

CANADIAN MENNONITE

May 16, 2022 Volume 26 Number 10

A photograph of two people walking away from the camera on a wooden boardwalk that winds through a dense forest of tall, thin trees. The sun is low in the sky, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows on the boardwalk. The person on the left is wearing a purple jacket and a grey beanie, while the person on the right is wearing a blue jacket and a grey beanie. They appear to be holding hands or walking closely together.

Focus on Mental Health

See pages 4, 10 and 23.

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EDITORIAL

Two things not up for debate

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive editor



This editorial is not about abortion. Or maybe it is.

I write this on the day after Mothers' Day, at a time when conversations are intense about the rightness or wrongness of ending a woman's pregnancy. There is a lot to be said about the medical, legal and religious aspects of abortion, but not by me right now.

Two things that are not up for debate: Every child deserves to be cherished and nurtured; every adult caring for children deserves to be supported.

I remember those days of raising my own young children: the sheer emotional, physical and financial demands of the job. It took fortitude and commitment. And much love. Our household had two mature parents, working in partnership, along with our extended family. We had support from our church community, and we shared resources with other parents of young children. Our faith in God sustained and directed us.

But the blessings my husband and I experienced back then, and the joy parenthood continues to bring as we relate with our adult children—these are not the reality for some mothers and fathers. For them, life brings challenges that make it difficult, or even impossible, to provide the nurturing that young lives need:

- **They are raising** a family as a sole parent.
- **They lack consistent** support from a larger family, a community or a church.
- **Because of trauma** experienced in their own early years, they don't have

psychological capacity for nurturing another young human.

- **Domestic abuse, sexual violence** or restrictive laws mean that they have little control over their own bodies.
- **The systems of social support** are non-existent or difficult to navigate.
- **Their child has** health conditions that place extra demands on the parents.
- **It is difficult** for them to access or use family planning methods to time the arrival of children.

Every child deserves to be cherished and nurtured. Every adult caring for children deserves to be supported. For some parents and potential parents, these basic human rights feel unattainable. They live in a society in which abortion seems like the only option.

As Christians, we hear Jesus calling us to love, nurture and support all God's children. That includes both the vulnerable young ones and the adults experiencing difficult life circumstances.

With God's help, can we help build a reality that better supports families? In such a society, women would be able to choose what happens to their bodies. Living wages would support every household and educational opportunities would allow people to gain more employment skills. There would be community supports of all kinds, including adequate health care, affordable housing and quality childcare options. The church would be present, offering love, acceptance and practical help.

Many Mennonite congregations include in their services times for blessing young infants and their parents.

We affirm, "We welcome children to the church community and commit to nurturing them as our own" (*Voices Together*, no. 969). To the parents we promise, "With God as our guide, we will share in your child's nurture and well-being" (*Voices Together*, no. 970). In our chosen family of faith, we seek to protect and support children and parents growing together in God's love.

As part of the larger society, how might our congregations extend those pledges to the other parents, youth and children in the neighbourhoods outside the church walls?

Faith communities can offer friendship, spiritual grounding and physical help for adults providing for the children in their care. It could be as simple and friendly as playgroups and sharing hand-me-down clothing. It could be as complex as church members stepping up for foster care and adoption. People of goodwill could open hearts and homes so that ending a pregnancy becomes a less desirable option.

Beyond the debates about abortion is the question of how to make our neighbourhoods and our world places where all are cherished, nurtured and supported. There is much to do.

Clarification

The article "In search of the holy grey," April 4, 2022, p. 14, stated that denominational leaders are fully supportive of government restrictions. There have been no official statements from Mennonite Church Canada or the regional churches that indicate that kind of wholesale support. ❧



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ISTOCK PHOTO BY PAMELA JOE MCFARLANE

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FEATURE

Finding value in challenged lives

By Carlene Hill Byron

What is a human life worth? What makes my own life worthwhile? Is my time valuable only when my efforts add up to some measurable achievement I can document on my résumé or in my exercise log or my family's "brag book"? And if that's the case, what value is there to a less productive life?

Answering those questions forces us to examine our deepest values and commitments. For those who grew up in the Christian faith, we learned from our earliest days that God sees every life as priceless. We are not free to disregard anyone, because all are essential to the whole. We must all rely on each other, and all of us together rely on God.

Still, we are often prone to value our productivity—what we can create—over our identity as God's creations, even when we're trying to create work for God in this world. To maximize our measurable contributions, we often overlook contributions and contributors that don't fit our preconceived plans for success. We also can find it hard to obey God's command to rest.

When we acknowledge that God has given value to each of God's people, we are better able to recognize that God values even the sometimes less-productive lives of those with mental-health problems.

Finding God's value in all lives

Theology and philosophy distinguish between relationships that are "transactional" and those rooted in "love." Transactional relationships are like those of the market economies, defined by the metered back-and-forth flow

of equivalent benefits between the two parties. A love-based relationship can be two-way, but the nature of compassion means that its benefits accrue unequally to the parties from time to time.

God's relationship with us is the ultimate in non-transactional relationships. God expects no equivalent return from relationship with me, yet God, out of love, makes me not just a member of the household but a friend. For those in Christ, our relationships are not supposed to depend on how appealing or useful we find each other. Our relationships in Christ are intended to demonstrate the character of God's relationship with us, where servants have become friends.

To value the personhood of an individual with mental-health challenges requires paying more attention to God's creative work in the person than to the ways that creation has been marred. And there are times when that can be hard to do. It's easy to see God in the person with a serious mental-health diagnosis when he's praying daily with his pastor for their church plant. More difficult are the times when that person becomes lost in delusion and self-endangerment. It's relatively easy to see God in the voice that breaks out in original worship song during the Sunday service. It's more difficult when the music is banged on an out-of-tune guitar sometime after midnight on the other side of a too-thin apartment wall.

To value others for their personhood also requires believing that God so loved the person you see now—just as she is—that God was willing to sacrifice his Son on that person's behalf, just as he did for us. And that

(Continued on page 6)

For those in Christ, our relationships are not supposed to depend on how appealing or useful we find each other. Our relationships in Christ are intended to demonstrate the character of God's relationship with us, where servants have become friends.

The quietness and rest that people with mental-health problems need is something we all need. For us to live according to the pace and drive of contemporary western culture is for us to burn through our neural circuitry in ways that lead to disruptive and disorderly crises.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RUTH BERGEN BRAUN

(Continued from page 4)

God may have sent the Spirit already to indwell the person, despite the obvious imperfections, just as the Spirit indwells us despite our imperfections.

When we understand the value God sees in ourselves and others, we can rest. We don't need to try to be something different or to make others be different, because we know that we and they are already enough.

We all need rest

Hard work and achievement are part of our cultural DNA. But over time, that drive has metastasized into something less laudable and more life-threatening.

Most of us know that we get cranky when we don't have enough sleep. We aren't able to perform our best at work or at home. Medical research tells us that sleep is foundational to good health. We also may recognize that our spiritual life suffers when we don't rest adequately.

Steve Macchia, who teaches spiritual formation for church leaders, reminds us that when we fail to get enough rest, our souls become unhealthy and spiritually vulnerable, just as lack of rest creates easily recognized vulnerabilities in our health, performance and emotions.

Many kinds of mental-health problems are exacerbated by sleeplessness. For those who aren't inclined to mental-health problems, snappishness or lack of focus might be a signal that more downtime is needed. For those with mental-illness diagnoses, sleeplessness can be a symptom of, or precursor to, difficult times. Extended periods of sleeplessness can be a symptom of depression. For those like me with bipolar diagnoses, a period of creative enthusiasm can launch into a multi-day binge of activity that never stops until the body either crashes or swings dangerously high.

Rest is one of the ways by which we are re-created. It is also a way in which we acknowledge and value our own true and finite selves. Resting is one of the ways we demonstrate daily that we know our accomplishments are not fully



FLICKR.COM PHOTO BY THOMAS RICKER

our own. God works in and through us to accomplish God's own purposes. And God is able to accomplish those goals with or without our 24/7 involvement.

A 10th-century Roman Catholic pope expressed this humble trust in his bedtime prayer: "I've done the best I could in your service this day. Oh Lord, I'm going to bed. It's your church. Take care of it!"

We need to remind ourselves: This is God's world. We live here by God's gracious gift. Because none of us is God, we don't have God's responsibility.

We're responsible for only as much as God has assigned each of us. And God can certainly manage during our times of rest.

The particular mental-health problems I have require me to rest more than many people do. My need for rest gives me something in common with friends who live with physical disabilities. They, too, often need to choose between what they want to do and what their bodily limits allow. They, too, sometimes find that their challenges place boundaries around their ambitions and dreams.

It's important to acknowledge the

limits we experience in this world. All of us—those with more challenges and those with fewer challenges—make our offerings from within our own specific limits. And we all are to be grateful together for what God has made us, individually and together.

People who live with mental-health problems face some distinct challenges in finding quality rest. First is the difficulty some experience in resting at all. Sleep is a challenge from time to time across a wide range of mental-health problems—anxiety, depression, manias and even psychotic disorders.

When we're in the throes of a mental-health problem, we have to choose to do things that we enjoy when we're in other states of mind, because in those moments nothing will appeal. For me, the best choices often are those that carry intrinsic rewards. Cooking a favourite recipe or baking something to share are favourite activities and also help build relationships. A long drive to a lake where I can rent a kayak, or to a forest where trails will lead to a waterfall, are other activities I choose to do when I'm trying to pull myself out of the depths.

As a person with a bipolar rushing brain, I also find that, for me, the best kinds of rest involve the opportunity to refocus. Physical activities like dance aerobics, gardening, practising piano scales, kayaking and nature photography engage multiple senses and help replace internal chaos with external order.

For congregations to encourage rest and refreshment often means to encourage all to do whatever is restful and refreshing to them, whenever they need it. When we are tempted to ask for yet more service from ones who today seem hesitant, we can release them in the knowledge there will be other chances for them to serve. And perhaps to tell them so directly: "There will be another chance. We'll miss you, but if this isn't a great time for you, do what you need to do. You know best." In God's grace, the person who accepts God's generous gift of rest is refreshed to later give generously to others.

Look for what God sees

God has placed gifts in even the most challenged members of the flock, and they are there for the benefit of God's people. "God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other" (1 Corinthians 12:24-25).

In other words, God gives the greatest gifts to those who would otherwise be most likely to be overlooked. The people our culture writes off for their lack of achievements are likely to be those in whom God has planted the greatest value. Ask yourself, "What is God seeing that I'm not?" And when God answers, find a way to honour the message. A note of gratitude for what you see could be a start. An opportunity for them to share that gift could come next.

The good news

The quietness and rest that people with mental-health problems need is something we all need. For us to live according to the pace and drive of contemporary western culture is for us to burn through our neural circuitry in ways that lead to disruptive and disorderly crises. For us to honour God with our lives, we need to live in ways that may seem out of step with many around us. Our most God-honouring ways of life may seem to gum up the rapidly moving machinery of busy churches.

The person who must often rest is of value. So is the person who lives endlessly in rapid motion. In fact, that very active person's energy can help move burdens that are bringing others to a dead stop. It's countercultural to bear one another's burdens. It means one person's progress may be slowed to another person's pace so we all may finish together well. But this is the kind of life against culture that Christians have been called to from the beginning. As Paul urged the early church at Rome: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1).

