others. He notes that environmental impacts are often felt most acutely by people who are already disadvantaged. He links it to the church's calling to care for the vulnerable.

He would like to see faith compel people to do more than they would otherwise, going beyond what everyone else already does. He says his vision is that the church would be "willing to be vulnerable in a practice that moves us toward a better way of being."

In addition to Wiebe-Neufeld, other current SLG members are Joanne Moyer, Caleb Gingrich Regehr, Jess Klassen, Henry Krause and Allan Hiebert.

The group is scheduled to meet again in January.

Klassen says the hope is for sustainability groups to emerge in each regional church. ❧

❧ News brief

Drive-in carol festival inspires hope



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSTHERN JUNIOR COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

RJC students sing Christmas carols for guests at the school's drive-in Christmas carol festival.

To spread Christmas cheer in their community, staff and students at Rosthern Junior College High School (RJC) hosted a drive-in Christmas carol festival. They invited guests to park in the school's front parking lot on Dec. 9 and listen from the safety of their vehicles as students and staff sang Christmas carols. Alex Tiessen, who is director of admissions and development, says RJC submitted a plan for the event to the Saskatchewan Health Authority. They were allowed 30 masked and distanced participants. Because more than 30 students wanted to participate, the school scheduled two sets, with a different group of students carolling in each set. Singing was unrehearsed. Audience members received the list of carols the students were singing, so they could sing or hum along from their vehicles. Tiessen says the festival was meant to be a community-building event rather than a polished performance. "We were really happy about how it went and heard a lot of positive comments," he says, adding that the drive-in carol festival was intended to inspire hope in students and offer a creative way for students and school supporters to see one another safely.

—BY DONNA SCHULTZ

❧ Staff change

Shalom Counselling executive director announces resignation

Wanda Wagler-Martin, the long-term executive director of Shalom Counselling Services in Waterloo, Ont., intends to leave the organization

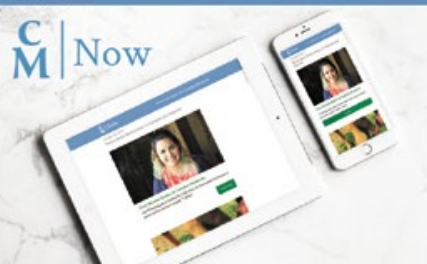


at the end of June 2021, following 24 years of leadership. In a recent letter, she wrote: "[M]y focus remains on the work of Shalom and bringing to a close this wonderful chapter of my life. Shalom is in a good place. I'm excited about the possibilities that new leadership will bring as Shalom continues to grow and thrive." This is not retirement for Wagler-Martin, though, who says she will be "leaning into the unknown," as she figures out her next horizons. It will, however, be the end of an era of growth and development for Shalom under her leadership. Her leadership and many contributions to Shalom have left the organization in a strong position for continued success in delivering affordable and accessible counselling services to the community. A search committee has been appointed by the board to lead the process of finding a new executive director.

—SHALOM COUNSELLING SERVICES

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Scholar researches coverage of sexual violence in Mennonite church press

Conversations mirror and shape the church

Story and screenshots by Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

In her recent research Carol Penner surveyed how the church periodicals, *Gospel Herald*, *The Mennonite*, and *Canadian Mennonite* reported on sexual violence from 1970 to the present. What she found became the subject of the annual Benjamin Eby Lecture, which features research of a Conrad Grebel University College faculty member.

Penner is an assistant professor of theological studies at Grebel. Her November 12 lecture, entitled “#Mennonites Too: Sexual Violence and Mennonite Peace Theology,” was delivered virtually to around 170

only in the last fifty years. She asked, “What does it mean to be people of peace when sexual abuse and assault is woven into the fabric of our own communities?”

Penner’s research showed that, over that time, the periodicals showed a gradual increase in discussion of abuse, with coverage spiking in the 1990s and then tailing off again, until recently. There was more content in American periodicals, until the last decade.

She suggests that church periodicals are “helpful barometers to measure theological opinions,” acting as a “mirror that

storytelling is important as a way to “name what is actually happening.” Accounts of abuse in the 1970s were vague, but by the late 1980s first-person stories started to appear. Written mostly by women, they reflected the isolation, shame and self-blame experienced by survivors of abuse. “No one was willing to walk with me,” reported one survivor. The church’s response was most often to deny or minimize what happened.

Most controversial was what Penner called a “flurry of stories” in the 1990s about church leaders who perpetrated abuse. Some people said it was terrible to make them public, while others insisted that the truth should come out. Editors eventually created guidelines around publishing such accounts, naming that “pastoral misconduct is not just a story between two people. It is a violation of public trust in the church, and silence only leads to more victims.”

Second, Penner observed that writers began to use social analysis to look at the dynamics of power. “They named patriarchy as a problem,” she said, and they addressed deficiencies in Mennonite peace theology. One person wrote, “A peace of silence is an unjust peace.” Another wrote, “We cannot continue to teach a hierarchical model of men and women.”

Penner observed “lots of backlash” to the discussion of patriarchy through attempts to defend male headship and female submission as biblical, and attempts to discredit feminism as “secular and ungodly.” She noted that recently there has been less discussion about patriarchy.