Christians are called to nurture value

in those the culture won't value—people with disabilities, children not yet born, people who learn slowly, people whose excess energy can be disruptive, those who live in poverty, those who find themselves imprisoned, those stunned by grief. To God, a person's value is in their personhood, not their productivity. God looks at the person less able to produce on their own and sees in that individual both a beloved part of God's very inheritance and an opportunity for service by others using the gifts and talents God has lovingly placed in that person.

The good news is this: People with mental-health problems are a sign that God values all that God has created, even those parts of creation that carry signs of the Fall. We are a sign that God has work still to be done in this world. And those of us with mental-health problems, as well as those who live with other limits and challenges, are a sign that God calls all of us to rest. ☘

Author Carlene Hill Byron is a fundraiser and communicator for non-profits that serve people with disabilities and other life challenges. She also has life experience with depression and bipolar disorder. Adapted with permission from Not Quite Fine: Mental Health, Faith and Showing Up for Each Other, © 2021 by Herald Press. All rights reserved.



Mennonite Church Canada and MC U.S.A. have designated this book as the Common Read title for spring 2022. To learn more, visit commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/24012.



☘ For discussion

1. What makes your life worthwhile? Do you believe that God values everyone equally? How much do you value yourself based on what you can accomplish? What were you taught about valuing those who are not high achievers?
2. What are the relationships in your life where giving and receiving are not in balance? How much do you value these unbalanced relationships? In what ways can those who appear less productive be making valuable contributions?
3. How would you explain the difference between transactional and non-transactional relationships? What are some examples from your own life? What does it mean to value others for their personhood?
4. Carlene Hill Byron says, "We also can find it hard to obey God's command to rest." Do you agree? Why can it be difficult to rest? What happens when you do not get enough rest?
5. 1 Corinthians 12:24 says God gave "greater honour to the parts that lacked it." What do you understand this to mean? Who are the people with challenges in your congregation? How does the congregation show value and love to these individuals?

—By Barb Draper

See related Mental Health resources at www.commonword.ca/go/2151

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OPINION

/// Readers write

✉ What to do about Vladimir Putin?

Re: “Becoming the enemy you hate” column, April 18, page 13.

The topic that Joshua Penfold highlights is at the very heart of the Anabaptist movement, which began in the 1500s. The Anabaptist leaders determined that the only way to stop the circle and cycle of “an eye for an eye” was to replace vengeance with forgiveness and meaningful actions of love.

This teaching was central to their recorded doctrines of faith and practice. It was rooted in what Christ taught, lived and demonstrated by his death and resurrection. It was indeed a costly decision for them, just as it will be for those who desire to follow Christ today.

To be willing to obey Christ, to seek not to retaliate and to seek reconciliation require divine empowerment. It may still be a serious component in the statements of faith and practice of many Anabaptist communities, but is it held with conviction by the pastors and leaders who influence their faith communities each Sunday?

Today, with the war in Eastern Europe, the present generation of Anabaptists are forced to evaluate their peace position. On Feb. 24, Russia invaded Ukraine. A sorrowful reminder of what the Anabaptists in Ukraine experienced in the early 1900s. They suffered because of the civil wars and unimaginable chaos. Ukrainians also suffered terribly under the forced famine by Stalin in the 1930s.

Is Russian president Vladimir Putin the enemy that is hated? As more and more of Eastern Ukraine is destroyed, will hate consume us? Will we justify revenge and destruction?

Much is being done in assisting the suffering Ukrainians, but what about our attitude toward Russia and its leaders?

I would appreciate a pastoral word concerning Russia from the leadership of Mennonite Church Canada.

DAVID SHANTZ, MONTREAL

✉ Reader feels ‘gut-wrenching emotions’ of his ancestors

Ten weeks into Russia’s invasion of Ukraine still sends shivers up my spine, as it did when I read the headlines in the *Globe and Mail* on the morning of Feb. 24: “Russia invades Ukraine.”

You see, my girlfriend and her daughter were stuck in her apartment in Kyiv on that morning and now,

10 weeks later, still cannot leave.

My grandparents were all born in Russia, my paternal grandfather in Spat, Crimea, and my maternal grandmother in Terek colony, Russia. They met and were married in Rosemary, Alta., in 1936.

My grandmother published her memoirs in the 1980s. In it, she describes her terrifying ordeal at being surrounded on all sides by militant tribes: the Nogais, Tatars and Chechens, and the very difficult decision to leave the colony in February 1918.

After a harrowing journey across the steppes of Russia, they eventually reached Ukraine, and freedom to Canada, in 1924.

Now I am experiencing those same gut-wrenching emotions they must have felt, as I wonder how long this conflict will last, and when they will be set free.

RYAN ADRIAN, WINNIPEG

The writer attends Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

✉ Writer, husband, CM chastised for ‘middle-class, individualistic thinking’

Re: “Be at peace?” Feb. 7, page 11.

I was disappointed to read this article in *Canadian Mennonite*.

The author names her husband’s “more worldliness” as a desirable trait. Strange language coming from a Mennonite.

Beyond the host of biblical references that challenge the worldview of this author—“Don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” “Give to those who ask of you”—I found her middle-class assumptions most disturbing.

Having worked with lower-income individuals, I read Vincent as entering into what he believed to be a reciprocal relationship with the author. He helped her with cheaper groceries and she helped him with fronting some cash. She indicated that Vincent always made good on these small loans.

Just when Vincent was at the point of counting on her for this regular help, she withholds this act of grace. Vincent’s anger is fully expected. Beyond her naivety as to the distress that this likely caused Vincent, it would be doubly angering to have somebody who is clearly doing better than you financially say they “are not in a position to help.”

The couple seems ignorant of class distinctions and how somebody from a class other than their own may think and act differently than them. Vincent seems to depend on reciprocal relationships while his neighbours seem to have bought into middle-class, individualistic thinking, something I

would think a Mennonite periodical would be calling into question, not lending support to.

TOM FRIESEN (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ **Congregant feels unwelcome because she's 'not jabbed or masked'**

Re: Second letter of "Two views on the 'freedom convoy,'" April 4, page 7.

To Paul Thiessen: Knowing that God is involved in the truckers convoy, I am angry at the churches "downing" this. I don't feel welcome in my church because I'm not jabbed or masked. Again I asked God for an answer, and "no jab" was it. The Mennonite church needs to wake up. Thanks for reading.

ANNE WARKENTIN, WINNIPEG

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

Epp—Carter Ian (b. Feb. 8, 2022), to Ian Epp and Kirsten Hamm-Epp, Eigenheim Mennonite, Rosthern, Sask.

Erb—Emilia Violet (b. Nov. 30, 2021), to Luke and Alyssa Erb, Poole Mennonite, Ont.

Klassen—Hudson Chinedu (b. April 11, 2022), to Luke and Chaz Klassen, Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Peters—Mara Lyn Akshita (b. Nov. 16, 2019; adopted by Elroy and Krissi [Martens] Peters on Aug. 2, 2021), Steinbach Mennonite, Man.

Peters—Riley (b. April 17, 2022), to David and Rachael Peters, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Schriemer—Amelia Lauryn (b. Nov. 17, 2021), to Michael and Marie (Loepky) Schriemer, Steinbach Mennonite, Man.

Baptisms

Sue Lampman—Vineland United Mennonite, Ont., April 17, 2022.

Deaths

Bean—Ralph, 81 (b. June 18, 1940; d. April 16, 2022), Wilmot Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Beckett—Lyn, 74 (b. June 18, 1947; d. April 14, 2022), Grace Mennonite, St. Catharines, Ont.

Bergen—Maria (Marie) (nee Klassen), 87 (b. May 26, 1934; d. Dec. 27, 2021), Grace Mennonite, Regina.

Block—Peter J., 94 (b. Aug. 26, 1927; d. April 22, 2022), Steinbach Mennonite, Man.

Braun—Elfrieda (nee Janzen), 88 (b. Oct. 27, 1933; d. April 9, 2022), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Brenneman—Keith, 53 (b. Oct. 16, 1968; d. April 1, 2022), Charleswood Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Brenneman—Mildred, 81 (b. May 4, 1940; d. Dec. 11, 2021), Poole Mennonite, Ont.

Derksen—Elizabeth (Heinrichs), 95 (b. May 11, 1926; d. April 15, 2022), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Dick—Henry (John), 99 (b. June 17, 1922; d. March 20, 2022), Lethbridge Mennonite, Alta.

Driediger—Lydia, 86 (b. March 21, 1936; d. April 14, 2022), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Falk—Annie (nee Rempel), 94 (b. Oct. 19, 1927; d. April 24, 2022), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Hiebert—Jake, 84 (b. Dec. 6, 1937; d. April 11, 2022), Grace Mennonite, St. Catharines, Ont.

Hiebert—Mary Helen (Unger), 85 (b. Nov. 6, 1936; d. April 27, 2022), Sterling Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Janzen—Mary, 84 (b. June 4, 1937; d. April 19, 2022), Lethbridge Mennonite, Alta.

Kasdorf—Anne, 89 (b. March 17, 1933; d. April 3, 2022), Steinbach Mennonite, Man.

Martens—Irene (Hampel), 86 (b. April 17, 1935; d. April 16, 2022), Fiske Mennonite, Sask.

Peters—Jacob (Jake), 90 (b. July 11, 1931; d. April 10, 2022), First Mennonite, Calgary.

Poole—Lisa, 52 (b. July 19, 1969; d. Dec. 11, 2021), Poole Mennonite, Ont.

Schmidt—Irwin, 83 (b. June 3, 1938; d. Feb. 26, 2022), Valleyview Mennonite, London, Ont.

Schulz—Rudi, 94 (b. Feb. 11, 1928; d. April 13, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Siemens—Katharina (Tina) (nee Kroeker), 91 (b. Oct. 19, 1930; d. April 10, 2022), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Thiessen—Katherine (nee Wiebe), 96 (b. Feb. 21, 1926; d. April 3, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Toews—William G., 80 (b. Dec. 16, 1941; d. April 21, 2022), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Wiens—Rodney, 59 (b. Dec. 2, 1962; d. March 26, 2022), Herschel Ebenfeld Mennonite, Sask.

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.

IN THE IMAGE

The church and mental illness

Ed Olfert

I have lived with depression for most of my adult life.

When I began my role as a minister, I realized that, while I could mostly hold my depression at bay while I carried out my daily responsibilities, it was usually in the tiredness of my time at home that my depression would find its expression. Typically, that would play out as irritability towards the one closest to me.

I have received some counselling and have been on medication for a number of decades. I cope reasonably well, I hope, and continue to count on that one who is closest to me to point out when my coping ability fades.

I find that there is an upside to my mental-health struggles. Through these decades, I have sharpened my skills at recognizing the struggles of others. If you have contact with me, be that in personal conversation, phone calls, text or emails, body language or facial expressions, there is a part of my psyche that is evaluating the state of your mental health.

There are certainly things to learn in every exchange, as mental health is not an on/off switch, but rather a rheostat that readjusts constantly.

I have a bit of an addiction to auction

sales. These days, that takes the form of time spent perusing online buy-and-sell apps, mostly evaluating old trucks and tractors. Not infrequently, a seller includes a rant demanding that there be no “lowball” offers, and gets apoplectic about messages asking if said item is still for sale.

Obviously—to me—there is a mental-health struggle at play here, and I wonder if that person has a safe confidant with whom to explore anger.

In my spiritual life, I have had a significant connection with four congregations. All have been in Saskatchewan; all have been relatively small. Also, all have gone through times of hard struggle. As I think about those times, mental illness has played a significant role in creating all of those struggles.