She asked, “What happens to the movement for social change if we are reluctant to talk about power?” She added, “Social analysis is essential in order to address

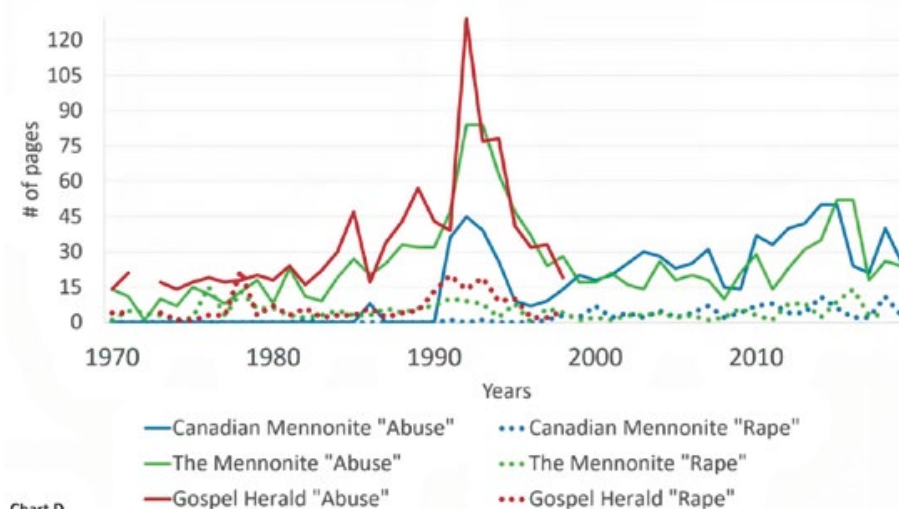


Chart D

Data from Carol Penner’s research into the coverage of sexual violence in Mennonite church periodicals shows a flurry of stories in the 1990s. She presented these and other observations at the 2020 Benjamin Eby Lectures at Conrad Grebel University College.

people. Since then, more than 600 people have watched the recording.

While Mennonites have had five hundred years to wrestle with their peace theology, Penner noted that discussions about sexual violence have taken place

allows us to know ourselves” and serving to “shape the church more than academic writing, because they are more widely read.”

Penner shared three observations from her research. First, she found that

inequality.”

Third, Penner said reporting on abuse in the church press forced a theological discussion within the church. Big questions were raised like: Where is God in these stories? and How does the reality of sexual violence shape our understanding of God? Women scholars engaged with biblical texts about abuse and showed how scriptures about reconciliation could be misused.

Just as interesting to Penner was “looking into the margins” to see what was not being reported in the church press over those fifty years. She observed that there was very little practical help for survivors of sexual assault, and “almost nothing that addresses the people that are doing the violence.” She encourages the church to challenge “societal training that normalizes violent behaviour for men.”

Also missing was discussion about how sexual violence interacts with other “webs of oppressions.” She notes that people from LGBTQ+, newcomer and BIPOC communities as well as people with disabilities and economic disadvantages are most likely to be hurt and least likely to be able to access good medical care or fair treatment by the justice system.

Finally, she says the press has not addressed the abuse of LGBTQ+ people in the Mennonite church, resulting in much suffering and deaths by suicide. Rejecting, expelling and forcing them into heterosexual moulds is “a type of sexual violence” that uses “spiritual and community power in oppressive ways.”

Penner says, “You can’t work on something if it’s not talked about.” But online advocacy brings her hope today. “Patriarchy works when victims are isolated and silenced, she says, but the internet has “slashed through that silence,” allowing people to share their stories and find networks of support. ❧

Penner’s presentation can be viewed at uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/eby-lecture-2020.



News brief

There will be borscht!

Since the 1960s Bethany Mennonite Church in Virgil, Ont., has held a community borscht luncheon. On Nov. 14, this intergenerational event happened in a new way due to the need for physical distancing during the pandemic. The first-come, first-served event was publicized in the community and held outside. During the drive-through curbside pick-up lunch, there were two lines of traffic and two servers delivered the food. Many volunteers were involved: the bakers and cooks who worked at home, the ones who did the set-up and clean-up, those who did traffic duty, and the ones who collected the money. They sold 248 one-litre jars of borscht and 125 loaves of bread. The event generated \$4026.15, which went to groups including the church’s quilting fund, Mennonite Central Committee, Friends of the Ukraine, Welcome Inn, Westview Centre4Women, Mennonite New Life Centre in Toronto, the Red Roof Retreat and a sister church in Colombia.

—BY MARIA H. KLASSEN



PHOTO COURTESY OF
BETHANY MENNONITE CHURCH

Leah Klassen and Denise Falk sell borscht at a Bethany Mennonite Church fundraiser.



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Building relationships through online campus ministry

By Gladys Terichow
Inter-Mennonite Chaplaincy Association
WINNIPEG

Stress, anxiety and loneliness are among the many challenges that university students face during this era of remote learning and physical distancing. In past years, Inter-Mennonite Chaplaincy Association (IMCA) operated a welcoming space known as the Menno Office on the University of Manitoba campus. It was a place where students from various backgrounds and academic programs gathered to enjoy food, music, spiritual guidance and a sense of belonging among friends and mentors.

Although Mark von Kampen, the Inter-Mennonite chaplain, can't meet with students this year in a physical space due to COVID-19 restrictions, he is facilitating a vibrant and enthusiastic online community through the E-Menno Office on the Discord platform.

"It is a privilege to journey alongside students in these challenging times," says von Kampen. "Some of the common challenges I've heard from students are feelings of isolation and yearning for connection and interaction.

"Coupled with this, a number of students have talked about a lack of motivation that seems to come from not being able to interact with peers the way they would when physically on campus. I can also sense anxiety about economic realities and job opportunities post-COVID-19."

The E-Menno Office offers a safe space for students to interact via voice-chat channels in group discussions, to arrange one-on-one chats with von Kampen and to join "Menno Talk" and other scheduled group discussions. In addition to services provided on Discord, von Kampen also supports students through email, phone calls and texting.

This has been a year of challenges and adjustments for von Kampen and other chaplains who had offices in the University Centre. In early March these offices sustained extensive damage from a fire.



PHOTO BY BRUCE HILDEBRAND:

Chaplain Mark von Kampen meets with students in the Menno Office on March 13, 2020, the day before the office was damaged by a fire in the University Centre.

A few days later COVID-19 pandemic restrictions made it impossible for students to be together in the same physical location.

The Inter-Mennonite chaplaincy has produced a four-minute video that uses photographs and video footage of activities in the Menno Office before the fire. IMCA has also created a website that provides a link to the video and easy access to the E-Menno office. See mennooffice.ca.

"The Menno Office, whether physical or virtual, is a unique expression of the church reaching into the everyday lives of students," says von Kampen. "Young adulthood is a pivotal time in their lives when they are making important decisions about relationships, vocational choices and life directions and priorities. The Menno Office is a tangible reminder that the church cares about them and ultimately that God cares about them." ❧

News brief

CommonWord's top hits of 2020

The year of the pandemic saw everyone spending more time at home, and many paying increased attention to their bookshelves. We asked CommonWord, the bookstore and resource centre of Mennonite Church Canada and Canadian Mennonite University, what people read in 2020. In-store and curbside pickup sales and loans across Canada have declined, says Arlyn Friesen Epp, CommonWord's director. But online orders have increased significantly, making the staff busier than ever. If you're looking for titles to read as COVID-19 continues, here are CommonWord's most popular loans and sales of 2020:

Loans

- 1) *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization*, ed. Steve Heinrichs
- 2) *How the Bible Actually Works*, by Peter Enns
- 3) *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*, by Rachel Held Evans
- 4) *Fire by Night: Finding God in the Pages of the Old Testament*, by Melissa Florer-Bixler
- 5) *The Universal Christ*, by Richard Rohr



Sales

- 1) *Lifting Hearts Off the Ground: Declaring Indigenous Rights in Poetry*, by Lyla June Johnston and Joy De Vita
- 2) *Wrongs to Rights: How Churches Can Engage the UNDRIP*, ed. Steve Heinrichs
- 3) *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization*, ed. Steve Heinrichs
- 4) *Voices Together, Pew Edition*
- 5) *The Bible Unwrapped: Making Sense of Scripture Today*, by Meghan Larissa Good



—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

Together in Worship launches in collaboration with CommonWord

Online collection of Anabaptist resources offers resources and welcomes submissions

By Katie Doke Sawatzky
Mennonite Church Canada

While Mennonites across Canada and the United States eagerly await the arrival of the new hymnal, *Voices Together*, hundreds of online worship resources are already accessible to them through a brand new website that launched in November.

Together in Worship (TiW) is an online, curated collection of free and downloadable Anabaptist worship resources (togetherinworship.net). It's also a place where contributors can submit their own resources to be shared with the wider Anabaptist and ecumenical community.

"Mennonite worship is often led col-

leaders to share what they create in their contexts, taking local-level collaboration beyond the local congregation into the wider church."

The website was built in collaboration with CommonWord Bookstore and Resource Centre, which launched its own new site in June. The websites share the same database and structure, so resources from TiW are also available through CommonWord.

"This cooperation strengthens the creative capacity for gathering and sharing worship resources that reflect the growing

diversity of voices and gifts within our congregations both in the US and in Canada," says Arlyn Friesen Epp, director of CommonWord and a TiW leadership team member. "This shared digital platform is a gift to each other and to the wider ecumenical church."

There are currently 1,500 resources available through TiW. Most are written resources, but the vision is to have more music, videos, visual art and teaching resources available in the future. Original worship resources submitted to

CommonWord in the past will also be incorporated. Examples of resources already available are:

- **Resources from** Mennonite World conference.
- **Video children's** stories.
- **Worship series** from *Leader* magazine.

- **Poetry.**
- **Historical Anabaptist** resources.
- **Resources from** bloggers Carol Penner and Joanna Harader.
- **Teaching resources** on Mennonite worship.