Is there not a lesson here that calls us to address mental illness as much, or more than, bad behaviour? Maybe that would begin to whittle down shame.

In three or four decades of relating to the penal system, I have again been reminded that the offenders that we vilify, that we lock up, are all there—you may quibble, but I tend to say things grandly—as the result of mental illness, and often that dysfunction crosses

generations.

This winter, I stood on the doorstep of a released offender friend’s home, pounded on his door till he dragged himself to open. After 10 years of sobriety, “Bob” (a pseudonym) had fallen back into the bottle. When I asked him why, Bob’s one-word answer was “depression.”

Is there not programming, at a pretty basic level, that can offer support and hope to mental-health struggles in the justice system? Can that even happen in a monolithic system that is built around guilt or innocence, a system that is about punishment?

The world is again contorting itself to find reasons to hate, to destroy, to weaponize. Again, I suggest that the root lies in mental ill-health.

Does the church, with its message of love of neighbour, love of the least of these, love of enemy, have leadership to offer? ❧



Ed Olfert (p2peho@gmail.com) gives thanks for questions raised through mental illness.

Et cetera

‘Another man-made crisis’

When droughts strike in eastern Africa, clerics, church experts and faith-based agencies move to the front to save the people’s food security and deliver humanitarian aid. Now, the groups are moving again, or at least preparing to respond, as severe drought—the worst in 40 years—unfolds in the east and horn of Africa, where three successive rainy seasons have failed. Scientists and relief agencies are blaming climate change for bringing droughts in a region battered by conflicts and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic. “This is another man-made crisis, just like Ukraine, except that the cause of the drought is climate change,” Jouni Hemberg, Finn Church Aid executive director, says. An estimated 16 million people are in urgent need of food assistance in Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya, according to the Intergovernmental Government Authority on Development.

Source: World Council of Churches



WCC PHOTO BY ALBIN HILLERT

MIND AND SOUL

Lonely without insects

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

Once upon a time I hitchhiked to a park visitors centre nestled beneath Wyoming's Grand Tetons. Next to other quotes by famous American wilderness gurus were the words of a far-less recognized teacher of ecological wisdom.

"Woe be unto you, who add house to house and field to field until you live alone in the land," exclaimed the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah proclaims the spiritual and material loneliness of lack of diversity. In this context, the warning is to protect space for other creatures—biodiversity. It is not good for man (sic) to be alone, Isaiah implies.

Climate change gets most of the environmental publicity, but the biodiversity crisis may be even more serious. It is measured in several ways. The number of species or the number of living creatures in each species show different aspects of biodiversity. All the data shows a severe decline in the variety and amount of other creatures on the planet.

Remember the good old days of bug-splattered automobile windshields? Insect biomass—their cumulative weight—is 70 percent lower than it used to be in some places! Not just window-decorating insect numbers have declined—so too have all the bees,

beetles and butterflies that pollinate crops and flowering plants, as well as critters that decompose organic matter into rich soil and robust ecosystems, providing food for birds and the rest of the food web.

To argue only from a human-centred perspective, biodiversity helps our species because of the range of foods and medicines that plants and animals provide; and the way biodiversity stabilizes ecosystems, helps filter water in wetlands, pollinates agriculture, or eats other pests. In other words, we could never survive alone.

Creation is an interconnected web in which species rely on other species, and homo sapiens is one of those species. We, too, need healthy ecosystems. To think otherwise is human exceptionalism—the belief that we are an exception to the laws of Creator and creation. The Jenga-like game of pulling out more ecological parts has direct effects on human health, food security and spiritual alienation.

Since 1970, the number of birds in North America is about 30 percent lower. Wild animals now account for only 4 percent of mammal biomass. Humanity accounts for 36 percent, while our domesticated animals are the remaining 60

percent—another reason to drastically cut down on meat eating.

Habitat loss—*adding house to house and field to field*—is the top factor in the decline of biodiversity, but also significant are mining and other resource extraction to feed growing human consumption. We are harnessing all available space for human needs or desires, leaving nothing for other creatures. The result: the sixth great extinction in planetary history. Note that the power for both destructiveness and remediation is not equally distributed among all humanity.

Besides the physical impacts, what does declining biodiversity do to our spirits? There is at least one warbler that I saw on a high-school birdwatching field trip that is now gone forever from this planet. My life is poorer. So, too, are future generations. That makes it an issue of intergenerational justice. More deeply unsettling: Are we made for community? Does that community include all creatures in the community of creation? I think that the "woe" Isaiah pronounces is the terrible loneliness of the human species. Truly, in the words of that camp song, "all God's critters got a place in the choir." We should sing it loudly in church. ☿



Randolph Haluza-DeLay was trained as a wildlife biologist but, since caring for creation is mostly about human activity, he retrained as a social scientist.

Et cetera

CPT calls people to 'step up for the Earth'

Around the world, people are not only experiencing a global climate emergency but a land crisis as well. Land wars and colonial practices of monopolization rage while the Earth's life-giving soil is being polluted and deteriorated at an unprecedented rate. At the same time, people are boldly standing up to defend the Earth from the extractive violence of corporations and governments worldwide. In 2022, Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT) wants to bring increased attention to Earth stewardship and the critical work of land defenders. The United Nations Human Rights Council declared that "defenders working in environmental matters, referred to as environmental human rights defenders, are among the human-rights defenders most exposed and at risk." To learn more, or sign the pledge, visit bit.ly/3vQaU09.

Source: Community Peacemaker Teams



CPT WEBSITE ARTWORK

'Step up for the Earth. Learn. Act. Pledge,' CPT implores.

TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

An honest-to-God typo

Joshua Penfold

Most of the time I can't stand typos. They bug me. If I'm completely honest, I'm internally judgmental of people who don't catch their typos, myself included. I love words, I love Wordle, I have a knack for spelling and, when I catch something spelled wrongly, I have a hard time looking past it and focusing on the intended meaning of the misspelled word in its context. I can't see the forest for that one silly tree. I have a problem.

But on April 29, I attended the Mennonite Church Eastern Canada annual gathering and experienced a typo that I cannot get past in an unexpected and wonderful way.

That day we joined in worship by singing "Still" by Reuben Morgan, a song I have sung many times. As I was following the projected lyrics, I saw it. The lyrics of the song are, "When the oceans rise and thunders roar / I will soar with you above the storm." But what was projected on the screen was "I will 'sour' with you above the storm."

Oops! Someone had innocently made a mistake typing out the lyrics and missed it. No big deal. It happens, right? With the context of the line and the song leaders singing the correct word, it

was easy for everyone to adjust, move on and forget about it. Everyone except me.

I noticed the typo, then I tried to convince myself it wasn't a big deal. Then I realized I was outwardly singing but inwardly dwelling on this little typo. Then I scolded my secret typo-judgmentalism for kicking in.

Usually, at this point I would convince myself to move on, shake it off, extend grace to the situation, and attempt to return to some form of engagement in worship. But I didn't. Instead, something surprising happened.

As the word reappeared for a final singing of the chorus, I was struck by the lyric in a completely different way, this time noticing the powerful truth and surprising beauty of this unintentional phrase. "I will 'sour' with you above the storm" was not just a misplaced vowel but, perhaps for me and others, a more honest and true statement about the way we relate to God.

I mused that, in my faith life, I seldom feel like I am soaring with God above the storm. More often as I struggle through my life, my doubts and the challenging realities of being part of the broken and beautiful church, my

interactions with God are better described as souring than soaring. I sour with God within the storm.

I don't think I'm alone in this. Reading through the Book of Psalms I find the psalmists also souring with God. Many of the psalms contain lines of complaint, or struggle, even accusation toward God. If you are struggling with God's apparent inaction in your life, or the injustice of the world, you'll find good company in the psalms.

The psalms have many beautiful images of God's greatness, they tell the stories of God's faithfulness and power, they proclaim hallelujahs and declare God's love and goodness. But they also leave room—a lot of room, actually—for complaining, lamenting, being frustrated, questioning and doubting. I think the line "I will sour with you" so beautifully captures this holy, common and healthy, but sometimes under-appreciated and publicly avoided, posture of worship.

What began as a ridiculous fixation on a misspelled word, became the Holy Spirit breathing life into me. A minuscule error became an honest offering of worship and new language for my journeying and wrestling with God. I will continue to sour with God within the storm and invite others to do the same. ❧



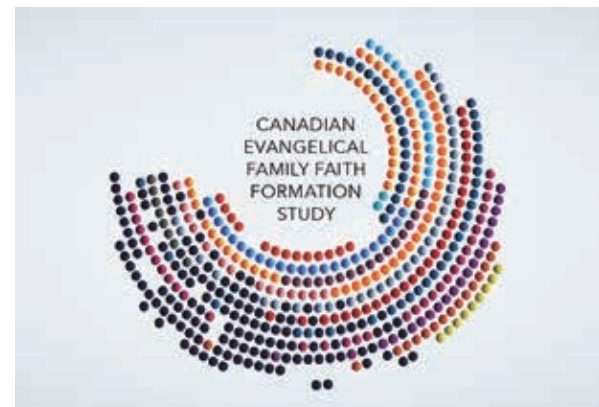
Joshua Penfold (penfoldjoshua@gmail.com) knows that a typo hear and their is probably good for hymn.

Et cetera

Canadian Christians sought for survey

Canadian Christian parents care about passing their faith to their children but may wonder how successful they are. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) and 15 other ministries are conducting research into how Canadian evangelical parents understand their role as disciple makers of their children. The Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Study invites Canadian Christian parents and guardians of children 18 years and younger to take an online survey that will shed light on what helps or hinders them in their role as disciple makers, and how churches and ministries can best support their efforts. The survey is open for participation until June 7. To take part, visit www.research.net/r/89NQRZ7.

Source: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada



VIEWPOINT

Grace, guilt and CO2

12 discussion points on climate

By Will Braun
Senior Writer

1. Grace

There is more grace in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.

That does not let anyone off the hook; it promises that we can face the grim fate of the Earth and the compromises of our lives without being utterly overwhelmed. (And it means I can break bread with sisters and brothers who do not believe there is a hook that anyone needs to be let off of.)

Do this in community. Slowly. Gently. Humbly. Constantly reminding each other that heaven and earth overflow with grace.

3. Moral imperative

I am tempted to wallop people over the head with red-hot climate charts, soul-numbing natural-disaster stats, and the searing questions my kids ask about the integrity of the church.

But politicians, scientists, celebrities, authors, preachers, popes and teenagers have brought climate-related moral imperatives to bear on humanity for a generation, and we are still seemingly headed for doom. Perhaps it is more fruitful to focus on spiritual opportunity (see No. 4) rather than obligation.

4. Love and theology

I like to think about response to the climate crisis less in terms of a duty to reduce emissions than an opportunity for fierce love. To address the climate crisis is to discover something new about love for the Earth, love for next generations, and love for the people most directly impacted by climate chaos. This is the spiritual opportunity.

In 1 John we read: *“If you love one another, God lives in you and God’s love is perfected in you.”* We can realize something new of God’s love. That’s amazing.

5. Skeptics

I have sometimes failed at this, but I believe climate questioners must be heard and respected. The body has many parts. Amputation is not an option. To shift metaphors, echo

chambers are good for neither society nor the soul.

6. Education

On climate, churches often revert to education mode. But most people who want education have already availed themselves. It’s all a click away. The key task is not to create websites or compile resources, but to nurture transformation and broaden dialogue—to humbly listen to the good people who are not inclined to consult existing resources. Why are they hesitant? What do they bring to the table?

7. Collective imagination

Can we really imagine getting to net zero? Although considerable desire for change exists, in our minds and hearts and imaginations we are stuck, understandably.

But when people take bold practical action, it creates fresh space in the collective imagination. Actions of obvious integrity loosen the logjam and give heft to policy advocacy. Integrity is the currency of change.


8. Big change

Recycling, cloth grocery bags and carboard-ish straws are not the game. Big change must be on the table: smaller homes, different vehicles, smaller incomes, different food, less mobility, less consumption—and public policy to support this. Small change counts, but not really if we don’t get to the big stuff. And we need to honestly assess how often small change leads to big, as the theory goes.

9. Activism

For years, I assumed that everyone who cared would follow an activist path. But most people are not activists and never will be. That’s okay.

I’ve organized illegal protests, choked on tear gas and met with cabinet ministers. That stuff is critical. But the body has many parts. Climate should also be the realm of spiritual directors, elders, youth, pastors, entrepreneurs, engineers, and artists. Activists and progressives do not have a monopoly on doing good.



Enough
is enough.

ENVIRONMENTAL ILLNESS NETWORK ON FLICKR.
COM / CREATIVE COMMONS 2.0

2. Guilt

We are guilty of being pretty messed up in a pretty messed-up world. If we pretend otherwise, we spurn grace and rebuff the truth that can set us free.

The danger is that feelings of guilt cripple us. The answer, I believe, is to move toward the guilt, not away from it. Confess it, examine it, pray through it, chip away at its sources.

10. Nature depreciation

Appreciating nature does not reduce emissions. They say if you love it, you'll protect it. Yes and no. People burn a lot of carbon to go love nature. I love hiking, but it's not a virtue.

Is nature a cathedral, eco-amusement park or a performer ready to be captured for our mini virtual audiences? Can we reduce it to something outside us, created for us? Are we at the centre? Or just a part?

More than sanctuary, playground or amateur reality-show stage, nature is the practical context of life. Nature is what we put into our bodies and what comes out. What we put in our cars and

what comes out. Food, waste and fuel constitute our most regular and intimate interactions with the rest of nature. In this, more than our favourite campsite, is where connection, love and transformation are to be found.

11. Simplicity

Near the top of every climate reading list should be *Living More With Less* by Doris Janzen Longacre. It covers guilt, grace, community, love and a gentle path to redemptive action.

On a systemic level, Mennonite churches could explore economic de-growth. No political party will touch it. This could be a valuable strategic

contribution to societal discourse.

12. Contemplation and action

I have been shaped by years of environmental work. Equally formative for me has been the contemplative Christian tradition. Sadly, the gap between these realms is large.

The contemplative realm is one of silence, stillness, waiting, surrender, listening, healing, inner journey. This is not the language of climate campaigners. Conversely, many contemplatives heed not matters of environment and justice.

If climate work is indeed about love, grace and humility, then the work of transforming the world and transforming ourselves are one. The inner journey is the outer journey. We can read Thomas Merton and climate reports antiphonally. Greta Thunberg can inform the Beatitudes, and vice versa. We can examine with every bit of our being what it is to love enemies, and let it transform us.

Rather than pushing an agenda, which short circuits truth, we can invite a range of views, trusting the wisdom God puts in the circle.

We can let go of results and cease grasping for levers of control. We can do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God (placing equal emphasis on the latter two). To reference John 1:16, we can rest in knowing that from the fullness of Christ we have all received grace in place of grace. ☸

I invite readers' confidential responses to seniorwriter@canadianmennonite.org on these 12 points, even if you've never voted NDP or Liberal, and especially if you feel climate discussions never create room for you. Rant, confess, dispute—whatever.

Readers can also send a letter for publication (up to 300 words) to letters@canadianmennonite.org or comment online at canadianmennonite.org/12points.



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'The gift of giving'

Amid economic disaster, people in Lebanon need food

Mennonite Central Committee

Aziza, a 29-year-old mother living in Beirut, Lebanon, spends almost all of her husband's income on hospital visits, oxygen and medication to treat her six-month-old son's lung disease. (*Her full name is not used for her security.*)

The family, who lives in a one-room house with a leaky roof, had funds for little else, including food, until they started receiving monthly food vouchers. Popular Aid for Relief and Development (PARD), a partner of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) distributes the vouchers.

"The quantity of food we're eating increased, and there's more variety in it," says Aziza, expressing the relief of being able to feed her five children, all under eight years of age. "What does a mother want other than seeing her children eating and feeling happy?"

She is one of many people in Lebanon whose kitchen cupboards have emptied as economic hardships have continually devastated the country.

The vouchers enabled Aziza to buy things she previously could not, like chicken, milk and cheese—important sources of protein for her children. The food vouchers also have allowed her to save some money to pay for her son's medical care.

Since 2019, the value of Lebanon's currency has collapsed by nearly 90 percent and food prices have quadrupled, but salaries have remained the same. The already vulnerable country was further shaken in 2020, when a massive explosion of improperly stored ammonium nitrate in Beirut left 300,000 people homeless and thousands injured or dead.

Add political turmoil, the COVID-19 pandemic and decades of resource mismanagement to the mix, and the combination has caused poverty rates and humanitarian needs to skyrocket in Lebanon.

When PARD's staff surveyed Palestinian and Lebanese households in six areas of Lebanon, they discovered that most families reported eating only one meal per day, with children getting slightly more, says Mira Moussa, the humanitarian aid project coordinator at PARD.

Many families couldn't afford meat or even fruits and vegetables.

"In each area you find stories of people who are really suffering," she says.

Seeing the need, MCC and PARD applied for, and received, a grant worth \$761,844 from The Lebanon Humanitarian Fund of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Since October 2021, PARD has been distributing monthly food vouchers, each worth about \$19 per family member, to 900 households. Recipients also attended nutritional awareness sessions in the beginning of the program.

In addition, PARD provides locally purchased hygiene kits, infant-care kits and elder-care kits to 1,701 Lebanese citizens and 3,159 Palestinian refugees. (MCC and PARD help Syrian families through other programs.)

Lebanon hosts the largest per capita number of refugees globally, most recently from the continuing influx of Syrian refugees. They joined existing Palestinian refugees who found refuge there since the Palestinian-Israeli war in 1948 and subsequent conflicts.

Basam is a 46-year-old Palestinian refugee living in Beirut, Lebanon, with his wife and three children. He asked that his real name not be used. Like Aziza, he lives in an impoverished area of the city known as Daouk.

Basam was a barber for many years, but now he cannot afford to rent a shop. He works numerous jobs to support his family, from being a porter and a guard, to selling water, vegetables, perfumes and hats.

"I have been working day and night for 21 years," he says. "Everything's getting more expensive—the least expensive meal now costs a big amount of money, like *mujaddara* (lentils and rice)."

He uses his vouchers to buy rice, oil, chicken and frozen vegetables.

The vouchers aren't enough to cover all his food expenses, "but now there is food in the fridge," he says, whereas what he earned before in a day determined how much he and his family could eat that evening.

The food vouchers offer some stability, allowing recipients to imagine a future instead of just surviving day to day.

"We're grateful to work tirelessly for the sake of supporting those we serve," Moussa says. "Every distribution, the beneficiaries come excited to collect the vouchers. They are deeply grateful for this assistance."

"When helping such families who are suffering due to the hard economic situation that we are living [in] nowadays," Moussa says, "I found the gift of giving in the eyes of those people." ❧



PHOTO COURTESY OF PARD-2022

Aziza, left, receives a monthly food voucher from a staff member working for Popular Aid for Relief and Development, an MCC partner.

Indigenous-Settler Relations program transitioned to regional churches

Nationwide church will shift to a supporting, rather than a leading, role

Mennonite Church Canada
WINNIPEG

Mennonite Church Canada is transitioning its Indigenous-Settler Relations (ISR) program to the five regional churches that make up its nationwide community of faith.

The decision comes out of Joint Council meetings held on April 9 and 10, during which the need for the program to have regionally based expression across MC Canada was affirmed.

“Since Mennonite Church Canada’s restructuring in 2017, our work has been to activate engagement with nationwide ministries within our regional churches and their congregations,” says Calvin Quan, MC Canada’s moderator. “The strong regional and congregational ISR efforts being developed across our regional churches mean we can now shift toward supporting these efforts rather than leading them.”

Due to the creation of a part-time associate executive minister position and a part-time climate action position at MC Canada, and the shift towards regional expression, the nationwide ISR position will be reduced to half-time.

The full-time ISR program director position ended on April 11. Steve Heinrichs, who has served in this role for 10-and-a-half years, will no longer continue in the position. He will remain for a short time to conclude current projects and help transition relationships with ecumenical and nationwide partners.

“I am incredibly grateful to Mennonite Church Canada for the opportunity to serve in this role,” says Heinrichs. “I have learned so much, and I pray that I have also shared and given much. Though my time in this office has ended, the work continues, and it’s never been more urgent. Indigenous

peoples have called the church to paths of truth-telling, repair and reconciliation. I think we’ve made a difference. And with growing courage and risk, we can make an even greater difference.”

Moving forward, the ISR position at MC Canada will focus primarily on information sharing and collaboration between regional church Indigenous relations working groups. It will also facilitate resourcing on Indigenous justice issues and relationship-building with Indigenous

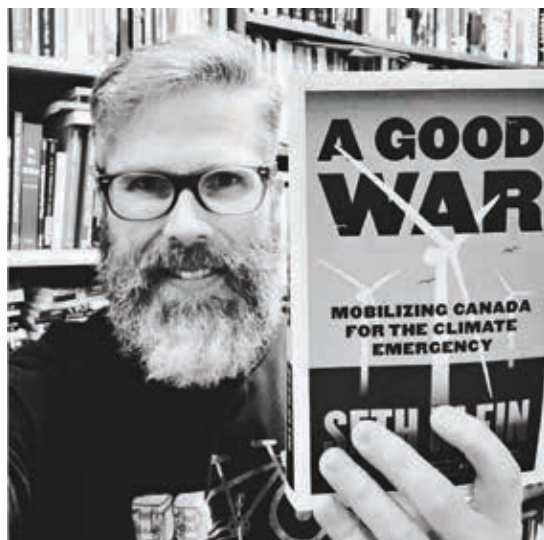
acknowledged in a recent interview Heinrichs’s mobilization of the Mennonite church community around Bill C-262 and Bill C-15, which passed last June, ensuring that Canadian law is consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

More recently, Heinrichs led MC Canada’s first community learning series on decolonization and decarbonization, at a time when the nationwide church recently answered calls to acknowledge and prioritize its response to the climate emergency.

“I’m grateful for Steve’s years of service to the nationwide church, in which he raised the profile of Indigenous-Settler Relations and has provided leadership not only within MC Canada but also through the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, in significant times for the journey of reconciliation,” says Leah Reesor-Keller, the executive minister of MC Eastern Canada. “Steve . . . has helped to set a strong foundation as we look to deepen our regional ISR work. I’m thankful for our MC Canada colleagues who are in ministry together with us as we seek God’s healing and hope for the world.”

Indigenous-Settler Relations has been a nationwide program priority for Mennonite Church Canada since 1959, when it was called Mennonite Pioneer Mission. In 1973, it became Native Ministries, then changed to Indigenous Relations in 2012, and ISR in 2017. ✎

To read a more extensive article on the MC Canada staffing changes by CM senior writer Will Braun, visit canadianmennonite.org/braun-isr-2022.