The project has been funded entirely through grants, including a 2019 Teacher-Scholar Grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship received by Carol Penner, and a Bequest Earnings Disbursement Fund grant from Shantz Mennonite Church in Baden, Ont. ☘



TOGETHER IN WORSHIP SCREENSHOT

The Together in Worship leadership team is pictured from left to right, top row: Jerry Holsopple, Darryl Neustaedter Barg and Rebecca Slough; middle row: Katie Graber, Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Carol Penner; and front row: Arlyn Friesen Epp and AnaSara Rojas.

laboratively by volunteers within a community," says Sarah Kathleen Johnson, chair of TiW's leadership team and worship resources editor for the *Voices Together* hymnal. "Supporting those volunteers is at the heart of Together in Worship, but in a collaborative way. We want to provide resources but also to invite



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Conrad Grebel
University College

Strengthening faith for the coming year

Four Saskatchewan pastors reflect on the need for spiritual practices in the life of faith

By Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent

When a new year begins, many people resolve to lose weight or begin exercising. But the dawning of a new year is also a good time to consider improving one's spiritual fitness.

Josh Wallace, who is Mennonite Church Saskatchewan's church engagement minister, says spiritual practice is essential to a healthy faith. "Our lives depend on it," he says. "Without a set of regular spiritual practices, our imaginations and desires are going to be shaped by other things."

Retired pastor Pauline Steinmann agrees.

"I think it's vital, because it's at those times that we attune ourselves to God, and to the ways of God, as opposed to attuning ourselves to the culture and media around us," she says. "If we don't have spiritual practices, we don't allow ourselves to be formed in the ways of God." She adds, "I don't think one hour on Sunday morning is sufficient to do that. We need those daily practices."

For many Christians, daily practice includes some form of prayer.

About once a week Sharon Schultz spends two to three hours alone at Eyebrow Mennonite Church, where she is the pastor. She plays piano and sings hymns. Then she walks through the church, praying. It's a practice that feeds her soul.

Schultz will also sing along with recorded music while driving.

"God works in my heart as I do that," she says.

Prayer books, including *Common Prayer*:

A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals and *Celtic Daily Prayer: Prayers and Readings from the Northumbria Community*, have guided Wallace's faith.

"When you [read] them year after year, bits and pieces of those prayers shape your imagination of the world around you," he says.

Kevin Koop is pastor of Carrot River Mennonite. He cites author Richard Foster, who identifies two types of prayer for times when one feels stressed or

that God was always with him. "Through spiritual practices we create space for God to have influence in our lives," he adds.

To become more aware of God's presence, Steinmann uses centring prayer.

"It's difficult because my mind goes in many different directions," she says. "It's fruitful because, when I stick with it, I am more attuned to God throughout the day."

Scripture reading is another spiritual practice many Christians find meaningful. Schultz reads through the entire Bible

each year. She says this gives her a sense of the scope of the Biblical narrative. But she cautions would-be readers not to start at the beginning.

"Start in the New Testament and read small portions, even just a few verses," she

says. She also tells people not to be discouraged if their reading doesn't bring them encouragement right off the bat. Daily Scripture reading is "kind of like taking medicine," she says. The effects are not always felt immediately.

Wallace says Scripture reading and Bible study are best done in community.

"Solitary Bible study is a fairly recent luxury," he says. "Jesus would have learned Scripture in a communal setting." The early Anabaptists would also have read the Bible and prayed together.

As the experiences of these four individuals show, there's no one-size-fits-all spiritual practice. What works for one won't necessarily work for another. Journaling, for instance, is a meaningful practice for Steinmann but not for Schultz, who says she finds it "not at all life-giving."



Josh Wallace



Sharon Schultz



Kevin Koop



Pauline Steinmann

With simple prayer, one simply cries to God for help. Contemplative prayer is less about articulating one's distress and more about bringing one's emotions before God.

Wallace encourages beginners to try something simple like reciting the Lord's Prayer every day. This practice helped shape the early church, he says. He also encourages beginners to engage in worship and Bible study with other believers.

"Having a community supporting you always helps," he says. "This can mean people doing it with you or even just supporting you in it."

Beginning a new spiritual practice needn't be daunting.

"Find what works for you," says Schultz, who acknowledges this may be a trial-and-error process. "If you find you're

Staff change

Pastoral change in British Columbia



Kevin Barkowsky has been called as permanent half-time pastor of Sherbrooke Mennonite Church in Vancouver. He had been serving as Sherbrooke's interim pastor since Aug. 1, 2019. He will continue half-time as Mennonite Church B.C.'s church engagement minister. Barkowsky, who is married to Deborah, holds an MA in Christian studies from Associated Canadian Theological Schools (ACTS) Seminaries in Langley, B.C. Barkowsky has 20 years of pastoral experience, including at First Mennonite Church of Kelowna, B.C.; he has also served as MC B.C.'s communications coordinator and administrative assistant.

—BY AMY RINNER WADDELL

discouraged, don't just give up. Try something else," she adds.

Koop echoes her thoughts.

"Pick something that appeals to you and just go for it," he says. "Don't worry about being good at it." He adds, "It's like falling in love—usually it's this bumbling,

awkward mess." But, he assures, "God is present in the bumbling." ❧

Staff change

Pastoral transition in Quebec



Annika Krause of Vancouver became the new half-time pastor of the Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal in November. She will move to Montreal in January. She earned a master of theological studies degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., and a BA in literature from Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C. She replaces John Docherty, who pastored the fellowship for the past eight years and retired this past summer. The fellowship's church committee began looking for his replacement in the fall of 2019. Then came the arrival of COVID, and the lockdown, which meant there were no in-person services at the House of Friendship, where the congregation meets. Although, there were updates from the search committee, the possibility of finding a new pastor during the pandemic seemed like a long shot. But the fellowship received word that Mennonite Church Eastern Canada had a candidate who was interested in serving the Montreal congregation. After numerous Zoom meetings, in small groups and as a congregation, Krause was invited to join the fellowship as its pastor. From the beginning of her discussions, Krause says the fellowship "came across as a very open and welcoming community. It is full of creative and caring people with a heart for God. There is a strong emphasis on service, both in the church and in the larger community. I wanted to be a part of a church community that actively seeks to be the hands and feet of Christ."

—FROM A MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP OF MONTREAL RELEASE

News brief

Forest Church founder wins creation care award



Wendy Janzen

Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN) calls **Wendy Janzen**, of Kitchener, Ont., a "forest church trailblazer" in naming her the recipient of this year's Art and Jocele Meyer Award for "effective leadership in caring for the earth." The award comes with \$500 "to further the ministries already in process." Janzen initiated Burning Bush Forest Church in 2016, and more recently Wilmot Forest Church as an "experimental expression of church" for people "drawn to the outdoors to nurture their souls and pay attention to God." They meet once a month in parks or natural areas. Janzen is also part of the Wild Church Network, a support system for new and growing wild churches and their leaders. She resources pastors and congregations exploring creation care and outdoor worship experiences, which have been of particular interest during the pandemic. She is "honoured and thrilled" to be recognized for her work and that of the Wild Church Network. She will consult with her forest church advisory team about how they can use the \$500 for a special "act of reciprocity for our watershed" and all the living things that call it home. MCCN encourages and supports American and Canadian congregations in their care for creation.

—JANET BAUMAN

BUSINESS OF FAITH

When change is your only option

By Maria H. Klassen
JORDAN, ONTARIO

When the pandemic hit in March, Chris and Laura Mullet Koop, who own and operate Elmwood Farms Inc., were profoundly impacted. Their farm, located in Jordan, Ont., in the designated green belt area on the Niagara escarpment, is an egg production and grape-growing enterprise, started by Chris's family in 1932.

The farm has seen many changes over these years. It had mixed fruit trees in the early years; now it is only vineyards. More acres were added and more of the work is now mechanized. Technology has improved the breeds, food safety and animal care. Chris has added no more land but has doubled the density of the grape vines by understanding the science of soil.

The farm has laying hens producing 8,600 eggs daily. The large and extra-large eggs are sold in stores, while the small and medium eggs are shipped in bulk, without the egg shells, fresh or frozen to restaurants and chain stores such as Tim Horton's.

When all the restaurants closed in March, the closure had a dramatic effect on supply chains. The farm still had 8,600 eggs rolling off the conveyor belt daily, as did all the other egg producers in Ontario. Meanwhile the borders were closed, the demand for wine was dropping and ice wine contracts were cancelled. Even though this year's grape harvest was the best in 20 years, sadly many grapes were left hanging on the vine and have fallen to the ground. Grapes used for ice wines ended up as regular harvest.

Elmwood Farms is subject to the Egg Farmers of Ontario Marketing Board, which controls supply management and fair farm pricing. The farmers produce the eggs and the Marketing Board, oversees distribution. Chris also belongs to the Grape Growers of Ontario, which negotiates prices for all grapes sold to processors.

Because of the marketing boards, Chris did not have to solve the problem himself,

but new strategies had to be put into place quickly. While some eggs went into storage, some medium eggs were re-packaged to sell in grocery stores. A Flock Early Removal Program helped to minimize the build-up of eggs in storage while new markets increased the eggs used in dog food and making vaccines. The egg farmers of Ontario also doubled their donations to food banks during the pandemic. They buy back the eggs and donate them, making sure all food banks have eggs.

Labour shortages have always been an issue in Niagara, and COVID-19 exacerbated the issue. The farm hires local labour for custom work, but some workers who helped in the vineyards stayed home due

How did Chris see his way through this most disruptive event for his generation? He says, "Faith is who you are, what you do, and how you work it out."

He quotes G. K. Chesterton, "The poet wants to get his head into the clouds. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits." He believes that, in the first half of life, we try to fit everything into our heads. It is the second half (where he feels he is) when we become more observant; when we are on a pilgrimage of self-discovery, to become new human beings, becoming more expansive in our faith.