STEVE HEINRICHS' INSTAGRAM PHOTO

Earlier this year, Steve Heinrichs cohosted a learning series on the climate crisis based on the book *A Good War*.

communities in the regions.

Heinrichs has worked with each of these working groups, encouraging regional and local engagement with Indigenous justice issues and communities. He leaves behind a host of initiatives, campaigns and publications from his time with MC Canada.

Former MP Romeo Saganash



Praising God together across barriers

By Karla Braun

Mennonite World Conference / Mennonite Central Committee

“I can see one family with a lot of members, worshipping the same Father,” says Natacha Kyendrebeogo of Burkina Faso.

She is one of four young people serving through the Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN) on the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly 2022 team in Indonesia.

YAMEN is a program that places emphasis on expanding the fellowship between churches in the Anabaptist tradition and developing young leaders around the globe.

All four members of the Assembly 2022 team are working on MWC’s five-day global gathering. Assemblies happen once every six years, and the YAMEN members of the planning team are looking forward to being part of the community meeting of worldwide Anabaptist-Mennonites in Indonesia.

“The Global Church Village, the programs, the workshops—I have this whole picture of a crowd that is so joyful, doing things together,” says Loyce Twongirwe of Uganda. A filmmaker, she serves on the communications team for Assembly 2022.

“I am looking forward to creating lasting friendships, getting to know each country, how people live, how they are as a congregation,” says Sunil Kadmaset of India.

While waiting for visas for Indonesia, Kadmaset and Ananda Mohan Murmu began to get to know the wider Anabaptist family as they served with Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India (MCSFI).

Kadmaset, from the Brethren in Christ in Cuttack, Odisha, and Murmu, from a Bharatiya Jukta Christa Prachar Mandali congregation in Balarampur, West Bengal, lived among Mennonite Church India members in Chhattisgarh. They collaborated with Anabaptist-Mennonite organizations from eight national churches in India and Nepal.

Murmu was drawn to YAMEN after hearing from his friends who participated



PHOTO BY LORENZO FELLYCYANDO

YAMENers experience Indonesia. Clockwise from bottom left: Assembly 2022 staffer Lorenzo Fellycyando, Rut Arsari, YAMENer Ananda Mohan Murmu, YAMENer Sunil Kadmaset, YAMENer Natacha Kyendrebeogo, YAMENer Loyce Twongirwe, and Assembly 2022 staffer Lydia Suyanti.

in MCC’s International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) and how the program had an impact on their perspective. Alongside MCSFI director Benjamin Nand, he called on gardening and peace projects, and he visited churches with MWC regional representative Cynthia Peacock. “People’s joy gives me my greatest joy,” he says.

“We are different states, different castes, [yet] we are still as brothers and sisters,” says Kadmaset. With MCSFI, he met people who suffered from COVID-19, yet, with help from the Mennonite family and encouragement from the Spirit, they persevered. “To know each other from eight conferences—I am content with that.”

Kyendrebeogo also tasted the fellowship of the global family before she even left home. After a military coup in Burkina Faso, she says, “I received a lot of mail encouragement from those who don’t know

me. They pray for my country; they pray for this situation. I couldn’t imagine the fellowship. I enjoy the love, the encouragement.”

As they tend their tasks, the YAMENers are spurred on by their hopes for Assembly 2022.

Twongirwe started her work from an office in Uganda and now is with the team in Indonesia. “We are advancing videos: how to register, how to book hotels,” she says, “so, when they reach [the] event, they don’t feel lost, confused, left out. It’s a great responsibility to us to make sure it goes perfect as we picture.”

“When I close my eyes, I see lots of people around me, . . . with people from Africa, U.S.A., Canada, we are together, we are praising God. Between them I am in that moment, in that place, that gives me very big joy,” says Murmu. ☿

MDS Canada volunteers 'like a bunch of angels'

By John Longhurst
Mennonite Disaster Service Canada

Mario Loutef has been working on his flooded home in Princeton, B.C. since the water receded more than three months ago.

"It's exhausting," says the 59-year-old, semi-retired carpenter. "There was over a metre of water in the house. We lost everything."

He still vividly remembers the first time he came back to his house after the disaster. "I broke down," he says of the damage.

Loutef and his partner, Melody, moved to Princeton four years ago from the Fraser Valley city of Abbotsford for a quieter small-town life.

"We had lived in big cities all our lives," he says. "We wanted to step back from the bustle."

Life was good for the couple, who have no children, until the night the Tulameen River roared into town.

"I was out sandbagging when we heard the dike had broken," he says. "We were told to evacuate."

He went back to his house and grabbed what he could. "The water was well over my boots," he says of the walk out of the flood zone.

When he came back to the house after the water was gone, it was a ruin.

"Those days are a blur," Loutef says, noting he didn't know where to begin to start the recovery process. But then Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada offered to help.

"They helped me get the damaged stuff out of the house and removed the mud," he says of the volunteers. "It was a lot of work. If not for MDS, I don't know what I would have done."

Now the volunteers are back, helping him repair his home.

"The people from MDS are like a bunch of angels," he says. "Absolute angels, for sure. Without them I don't know where we would be."



MDS CANADA PHOTO BY SHELLEY DUECK

MDS volunteer Gordon Baergen, right, is pictured with Princeton, B.C., homeowner Mario Loutef.

The couple is still living in a nearby hotel, but now there's a new furnace, the electricity is back on and drywall is going up. There is still no water, though. "The plumbing isn't finished yet," Loutef says.

He's also helping with the repairs, using his carpentry skills. When the house is finished, he knows just what he is going to do.

"I'm going to volunteer with MDS," Loutef says. "It's something I have to do when I look at what they've done for me." ❧

More volunteers are needed for flood response in B.C. For more information, or to volunteer, visit www.mds.org.



‘Formed in the wilderness, leading in hope’

Church leadership conference looks to Early Church for inspiration

By Heather Grennan Gary

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary / Mennonite Church U.S.A.
ELKHART, IND.

It has been a rough two years for pastors and church leaders. During the early weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown, they scrambled to organize online worship services. As the pandemic progressed, they provided pastoral support for church members who were sick and those who had lost loved ones. They contended with conflicts over masks and vaccines, and handled financial and spiritual crises. And more than ever before, they walked with their congregations through uncertainties, tragedies, trauma and grief.

Organizers of Pastors & Leaders: Deep Faith 2022, a joint conference of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) and Mennonite Church U.S.A. Faith Formation, chose the theme, “Formed in the wilderness, leading in hope” to address these challenges. Pastors and church leaders from across the United States and Canada participated in the Feb. 21 to 24 conference, with 141 in attendance on the AMBS campus in Elkhart and 64 participating online.

Sibonokuhle Ncube, an AMBS master of divinity student from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, set the tone for the conference in her opening sermon on Feb. 21, saying the wilderness “could be physical ecological

space or a metaphor for either self-initiated or externally initiated hard times of trial and testing.”

Ncube noted that the suffering and struggles fomented by the added layer of the pandemic have challenged the church to develop a mature patience that anchors its hope in God’s loving kindness as suggested by Psalm 107.

Conference participants engaged with the theme in several ways each day. Eleanor Kreider led daily teaching sessions that drew insights from the book *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*, written by her late husband, Alan Kreider.

“The early Christian teachers pointed to Jesus as the exemplar of patience,” she said. “They were saying that Christians needed to have a strong, disciplined stance of life that would make it possible to cope with difficult, dangerous and uncertain circumstances. Patience is hope with muscle.”

Tom Yoder Neufeld, professor emeritus of religious studies at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont., led a Bible study each morning. He tied together the themes of wilderness, patience, formation and hope with a focus on the Letter to the Hebrews,

which he described as a sermon preached to believers living in the late first-century Roman “wilderness.”

On the final morning of the conference, participants gathered shortly after the news broke that Russia had invaded Ukraine. Yoder Neufeld acknowledged this new wilderness at the beginning of his talk, saying: “The more the wilderness closes in around us, the more that wilderness becomes experiential for us, the more daunting the whole notion of leading in hope becomes. If we’re being honest, we are often as, or more, perplexed and disheartened than those we are to lead in dangerous times.”

Rolando Sosa Granado, a pastor of Piedra Viva Mennonite Church in Elkhart and a therapist for children and adolescents, based his sending sermon on Jeremiah 1:4-10. “God has promised you that when you go through the desert, when you go through difficulties, he will be there for you,” he said. “Why? Because he chose you and he is faithful.”

Videos of the featured conference sessions are available online at [ambsmc.org/pastorsandleaders](https://www.ambsmc.org/pastorsandleaders).



AMBS PHOTO BY PETER RINGENBERG

Rolando Sosa Granados, a pastor and therapist for children and adolescents, gave the sending sermon at the Pastors & Leaders: Deep Faith 2022 conference.

Place yourself as a witness for peace

Global Anabaptist Peace Network

“How do we amplify voices? How do we nourish acts of resistance already in place?”

These questions were raised last year during “Ubíquese,” a webinar from the Global Anabaptist Peace Network (GAPN), an emerging network of peace organizations connected to Mennonite World Conference (MWC).

“By choosing the name *ubíquese* in Spanish (which could be translated as “place yourself” in English), the goal of the webinar was to inspire discussion about what it means to witness to peace in times of the COVID-19 pandemic and in contexts dealing with injustice,” said Andres Pacheco Lozano, GAPN’s coordinator.

The webinar had two focal points: past and present injustices against Indigenous peoples in Canada and the recent national protests, cases of police brutality and implementation of peace accords in Colombia.

Two peace activists from each context reflected on key challenges for peacebuilding in those realities, on how they were participating in addressing them, and on how they envisioned the international

community could be in solidarity with these two contexts.

“Where there is relationship, real reconciliation happens,” said Adrian Jacobs, keeper of the circle of the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre in Manitoba. “When you see suffering, you move.”

“We need to prioritize those who are suffering most, those who are most vulnerable,” said Steve Heinrichs, now former Indigenous-Settler Relations director for Mennonite Church Canada, an MWC member church. “This is an urgent moment in the climate crisis,” he said, where both international and Indigenous Canadian concerns converge.

From Colombia, Francisco Mosquera, founder of Edupaz, asked the Anabaptist family for solidarity. He called for a body to monitor the Colombian reality to create a record of action.

Angélica Rincón of Justapaz called

for solidarity in the form of interaction. “Mutually, we can accompany one another, recognizing skills, wisdom and experiences,” she said.

Both organizations are GAPN members.

At this year’s MWC assembly, to be held virtually and in person in Indonesia in July, attendees will have opportunity to attend several workshops conducted by GAPN members. ☘



GAPN SCREEN SHOT

Members of GAPN, an emerging network of peace organizations connected to Mennonite World Conference, met virtually last October.



MDS PHOTO BY PETER ANDRES

Three grants worth \$400,000 will enable Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada to help homeowners affected by last November’s floods in B.C. Grants of \$210,000 from Fraserway RV in Abbotsford, B.C., and \$100,000 from the Abbotsford Community Foundation were given to help MDS repair homes in the Fraser Valley. Also providing funding for work in B.C. was Canadian Lutheran World Relief with a grant of \$90,000. ‘We are thankful for this support, which will help us to help people impacted by the floods in B.C. to get back home,’ says Ross Penner, director of Canadian operations. ‘These grants will go a long way toward enabling us to achieve that goal.’ Pictured: MDS volunteers Mark Rempel, Shirley Gotzke and Fred Rempel do repairs at a home in B.C.’s Fraser Valley.