And that is what he sees in this pandemic time. It is like riding the wave in an



PHOTO: CHRIS MULLET KOOP

Chris Mullet Koop's son Timothy works on the family farm, packing 30 eggs to a tray, that get stacked on skids. Six skids of eggs are picked up once a week.

to the fear of contracting the virus. Some work finally got done a month later than scheduled. Farms that regularly hire off-shore labour found borders were closed and flights restricted in the spring, when workers normally arrive.

ocean, it is up and down all the time. He is optimistic that we as a society will find a way through, that we will learn a lot and come up with new strategies. We are facing a new frontier that invites us to continue our pilgrimage. ❧

Pastor addresses radio audience about church gatherings

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

With a message of “Love your neighbour as yourself,” a Mennonite Church B.C. pastor reached a wide audience on the radio with a message about in-person church gatherings.

On a recent call-in talk show on radio station CKNW, broadcast from Vancouver across the Fraser Valley, senior pastor Frank Berto, of Living Hope Christian Fellowship in Surrey, was interviewed by the show hosts, Lynda Steele and Eric Chapman. In response to three



Frank Berto

area churches proclaiming their right to meet in person, despite orders to the contrary from the provincial health ministry, Berto expressed his belief that in-person gatherings were the wrong thing to do during a pandemic, saying he was “embarrassed” by those congregations who cited their right to meet under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

“Which charter of rights is first and foremost for Christians?” he asked. “Love your neighbours as yourself. I do funerals all the time, so how could I look a family in the face and say ‘Your right to gather

trumps their [possible COVID patients] their right to life?”

Berto added that suspending in-person worship services did not mean closing the church and that giving up meeting for a few months was small sacrifice. “Church actually refers to people, not a building,” he said. “If I can care for my neighbour by briefly shutting down gatherings in the building and going to online meetings, what a wonderful thing!”

Concluding his comments, Berto said he hoped that the Holy Spirit would change people’s hearts: “Jesus was the son of God; he gave up his right to come down and teach us how to live. How can Christians do anything less?”

In response, Chapman told Berto, “Pastor, you give me goosebumps. You make me want to go to church!” ❧

News brief

Saskatoon’s Mennonite mayor wins second mandate



Charlie Clark

Charlie Clark secured a second term as Saskatoon’s mayor following the Nov. 9 civic election. His five challengers included a former Saskatoon mayor and a former Saskatchewan provincial cabinet minister. Clark garnered 49 percent of the vote, more than the combined percentage of his two heavy-weight opponents. He attributes his success to leadership that balances building the economy with caring for the city’s most vulnerable, and working toward environmental sustainability. A member of Osler Mennonite Church, Clark says his faith community is “a great place of calm within the storm of political life” that “[plays] an important role to help keep [him] grounded and humble.” Clark is grateful for the training in peacemaking and mediation he received at Menno Simons College and during a voluntary service term, which, he says, gave him the skills “to transform conflict into opportunities for shared growth.” Clark’s job right now is seeing Saskatoon through the COVID-19 pandemic. “How do we support one another to endure and learn through [this] crisis?” he asks, hoping to learn “how we can do things better” including “better ways to support our homeless and vulnerable populations.” Clark says he hopes to “guide the city to a strong future that builds on hard-working, caring people” and to “ensure that everybody is included in that success.”

—By DONNA SCHULTZ

Staff changes

AIMM appoints new executive coordinators

John Fumana and **Bruce Yoder** have been appointed to work as the new team of executive coordinators for Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM). Fumana is a member of the Mennonite Brethren Church of the Congo and he serves as deacon of his local church in Kinshasa in the Demo-



John Fumana, left, and Bruce Yoder are new executive coordinators for Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission.

cratic Republic of the Congo. He received a bachelor’s degree in education and has a certificate for Asset-Based Community Driven Development. He brings extensive experience working with international organizations such as Oxfam, World Vision, the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa and Interchurch Medical Assistance, where he has served as program and operations manager, cultural affairs assistant, logistics coordinator and human resources manager. John lives with his wife and children in the Congo. Yoder and his wife, Nancy Frey, served as Mennonite Church Canada Witness partners in Burkina Faso until 2019. Yoder is a member of Listowel Mennonite Church in Ontario. He has 26 years of experience working in intercultural settings in Latin America and West Africa, most recently serving with the Mennonite Mission Network in missional development and as a teacher of missiology and of the history of Christianity in theological schools in Benin and Burkina Faso. Yoder and Fumana will begin to transition into their roles in January 2021; they replace Rod Hollinger-Janzen, who retired after 15 years as executive coordinator.

—MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

/// Staff changes

Pastoral transitions in Manitoba



John Klassen will be finishing his role as senior pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Winkler on March 31, 2021. This concludes his 23 years of service at the church, first from 1986 to 1994 and again from 2006 to the present. Klassen has worked in pastoral ministry since 1983, serving at Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church and in the role of conference minister for Mennonite Church Manitoba. He sees this next step as partial retirement but still has energy and passion for ministry, especially interim pastoring, for which he recently received training. He holds a master of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), Elkhart, Ind.



Karen Schellenberg completed her term as interim pastor of Charleswood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg on Dec. 31, a full-time position she held from the beginning of 2020. She will begin the role of intentional interim pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite in the spring. She will pastor the Winkler congregation for nine months, working in the 0.8-FTE position from April 1 until the end of 2021. Schellenberg has extensive experience in this work; in 2019 she completed another interim pastoral position at Fort Garry Evangelical Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. She holds a master's degree in biblical and theological studies from Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg.



Lisa Enns began as a full-time co-pastor of Charleswood Mennonite Church on Jan. 1. For the last year-and-a-half, she worked as chaplain at Donwood Manor Personal Care Home in Winnipeg where she offered spiritual care visits and programming to seniors. Enns has a long history in pastoral ministry. From 2002 to

2016, she was associate pastor of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. She holds a master of divinity degree from AMBS.

—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

Spiritual health practitioner change in B.C.



Susan Nickel, a member of Valleyview Mennonite Church in London, Ont., has begun serving as a spiritual health practitioner for long-term care with the Fraser Health Authority in British Columbia. Her areas of practice include Cottage Worthington in Abbotsford, the Bradley Centre and Heritage Village in Chilliwack, and the Fraser Hope Lodge in Hope. Nickel, a certified spiritual health practitioner, was born in Vancouver and grew up in Chilliwack. She earned a BA in religious studies at the University of Western Ontario in London, and began training as a spiritual health provider at two hospitals in Winnipeg, where she was working on a master of divinity degree. Her therapeutic work with people inspired her as they shared what filled their lives with hope and courage. For 20 years she worked at a cancer centre in London and at the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance. She began working at Fraser Health in 2019 as a palliative spiritual health practitioner before moving to long-term care.

—FRASER HEALTH AUTHORITY

/// Upcoming

AMBS Pastors and Leaders conference to go online

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) is planning its first online Pastors and Leaders conference from March 1 to 4. With the theme, "Thriving Together," planners want to give pastors and other leaders the opportunity to "get away" and recharge in the midst of a difficult and demanding time. Speakers at plenary sessions will include: Cynthia L. Hale, pastor at Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Ga.; James Nelson Gin-

gerich, a doctor at Maple City Health Care Center in Goshen, Ind.; Marvin Lorenzana, the incoming president of Eastern Mennonite Missions; and Drew Strait, assistant professor of New Testament at AMBS. The conference also will include worship times, small-group conversations, workshops and creative breaks away from the computer. Katie Graber and Anneli Loepp Thiessen, co-directors of the Anabaptist Worship Network, will guide participants in using resources from the new *Voices Together* hymnal. A reduced registration fee is available until Jan. 19, 2021. To learn more, to register, to inquire about mini-grants or to submit a workshop proposal, go to ams.edu/pastorsandleaders.

—ANABAPTIST MENNONITE BIBLICAL SEMINARY



Calendar

Nationwide

Jan. 15: Anabaptists around the world are invited to a special Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday online prayer hour, at 12 p.m. UTC. To learn more, visit mwc-cmm.org/awfs. To register, visit mwc-cmm.org/oph.

Jan. 21: Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday. To learn more, visit mwc-cmm.org.

Alberta

Every Monday to Thursday:

Congregants from across Mennonite Church Alberta are invited to join a Zoom group for morning prayer on Mondays and Wednesdays at 7:30 a.m. MDT, and evening prayer on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9 p.m. MDT, for about 15 to 20 minutes, using *Take Our Moments and Our Days*. Register online at mcab.ca/events.

March 20-21, 2021: All delegate sessions to be held via Zoom. More details to follow.

Saskatchewan

Ongoing: The Youth Farm Bible Camp food market is back! The camp will once again have groceries, fresh cinnamon buns, a hot meal of the week and many more options. Check out the products at yfbcfodmarket.square.site. Order by Monday for pick up on Wednesday.

Ontario

Jan. 27, 2021: Conrad Grebel University College hosts a virtual *Voices Together* hymnal celebration

with Sarah Johnson, at 7 p.m. EST. For more information, visit bit.ly/37erUkl.

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



Classifieds



Employment opportunity

Professor of Biblical Studies position open. Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary is hiring a full-time professor of Biblical Studies to start July 1, 2021.

Preferred qualifications: Ph.D. or equivalent; expertise in Old Testament or New Testament studies and competence to teach in the other testament; intercultural competency; and the ability to inspire students in face-to-face and online learning environments. See a full job description at:

www.ambs.ca/jobs



Employment Opportunity Executive Director

Shalom Counselling Services, located in Waterloo, Ont., seeks an Executive Director (E.D.) to lead this dynamic agency committed to "helping people grow toward peace and wholeness".

The E.D. is responsible for strategic leadership and successful operations of Shalom. This includes directing and overseeing all aspects of the organization; promotion and fundraising; community collaboration and service delivery; finance and property; and human resources. The E.D. will support an exceptional team, fostering a culture of caring and service.

Qualifications for the position include: Master's degree in a relevant discipline; proven expertise in organizational leadership, administration and management; and five years' experience in a senior leadership or management position. Expertise in clinical counselling is preferred.

Start date for this 0.8 FTE position is scheduled for June 1, 2021. Learn more at www.shalomcounselling.org/jobs.