PEOPLE



PHOTO BY EMILY SUMMACH

Leaders from Carrot River Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church Saskatchewan pray with Pastor Kevin Koop, second from left, at his ordination service on May 1. Koop has been serving as pastor of the Carrot River congregation since 2019.

Staff changes

Pastoral transitions in Manitoba

Dan Kehler concluded his ministry at Altona Mennonite Church on April 30, Man., after serving there for almost 12 years as lead pastor.



He previously worked at Altona Berghaler Mennonite Church for 11 years, first as youth pastor, then as associate pastor. While he is still determining whether he will take on another full-time pastoral position, or officially retire from ministry, he hopes to explore intentional interim ministry work. Kehler has an undergraduate degree in education and has partially completed a master of arts degree with a concentration in theological studies at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg.

Laura Funk began as a half-time associate pastor with a focus on seniors ministry at Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg on May 1.



Over the past year, she served as spiritual director-in-residence for Mennonite Church Manitoba in a half-time volunteer position, planning retreats, leading workshops and giving spiritual direction. She previously served as chaplain in a personal-care home for three years and in leadership in an ecumenical congregation in Winnipeg for five years. Funk continues to do spiritual direction through her practice, Butterfly Journeys, which she has been doing for more than 10 years. She earned a master of arts in Christian ministry degree from CMU.

— BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

News brief

CMU honours LeBlancs with 2022 Pax Award

WINNIPEG—Theologians and community organizers Terry and Bev LeBlanc were honoured with the 2022 Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) Pax Award on April 30. CMU president Cheryl Pauls presented the award to the LeBlancs at CMU's graduation ceremony, during which Terry gave the commencement address. "The CMU Pax Award is presented annually in honour of a lifetime of exemplary service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society," Pauls said. The LeBlancs are in their 50th year of marriage and, in those years, have committed themselves to constructing intercultural relationships through community education and development practices. In the late 1990s, they, along with a larger group, collaboratively created and launched the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies (NAIITS), an Indigenous learning community. Terry, a Mi'kmaq-Acadian, is the founding chair and current director of NAIITS. Bev works in various modes to support the development of theological capacities in the Indigenous community. Pauls said, "In generating an expansive field of Indigenous theological scholarship, Terry and Bev are vital to the reckoning and transformation happening in the church today across many global and denominational bodies."

—CMU STORY AND PHOTO



Terry LeBlanc, left, the founding chair of the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies, accepts the 2022 CMU Pax Award on behalf of himself and his wife Terry, from CMU president Cheryl Pauls on April 30.



ONLINE NOW!

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Synesthesia and art

A university student talks about the neurological condition she lives with and how it impacts her music-making.

canadianmennonite.org/synesthesia



MWC doubles on-site participants for Assembly 17

Mennonite World Conference has raised attendance numbers for the upcoming assembly in Indonesia to 1,250.

canadianmennonite.org/doubles



Joy, abundance and cookies

Suzanne Gross reflects on what happened when her Muslim friends asked her to make "Mennonite cookies."

canadianmennonite.org/cookies



Second season of *The MennoCast* underway

Moses Falco talks about the second season of *The MennoCast*, the podcast he co-hosts with two other pastors.

canadianmennonite.org/mennocast

News brief

Columbia Bible College celebrates commencement



Graduates of Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, B.C., celebrate their academic achievements following their commencement ceremony on April 23.

ABBOTSFORD, B.C.—On April 23, Columbia Bible College celebrated the achievements of 113 students graduating from degree, diploma and certificate programs. The ceremony included speeches from class valedictorian Darian Atwood, commencement speaker Sharon Simpson, and worship led by Columbia's travelling ministry team. After two years of graduation ceremonies hosted online, students, families and faculty were incredibly thankful to celebrate together. "We have not had the opportunity to celebrate a spring graduation ceremony since April of 2019, so it was a joy to welcome graduates and their families to this celebration," said Gil Dueck, Columbia's academic dean. "We are so proud of the way our students have persevered, especially through these past two years. It was a rich time of celebrating the achievements of our grads and being challenged to lives of faithfulness in response to God's call."

—COLUMBIA BIBLE COLLEGE STORY AND PHOTO

NEW in 2022

CM Events – online panel discussions



Join Online Media Manager **Aaron Epp** and guests to talk about current events in the church and the world.



May 25: The climate crisis:
How Canadian Mennonites might best respond

Watch *Canadian Mennonite* for details or go to
www.canadianmennonite.org/events

All events on Zoom, 8:00 pm ET



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Meeting pain with compassion

By Jessica Evans
Alberta Correspondent

“I can talk about mental health and, specifically, suicide risk, because nearly every day I ask someone if they have thoughts of wishing to die.” Ruth Bergen Braun is a recently retired Canadian certified counsellor who has first-hand experience with clients who think of suicide or have lost someone to suicide.

In a sermon that she preached at Lethbridge (Alta.) Mennonite Church, she answered the questions: “How do we view Christians who chose this path? Have they given up on God’s help?”

The church community in Lethbridge has a question box. Pastor Ryan Dueck encourages his congregation to write questions down and put them in the box, so that the congregation might learn more as the Body of Christ.

“I commend whoever asked the question for broaching the subject,” Bergen Braun said in her opening. “Simply doing so tells me that [Lethbridge Mennonite] is a safe space, and for that I am very grateful.”

She admitted that this is a touchy subject, stating that suicide is not often spoken of outside of the mental-health field and is still riddled with stigma. In the past, suicide was seen as a selfish choice, a sign of weakness. Currently in the mental-health community, death by suicide is seen as a symptom of depression.

Some argue with this and want to empathize that there is always an element of choice when someone dies by his or her own hand, but the link to mental illness is well documented, she said.

“Regardless of your perspective, whether suicidal thoughts [or] behaviour is attributed to mental illness or choice, like addiction, suicidal behaviour is always a result of pain,” she said, adding, “If someone speaks to us of wishing to die, we need to ask, ‘Where’s the pain?’”

She noted that, although progress has been made, mental illness continues to be stigmatized in the church.

“I recently had a client from a conservative group who had been diagnosed by a reputable physician as having both depression and panic disorder,” she told the congregation. “Her church, however, told her that this was simply an indication that she wasn’t right with God. No compassion; no understanding. Their response to her illness did not serve to bring her closer to God, but further from them.”



IMAGE BY RUTH BERGEN BRAUN

**‘If someone speaks to us of wishing to die, we need to ask, “Where’s the pain?”’
(Ruth Bergen Braun)**

Bergen Braun read Colossians 3:12: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

“So what can we do to be compassionate, kind, humble, meek and patient?” she asked. “Of course, we can listen. But we can also educate ourselves about suicide and suicidal thinking. We can learn how to respond to a friend who says, ‘I just want to go to sleep and not wake up.’ We can take people seriously—not to dismiss their pain but to acknowledge it and point them in the direction of good professional help.”

With a common thread in suicidal thinking being “deep shame,” an inability to forgive oneself for past wrongs, and

a belief in being unforgivable and of no value, Bergen Braun encouraged everyone to be more forgiving of each other and of themselves.

“When Paul writes in verse 13, ‘just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive,’ I believe we can hear the echo of ‘you must also forgive yourself,’” she said.

Have suicidal people given up on God’s help? To this Bergen Braun said “perhaps,” noting that the three markers for suicidal thinking are: hopeless, helpless, worthless. The cloudy thinking of depression feeds these, but that doesn’t mean people should give up helping.

“A depressed person, however, often lacks the energy to reach out and will withdraw and isolate, to the exasperation of his or her therapist, friends and family,” Bergen Braun said. “A depressed person won’t answer the phone, won’t reply to texts, emails or other messages. We may wish to help alleviate this person’s loneliness but may be stymied at every turn.”

As for what keeps people safe from suicide, Bergen Braun acknowledged the church in this regard: “Connection. People who love them and are there for them. This is where we, as the church, are called to be, even when it’s hard. Even when we’re pushed away. Even when it takes 15 phone calls to get an answer. Even when our patience is tried.”

She encouraged the church to mediate helplessness when reaching out with words and actions. Simply say to a struggling friend or family member, “Here, I will help you,” or, “I can’t help you, but I know someone who can.” And people can pray in addition to their actions.

In conclusion, Bergen Braun said: “There is good news in God’s mercy, forgiveness and love, and in us. Christ-in-us. Those assembled here, and those who cannot be with us today, may we recognize the pain that puts others at risk as we go out to love and serve the Lord.” ❧

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

‘You don’t need words to do it’

*Art therapists share experiences with the transformative practice*By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

Sometimes people go through experiences that are too difficult to talk about or too confusing to articulate. Art therapy helps many people process and heal when at first the words are just too hard to find.

“One of the real gifts of art therapy is that the inexpressible can come out in lines and shapes. . . . You don’t need words to do it,” says

Lauren Harms, the pastor of Calgary Inter-Mennonite Church who works as an art therapist at her practice, Lily Inspired. She earned a dual diploma in art therapy and expressive arts facilitation from the Winnipeg Holistic Expressive Arts Therapy Institute in February 2021.

Creative outlets like music and writing have always been helpful in caring for her mental health. When she was caring for her great-aunt who had dementia, she was working in an environment where a lot of lonely people existed.

“I wanted more tools to work with people and to provide safe spaces, but also creative spaces for people to have fun,” she says. “Sometimes we just need to play.”

When Jungyeon Jennifer Lee began volunteering with students at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) for her art therapy internship, she was afraid no one would attend any of her sessions. But she needn’t have worried. Students filled up her schedule, eager to grow from art therapy’s unique approach.

“They said, ‘It’s really fun and insightful



Lauren Harms



PHOTO BY AMAURI MEJIA ON UNSPLASH

Paint hands.

at the same time. I’ve never heard that therapy is fun,” she says with a laugh.

Lee, who attends Charleswood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, works full time as a financial officer for the provincial government, while also studying art therapy full time. She is graduating this spring from the Kutenai Art Therapy Institute in Nelson, B.C., where she studies as a distance student.

Her passion for art therapy began 20 years ago, when she was preparing to immigrate to Canada from South Korea. “I was hopeful but also afraid of a new life in a new country. I was praying to God: ‘What is the purpose of my life?’ because at that time I felt a little lost,” she says.

Then one summer night she dreamt of stars filling the sky, moving and dancing together. “Then the stars began

to embroider the sky,” she says, and they spelled “Art Therapy.”

“I woke up from the dream with overwhelming joy,” she says. She didn’t even know what the English word “therapy” meant, so she ran to the dictionary to look it up. “So art therapy entered my life as a striking, star-like image in a dream in 2001. . . . It became my constellation, my life force.”

When she suffered a concussion during her third year in Canada, she struggled to speak, write and walk for a year. “That was [a] really hopeless and helpless situation, and I was in a deep depression,” she says. “Art making was really healing for me to get out of the despair.”

Haeon Grace Kang, too, knows firsthand the life-changing power of therapy, as it played a huge role in her healing



Jungyeon Jennifer Lee

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

and recovery from mental illness. She is now studying in the master of marriage and family therapy program at the University of Winnipeg, while simultaneously studying fine arts at the University of Manitoba.

“I hope to integrate these two fields in my practice by combining family systems theories with art expression and interpretation,” she says. “Art is so interesting because it’s an expression of who someone is and all the experiences that culminated in the person they are today.”

Art can also reveal things that people don’t know about themselves.

Harms has had clients who drew one image and yet another image appeared within the art that was a complete surprise



**Haeon Grace
Kang**

to them. This ended up leading the therapy in an unexpected direction. The same thing has happened to her, and she still has the art hanging on her wall; it holds a lot of meaning for her.

“I find that giving people space to be creative allows them to create their own healing,” she says. “I think that people are inclined to work towards their own wholeness.”

Every art therapy session looks so different, depending on the client. Usually though, it begins with an activity that connects the therapist and client, and settles them both into the moment, like deep breathing, spontaneous drawing or an imagining activity. Then, with the client leading the direction of the session, often a lot of time is spent on creating art, whether

it’s with clay, watercolours, or cutting and folding paper. Integral for clients is debriefing the process and considering the end product—describing the art, noticing how their body feels, talking about their feelings and writing about the process.

It’s all about being curious, Harms says: “The art is so interesting because it’s both very simple and holds a lot of wisdom. You don’t have to be an artist to put something on a page, but it’s just a space to hold what’s going on.”

For created beings of a Creator God, the act of creating can be a transformative and spiritual one.

“Art, when approached prayerfully, can become an act of worship and, because it is worship, it has the ability to transform the participant,” Kang says. ❧



Pottery hands.

PHOTO BY ALEX JONES ON UNSPLASH

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

Moral distress in pandemic times

Cindy Wallace brings awareness of mental-health challenge to national radio audience

By Emily Summach

Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON

Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, Cindy Wallace was feeling out of sorts. Each new day seemed to bring more bad news, more uncertainty from leaders around the world about how to manage the virus, and more divisive politicking on all sides. In the midst of the unease she was feeling, Wallace was reading *Standing at the Edge* by Joan Halifax.

"It was in that book that I encountered the idea of moral distress," Wallace says. "Really simply, moral distress is seeing something that is wrong, having the sense that you could fix it, but you aren't in a position to do so. Usually, because you lack the power to fix it or make the change that would need to happen. It's seeing a way forward, but having no power to enact. The term was first coined about nurses in the 1980s, and again about soldiers in the 1990s, who lived with this terrible sense that they couldn't do anything."

The idea of moral distress resonated deeply with Wallace.

"I had these moments of frustration about what was happening," she says. "Watching the challenges of governmental leaders wrestling with questions about whether or not to have restrictions or masking to protect vulnerable people. There was definitely frustration at points, with institutional leaders, and I felt moral distress around that."

Wallace, who is associate professor of English at St. Thomas More College and the University of Saskatchewan, turned to writing to share her "aha moment" about the dissonance she felt.

"It was this tiny, little idea that I shared as a Facebook post, and a friend suggested I explore moral distress in long-form writing," Wallace says.

In June 2021, Wallace published an article in *Plough* magazine, "When



following the news becomes too distressing." Her thoughts on the subject soon gained a national audience. In January of this year, a producer from CBC Radio's faith program *Tapestry* emailed Wallace.

"The producer said they had read my article and would like to interview me on the idea of moral distress," Wallace says. "I explained that I wasn't an expert on the subject, and they said they were looking for someone to share their personal thoughts and experiences on the idea."

In early February, she recorded a half-hour interview with *Tapestry*.

"The host, Mary Hynes, was warm and lovely to talk to," Wallace says. "We ended up talking about the problem of evil, my experience of hospitalization for my appendicitis, our tiny church plant, and God's goodness in the face of suffering."

The interview struck a chord with listeners. After the interview aired, Wallace received emails from people across Canada, from all walks of life.

She says: "People have said, 'I needed this language; thank you so much.' Or tell me their stories of their life's difficulties. Or ask, 'Where can I read more about this?' Or share their faith journeys. I've heard from a range of people saying, 'These are the words for this thing I've been experiencing.'"

While moral distress is not classified as a mental illness on its own, its impact on mental health is notable. Prolonged moral distress can manifest in symptoms similar to that of anxiety or depression.

Wallace's research on moral distress offers some wisdom on how to move through it in a healthy way. In particular, by naming the experience.

"In the emails that I received after the interview, people said, 'You know, I had this blend of fatigue, hopelessness, and thought the problem was with me,'" she says, adding, "Language is healing; you're not your own pathology. People need to be seen and validated. We just need to find words for what we're experiencing."

For Wallace personally, walking through moral distress has reiterated her belief in the importance of a faithful community.

"That which helps with mental health helps with moral distress," she says. "I still try to make the change I want to see, even if I don't think it will do any good. The work of trying to lean toward the world we want reaffirms our own sense of agency; giving in to hopelessness only makes it worse."

"We can also remember parts of the past where things have changed," she says. "Walter Brueggemann, in his books, talks about how Israel had this remembrance of God's faithfulness, telling those stories and looking back at the history, things that have shifted. I think the world doesn't just get better and better, but I see stories of faithfulness of God in movements. I try to seek out communities of shared concern; fellow travellers on the journey. I've learned a lot from Black female theologians and womanist theology about community care. Nobody has to be a hero and it's a collective movement. Never just on you." ❧

While moral distress is not classified as a mental illness on its own, its impact on mental health is notable. Prolonged moral distress can manifest in symptoms similar to that of anxiety or depression.

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

New mental-health website consolidates resources

By Angelika Dawson
Communitas Supportive Care Society
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

Communitas Supportive Care Society has launched a new peer-support website, a comprehensive site that puts mental-health resources as close as the click of a mouse.

The effectiveness of peer support lies in its simplicity: People with lived experience of mental-health challenges support others on the journey towards mental wellness. Peer-support workers (PSWs) truly understand the people they serve.

Adrienne Roberts has been a PSW with Communitas for nearly four years. She sees the difference that such a simple connection can make in people's lives. It can be the first time that people feel they have been heard.

"My favourite part of Peer Support is when the people we serve open up and share their struggles and where their journey has taken them," she says. "There's a lot of empathy in our work."

Behind this simple formula is a wealth of resources. Communitas has been offering "Peer Support" since 1998, and has worked with Fraser Health to standardize services, training, PSWs, developing recovery peer-support training, and delivering and providing training in its Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP®).

Communitas is now the sole provider of Peer Support services for the entire Fraser Health region.

Jacqui Toews, program director for Communitas, says that being asked to expand its services in this way was an affirmation. "It is a reflection of the good work that our PSWs and our managers have been doing over the years," she says.

With this growth came the need for a consolidated space for delivery of information and resources. The new website was the brainchild of Patrick Raymond, coordinator of Peer Support for the Fraser Health region. He felt that there needed



Adrienne Roberts, left, and Patrick Raymond are peer support workers with Communitas. They are excited about the launch of their new peer-support website.

The effectiveness of Peer Support lies in its simplicity: People with lived experience of mental-health challenges support others on the journey towards mental wellness.

to be one place where people could access information about one-to-one support and WRAP, and access a variety of groups, as well as training opportunities.

"The website is for anyone who is interested in recovery," he says, adding that he is grateful for all the PSWs who have helped to bring these services together

under one umbrella. "I believe we are stronger and better for it," he says. "As one big team with a common purpose and a standard practice, we are able to deliver Peer Support services across the region. This is better for both our PSWs and for the people we serve." ❧



To learn more, visit peersupportcsc.com/.

Communitas Supportive Care Society is a faith-based, registered charity providing care in communities across British Columbia to those living with developmental disabilities, mental-health challenges and acquired brain injury.

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

FILM REVIEW

A poignant, honest look at grief

All My Puny Sorrows.

Directed by Michael McGowan. Starring Alison Pill, Sarah Gadon, Mare Winningham, Amybeth McNulty and Donal Logue. 2021. 103 minutes.

Reviewed by Mandy Elliott

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

Toward the end of *All My Puny Sorrows*, Lottie (Mare Winningham) sits in her Toronto apartment comforting her sobbing daughter, Yoli (Alison Pill), noting, “The pain of letting go of grief is just as painful—even more painful—than the grief itself.”

This sentiment colours the film’s entirety. At its core, the movie, based on Miriam Toews’s 2014 novel of the same name, is about grief: the grief of loss, of death, and of life, and of how much of each we can take.

Written, produced and directed by Canadian filmmaker Michael McGowan, the film opens on a wide shot of the barren prairie, where a mousy-looking man in a black overcoat stands next to some train tracks. We see multiple angles of him, as well as close-ups and full shots, documenting his existence from all sides. Then, while the narrator, Yoli, muses about how long life is supposed to last, the man, later identified as Yoli’s father Jake (Donal Logue), carefully removes his glasses, folds them, and places them on the ground before stepping in front of an oncoming train.

In the following scene, set years later, Yoli fights with her teenage daughter, Nora (Amybeth McNulty), as Yoli’s 16-year marriage comes to an end, and calls her sister Elf (Sarah Gadon), for camaraderie and impressive literary banter, as she always does. But soon Yoli’s personal problems are left to fester when Elf attempts suicide and Yoli, bereft of energy, but unwilling to lose yet another person, tries to convince her to live.

Part of the family’s pain comes from

church trauma. In flashbacks we see Jake’s pain when his conservative Mennonite church commandeers his family’s home for the pastor’s use. Later, Jake sits at the dining room table with two church leaders who insist that young Elf refrain from higher education or face shunning.

In another scene, when Elf is recovering in the hospital, a church member lets himself into her room and ignorantly insists, “When you give yourself to God, you don’t feel pain anymore. Shall we pray together for your soul?” Elf, who clearly isn’t interested in letting this man anywhere near her soul, takes her top off, and the scandalized man slinks out of the room. While the film certainly flirts with issues of existence and spiritual evolution, it has little patience with religion that imposes itself unbidden.

Alison Pill leads the cast with her heart-rending interpretation of a woman who is clinging to a cliff’s edge herself after dealing with more loss than seems humanly possible. The film depends on Pill’s unwavering chemistry with Gadon and Winningham, which commands the audience’s attention and emotions throughout, and offers a naturalistic depiction of family turmoil.

Filmed in North Bay, Ont., the movie is beautifully shot and features a stunning combination of cool blue and warm orange hues, depending on the atmosphere of a given scene. Even more noteworthy is the film’s attention to physical and aural space. Elf is often shown in full shots, alone or singled out in rooms bereft of colour, while Yoli is often filmed in close-up while



IMAGE COURTESY OF AMPS PRODUCTIONS INC.

Mare Winningham in *All My Puny Sorrows*.

surrounded by rich colours and ephemera of a life being lived. Throughout the film sound is treated as a separate character who comes and goes at just the right moments, allowing for the score and dialogue to be offset by extended moments of silence that reflect both the narrative tension and the need for a break from it.

Now showing in select theatres, *All My Puny Sorrows* is a film in which everything is difficult and nothing lets up. As such, it offers a poignant and honest look at grief in which, just as in life, not everything gets resolved happily or even at all. ☘

Mandy Elliott is an assistant professor of film studies and English at Booth University College in Winnipeg. She attends Hope Mennonite Church.

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

VIEWPOINT

Mental health, trauma and the non-profit sector

Rebekah Sears

“You can’t pour from an empty cup.” The words came from a place of kindness and empathy, from someone who knew the feeling. It hit me to my core, because I was empty.

It was 2015, days after the photo of the Syrian child Alan Kurdi was on the front page of newspapers around the world. This was the moment when the world finally awoke to the realities of the global refugee crisis. Now the images were all over the news. It was relentless; the suffering seemingly endless.