To apply, please send a cover letter and resume to Fred Loganbill, Chair of the Search Committee, at ShalomEDSearch@gmail.com by January 31, 2021.



Employment Opportunity Executive Director

Mennonite Community Services (MCS) seeks an **Executive Director** (fulltime) who supports

its mission and vision and builds on a strong reputation of serving our community; delivering excellent service, building connections, and leading MCS to capitalize on new opportunities.

The ideal candidate brings successful experience in a senior leadership role within a not-for-profit service provider organization, with knowledge of settlement programming.

Interested candidates should email their cover letter and resume to the Executive Director Search Team at HR@mcson.org. Submissions will be received no later than Monday, January 23, 2021.

www.mcson.org



Employment opportunity

The **Vice President for Administration and Chief Financial Officer** is a visionary leader who oversees the operational, business and financial affairs of the institution.

The successful candidate will be a hands-on collaborative manager who will lead in accounting, budgeting, business planning, investments, human resources and administration.

The CFO partners with the Administrative Cabinet in strategic decision making and operations. The goal is to ensure AMBS maintains strong academic programs and revenue growth, to educate leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world. For full job description visit:

www.ambs.ca/jobs

Come to Bethlehem and see

By Barb Draper

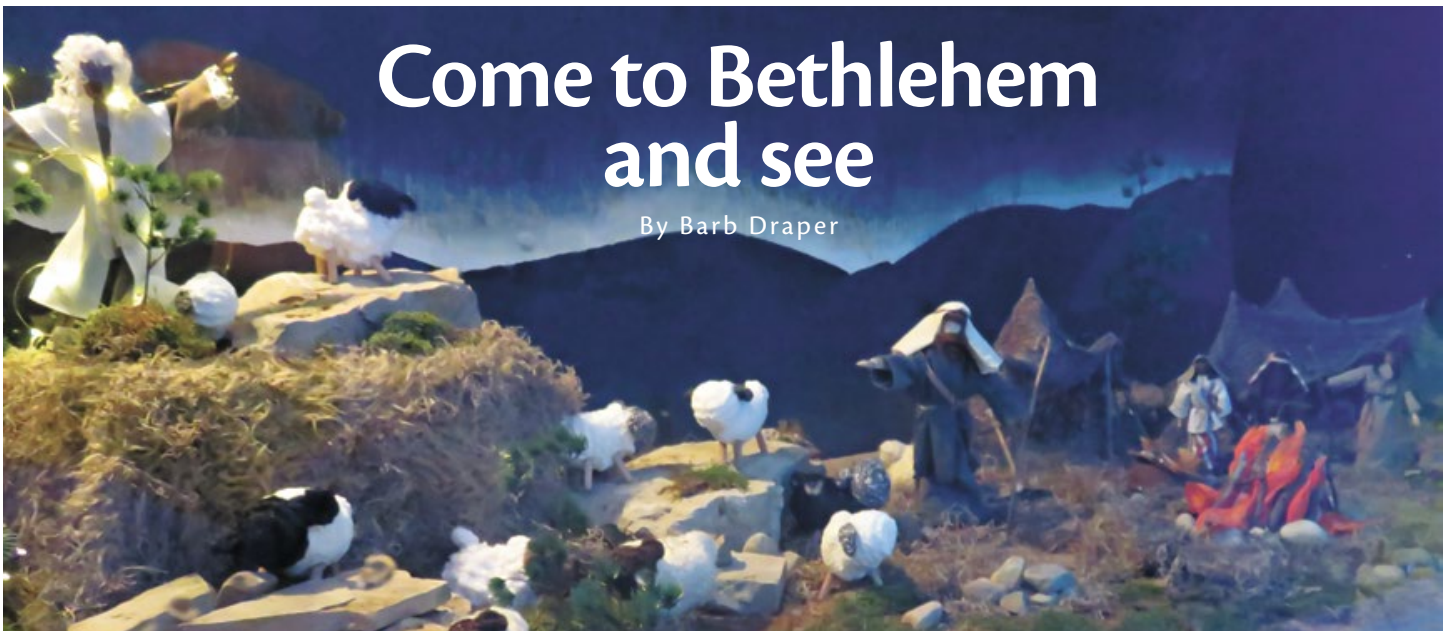


PHOTO BY BARB DRAPER

Many volunteers from Floradale (Ont.) Mennonite Church put together a Christmas display to be viewed from outside. The six-inch-tall shepherds watch over crocheted sheep.

Last year, when the Bethlehem village diorama at the front of Floradale Mennonite Church sanctuary was packed up, the designers intended to reconstruct it the following year, making it bigger and better. But when Advent 2020 approached, cases of COVID-19 were rising in the community, so

the Christmas story display was set up just inside several classroom windows at the back of the church. Visitors could remain in the safety of the outdoor air while the printed biblical text and commentary allowed them to have a self-guided tour of the wise men, shepherds and village life. ☞



PHOTO BY JANE HESSELINK

A sunset reflection on the window adds to the Bethlehem village display. Mary and Joseph and the baby can be seen in the doorway of a house, while everyday village life goes on around them.