This wasn’t the first time, nor the last time I’ve felt completely exhausted, overwhelmed and burned out by my work.

Within civil society organizations (CSOs) in the non-profit sector, which I work in, we see images like this and hear the stories that go with them all the time.

However, what we don’t often talk about are the impacts, short- and long-term, on those of us watching and walking with others in these kinds of circumstances: those on the ground accompanying communities; those visiting and spending time with project participants; and those at their desks reading the harrowing stories from halfway around the world.

Though not always said out loud, this is often coupled with an attitude of “suck it up” and a kind of messiah complex. After all, those accompanying others are not going through the same things—they cannot be suffering so much. There is a kind of shame, guilt and apparent weakness sometimes associated with needing to step back and catch one’s breath.

However, more and more we are learning that this is not a fair assessment. We know from the Canadian Mental Health Association that one in

five Canadians in any given year will experience a mental-health problem or illness and, by age 40, 50 percent of the Canadian population will have, or have had, a mental illness. The helping and serving sectors are potentially very vulnerable, due to the proximity to trauma.

I speak to this from a very personal perspective, coming from a lived experience with a chronic mental illness, which makes me even more susceptible to my circumstances, and vulnerable to secondary trauma and burnout.

This is why I argue that many CSOs should be officially recognized, both internally and externally, as trauma-exposed organizations—that is, the staff are regularly coming in close contact with trauma even if it is not their own, and this brings a risk of mental-health issues. Yet the resources for help and support remain limited.

Some of these risks, in addition to regular mental-health challenges, include what those in the helping sectors refer to as compassion fatigue or empathetic strain. Dr. Francoise Mathieu, in her book, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook: Creative Tools for Transforming Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Traumatization*, describes compassion fatigue as “the profound emotional and physical exhaustion that helping professions and caregivers can develop over the course of their careers as helpers . . . [and is often] described as the ‘cost of caring.’”

Earlier in the workbook, she sets the stage for the days we live in and its implications for those who serve, noting, “the reality is that we work amid oceans of pain and there will always be more clients in need than we can possibly help.”

Yet, in my experience, it is still rare for

this to be acknowledged or understood, or for robust systems of support to be provided within the international development and peace sectors. Change is coming slowly in some areas. An organization in the sector that I’m familiar with, for example, recently carried out trauma resiliency training for all national staff. This was in part due to a trauma audit that was carried out several years ago by a friend as part of her graduate studies. In the introduction, she called on the organization’s mission statement to serve and reach out to the most vulnerable, a call also to support staff who are struggling. She writes:

“[Our] mission statement emphasizes the value we place on those in vulnerable situations and the intent to demonstrate love and compassion through the work to meet people’s basic needs. . . . [Our] mission statement calls for careful reflection on how relationships are honoured with God, nature and each other by recognizing the experiences that cause brokenness and healing.”

Often these kinds of changes come from within, from individuals like my friend and others. They encourage me to keep raising the issues and bringing small changes until we see the big changes we need, until the sector fully embraces and comes alongside its workers who feel lost and overwhelmed. ❧



Rebekah Sears is a policy analyst and government relations specialist for Mennonite



Central Committee Canada’s Peace and Justice Office in Ottawa. A longer version was originally posted online at psychologytoday.com on April 12 of this year.

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

PERSONAL REFLECTION

My cousin couldn't manage the pain

Amy Rinner Waddell

Note: This reflection deals with the subject of suicide.

On Nov. 27, a Saturday, I received a long text message from my cousin Richard (I'm using only his middle name here, for privacy), also sent to other extended family members. "I hope none of you ever have to go to a pain-management clinic," he began. "They are a joke and out for money."

Richard, who had been battling cancer and severe back pain for several years, went on to reflect about the inadequacies of the health-care system for managing pain, starting with the patient being steered to a psychologist to talk about pain instead of getting a prescription for medication because of the danger of addiction.

"If you are in pain for a long time, you will start to think, 'How can I escape the grip this pain has on me?' If you are in severe pain, you don't smile, and depression sets in." His last line was, "God forbid, I hope none of you ever have to be told to go to a pain-management clinic."

Richard was a fun cousin who gave me my first motorcycle ride. He had an extensive music collection and sometimes sent me CDs he'd made of music he thought

I'd like. Richard did not text often, but I always appreciated hearing from him. "I really must call or text him soon," I told myself.

I never got the chance. The next day, minutes before walking in to the Sunday morning church service, I happened to check my phone and found a message from his sister that Richard had taken his life the previous evening.

I remember everything around me moving in slow motion as I tried to absorb the shock of losing my cousin

in such a horrific way. This was the first Sunday in Advent and the theme, ironically, was "hope."

All I could think about was Richard, who had so little hope of alleviating the pain in his body that he chose this way out. He left no other note; his message to all of us was obviously his way of explaining the reason for the act he planned later that day.



PHOTO BY AMY RINNER WADDELL

The family buried Richard's ashes on Easter weekend. Richard had purchased his headstone years earlier, his quirky sense of humour coming through with 'Hello world' preceding his birthdate inscription and 'Goodbye world' ready for the addition of his date of death.

A hole was left in the family with no chance to say goodbye to Richard. We were left in shock as we contemplated the thoughts that must have beset him to do what he did to escape his pain, and we wondered if anyone could have prevented it.

The family buried Richard's ashes on Easter weekend. Richard had purchased his headstone years earlier, his quirky sense of humour coming through with "Hello world" preceding his birthdate inscription and "Goodbye world" ready

for the addition of his date of death.

It was reassuring to realize that the cloud that hung over Richard at the end did not characterize his whole life.

A longtime friend, Jim, spoke at the graveside service about how the two had met at work more than 40 years ago: "Richard had a joy of living, a peace about him. So I asked, what made him tick? He told me he was a Christian. That wasn't

what I wanted to hear!" Jim was a recovering alcoholic who had renounced God earlier in his life. He said that Richard gave him Christian tracts and a Bible to read, but never once pressured him to do anything different. Eventually, Richard's witness opened the door for Jim to question and change his own life. Richard invited Jim to a Christian motorcycle rally, where Jim received Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord.

"Richard was the man that God put in my life at just the right time, so that I could walk in freedom from addiction by the power of Jesus Christ," said Jim, who went on to become active in his church and ministered to prisoners in the local jail. He said he was eternally

grateful to Richard for his positive influence that changed his life.

We will never understand the dark place in Richard's mind that caused him to end it all. The end of his life was marked by depression, but it was comforting to hear how the rest of his life was a force for good in a way he probably never fully comprehended.

Goodbye, dear cousin. ❧

Amy Rinner Waddell is CM's B.C. correspondent.

Calendar

Nationwide

July 29-Aug. 1: MC Canada Gathering 2022, in Edmonton. Theme: "We declare what we have seen and heard." Registration is now available for the in-person and virtual event at mennonitechurch.ca/gathering2022.

July 31-Aug. 4: MC Canada National Youth Gathering at Camp Valaqua, Water Valley, Alta. Theme: "Amplify! Giving voice to what we have seen and heard." For more information, or to register online, visit mennonitechurch.ca/amplify.

Saskatchewan

May 28: Annual RJC golf tournament and fundraising banquet. Golf begins at 1 p.m. with a shotgun start at Valley Regional Park in Rosthern. The banquet and program follows at 6:30 p.m. at the school. Visit rjc.sk.ca/homecoming to register for golfing. Call 306-232-4222 to reserve banquet tickets.

June 4: "The climate is changing: Now what?: a one-day retreat for youths in grades 6 to 12, at the Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim, from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Speakers Brenda and Wayne MacDonald will explore what it looks like to be a people of faith in a time of climate changes. Also plenty of outdoor fun. For more details, visit <https://mcsask.ca/event/10976>.

June 11: MCC Saskatchewan Relief Sale and Auction with drive-through lunch and online auction. Auction items will be on display from May 23 to June 11.

Manitoba

Until June 18: The MHC Gallery: A Gallery of Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, hosts "Who am I? A retrospective," an exhibition by Milos Milidrag, who came to Canada in 1997 as a war refugee from Yugoslavia having served as a professor in the faculty of fine arts at the University of Pristina.

May 27-29: Camps with Meaning's 20th annual Manitoba birding

retreat, at Turtle Mountain Bible Camp. Speakers: Paul Epp and Dan Epp-Tiessen. To register, visit <https://bit.ly/3q5St9v>. For more information, email Gordon Janzen at gordonjanzen@gmail.com.

Ontario

May 21: Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp hosts an alumni day, beginning at 10 a.m. For more information, or to register, visit www.hiddenacres.ca.

May 26-29: "Cahoots Festival of Faith, Justice and D.I.Y." meets in person for the first time since 2019 at Pierce Williams Christian Camp, Fingal. The ecumenical family-friendly gathering, allows participants to share skills and stories to create the world God envisions. (Event organizers include several members of MC Eastern Canada congregations.) For more information, or to register, visit www.cahootsfest.ca.

May 27-28: New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale, in person at the New Hamburg (Ont.) Fairgrounds. For updates sign up at nhms.com/subscribe.

May 28: MCC material resources warehouse hosts an open house at 65 Heritage Drive, New Hamburg,

from noon to 3 p.m. Visit mcco.ca/events for more information.
June 20: Ray of Hope Golf Classic, at Rebel Creek Golf Club, Petersburg, from 1 to 7 p.m. For more information, or to register, visit <https://bit.ly/3OLc8mf>.

International

July 1-4: Mennonite World Conference's Global Youth Summit, in Salatiga, Indonesia. Theme: "Life in the Spirit: Learn. Serve. Worship." To learn more, visit mwc-cmm.org/gys.

July 5-10: Mennonite World Conference's global assembly, in Semarang, Indonesia. Theme: "Following Jesus together across barriers." For more information, visit mwc-cmm.org/assembly/indonesia-2022.

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.



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Classifieds

Employment Opportunities

Community Mennonite Fellowship

Employment Opportunity Lead Pastor

Community Mennonite Fellowship, in Drayton, ON, seeks a **lead pastor (1.0 FTE)** who is widely gifted for pastoral ministry with focus on pastoral care, preaching and leadership.

Our congregation's faith, mission and priorities are best described in our Mission Statement:

"Enthusiastic followers of Jesus Christ, spreading His goodness in the community and the world."

Please send a cover letter and resume to Randy Shantz, Pastor Search Committee chair, rshantz@mac-ca.com. This role is anticipated to begin Fall 2022.



PHOTO BY RUTH BERGEN BRAUN

Louisa Adria, a Foothills Mennonite Church youth worker, carries a log at Camp Valaqua's annual spring work day on April 30.

Valaqua gets a spring makeover

By Jessica Evans

Camp Valaqua welcomed approximately 30 enthusiastic volunteers at its spring work day on April 30. Volunteers and staff focused on cleaning up brush and splitting wood.

“Our woodshed went from a few sad sticks to full in just a day!” says Jon Olfert, Valaqua’s camp director.

Volunteers also repaired the siding on one of the buildings and cleaned the eavestroughs.

“It was joyful to be together again,” Olfert says. “Many of these folks attend every year and, for some, this is their major connection to camp. The day becomes a reunion of sorts.”

“In terms of summer camps, the pandemic has really highlighted how important it is to just be together,” he says.

“The community we build promotes healing and growth, and I personally didn’t know how much I relied on that until it was gone. That and singing. . . . I can’t wait to sing together again!”