

CANADIAN MENNONITE

November 14, 2022 Volume 26 Number 23

Ich Catharina
Brenneman bin geboren
Den 19 ten November
1866,
Barbara Ebersol ist
Geboren den 18 ten May
1846,



1895,

Amish Mennonites commemorate 200 years in Canada

pg. 14

PM40063104 R09613

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EDITORIAL

3 lessons from a bumpy Sunday

WILL BRAUN

editor@canadianmennonite.org



The pastor of a big rural church asked me to preach about climate. He had read my article, “Grace, guilt and CO2” (May 16, page 13.)

But between the invocation and the worship leader’s call for me to step up to the stout wooden pulpit, I fully considered ditching my notes. It was my first time at that church and the audience was much different than I had expected. Older. More orthodox.

I was quietly panicking.

I’m not great off the cuff, so I just trusted my notes. It went fine, I think. The one teenager there even thanked me.

• **Lesson 1:** Churches within Mennonite Church Canada vary widely, including a wealth of newcomers. Don’t make assumptions about the audience/readership. Get to know them.

That same Sunday we reconvened for afternoon discussion in the sanctuary followed by pizza in the fellowship hall. (Step aside casserole. . . .)

The turnout was impressive; the discussion was turbulent. I faced resistance from various people, most ardently from a farmer and former municipal leader whom I’ll call Bob.

I felt I responded graciously, but it was tiring, so I was happy to retire to the fellowship hall. I was not as happy that my wife Jennifer, ahead of me in the pizza line, went to sit at Bob’s table. It’s always easier to avoid conflict, but I could only follow.

Bob, whom I did not know previously,

had a copy of the *Germinating Conversations* book by his plate. I knew why. The book is rooted in a series of interactions between large and small farmers, including myself, in Manitoba.

My contribution to the book—a raw critique of big farmers, which was reprinted in this magazine (June 7, 2021, page 16)—drew the ire of the John Deere crowd. (John Deere is a popular brand of farm equipment.)

After not much small talk with Bob and his wife, he calmly said my piece in the book had made him “livid.”

I calmly said I was interested in what specifically upset him.

The three of us talked frankly and respectfully. I pushed some points, but also confessed that my dad—a retired farmer and my go-to advisor on walking the line between challenging and unnecessarily antagonizing—had cringed when he read the piece.

Once we moved from pizza to apple crisp, Bob and his wife talked about how people used to have good debates in church. It used to be more acceptable to openly disagree. People were able to move on.

• **Lesson 2:** Talk through the tough stuff. Disagreement does not mean we are faulty Christians. It is awkward and uncomfortable, but also essential to life, community and spiritual growth. Jesus pretty much gravitated toward messy situations.

I once took a class at Menno Simons College called “Conflict as creative catalyst.” Great name, great class.

My goal is to make tension creative,

It used to be more acceptable to openly disagree. People were able to move on.

leaning on the maxim: humility before purity.

And next time I cross paths with Bob, I’ll be happy to see him.

Back to the Q&A in the sanctuary. At one point the assistant pastor noted that none of the discussion had been about the spiritual dimensions of climate change, even though the last and longest point in my article—the basis for our discussion—was about love, grace and transformation. “The inner journey is the outer journey.”

• **Lesson 3:** It takes intentionality and courage to talk, or write, about the stuff that matters most: our deepest longings, fears, doubts, passions. It involves risk. It may not feel safe. It might even involve disagreement.

But in sharing the prayers of our hearts, we can come closer to a place of belonging with one another and with God. Contributing in a small way to that sense of belonging—which transcends difference—is my wish for this magazine.

Finally, as I start in the role of editor, I acknowledge with much gratitude Ginny Hostetler and many others before her and beside her who have laid the foundation on which we continue to build. ☘



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PHOTO BY FRED LICHTI / SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

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CANADIAN MENNONITE

490 Dutton Drive, Unit C5,
Waterloo, ON, N2L 6H7

Phone: 519-884-3810 | Toll-free: 1-800-378-2524 | Fax: 519-884-3331

Website: canadianmennonite.org

[facebook.com/Canadian.Mennonite](https://www.facebook.com/Canadian.Mennonite) [@CanMenno](https://www.instagram.com/CanMenno) [@canadianmennonite](https://www.twitter.com/canadianmennonite)

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Board Chair, Henry Krause, hakrause@telus.net, 604-888-3192

Canadian Mennonite Staff

Publisher: Tobi Thiessen, publisher@canadianmennonite.org

Editor: Will Braun, editor@canadianmennonite.org

Managing Editor: Ross W. Muir, managinged@canadianmennonite.org

Graphic Designer: Betty Avery, designer@canadianmennonite.org

Online Media Manager: Aaron Epp, onlinemgr@canadianmennonite.org

Editorial Assistant: Barb Draper, edassist@canadianmennonite.org

Circulation: Lorna Aberdein, office@canadianmennonite.org

Advertising: advert@canadianmennonite.org

B.C. Correspondent: Amy Rinner Waddell, bc@canadianmennonite.org

Alberta Correspondent: Jessica Evans, ab@canadianmennonite.org

Saskatchewan Correspondent: Emily Summach, sk@canadianmennonite.org

Manitoba Correspondent: Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe, mb@canadianmennonite.org

Eastern Canada Correspondent: ec@canadianmennonite.org (vacant)

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(e-mail) office@canadianmennonite.org

(phone) 1-800-378-2524 ext. 1

FEATURE

Listening to the Spirit, with John

A sermon based on Isaiah 40:1-9 and Mark 1:1-10

By Johann Funk

At an Anglican church I know, the congregational response after the reading of Scripture is: “Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church.” This response captures the dynamic nature of Scripture that respects the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the lives of the many authors in the biblical canon. It inspires me to put my confidence in the timeless biblical drama reaching across millennia into our time and place.

What could the Holy Spirit be telling us in the gospel accounts about John the Baptist?

Two thousand years ago an apocalyptic preacher appears in the Judean wilderness. This wild man of the Bible preaches hellfire and brimstone, calling people to repentance and performing baptisms in the Jordan River. While he is true to his calling as the forerunner of Jesus, he expresses a fragmented understanding of the character of God, and a culturally conditioned grasp of Messiah and the Kingdom of God.

John the Baptist is an only child of an elderly couple who are well beyond childbearing age. While his father Zachariah is serving in the temple, an angel announces that they will have a child who will prepare the way for the long-awaited Messiah. His mother Elizabeth celebrates the significance of this reality when Mary, her cousin from Galilee, comes for a visit carrying the fetus of the promised Messiah. Their spontaneous expressions of joy express their excitement in anticipation of the fulfilment of God’s promised liberation. John’s parents hang on to the promise that their son John will be the warm-up act for God to physically intervene in world history.

Besides the Torah instruction most Jewish boys receive, John’s parents likely nurture him for his specific task. By the time John retreats into the Judean wilderness to lead a solitary life, his parents have died. We don’t know whether he chooses this lifestyle; whether he is exiled from his home community as an incurable eccentric; or whether he is discouraged and disillusioned, and is fleeing from a calling that makes him a social misfit. He lives a spartan lifestyle, clothes himself in simple attire, eats a meager diet and shelters in caves in the Judean wilderness. He looks like chaos. He predicts chaos.

By the time he is 30, John is a popular preacher railing against the evil that pervades Jewish life in his time. He preaches a God of judgment and vengeance. He calls people to repentance so they can escape the gathering calamity that is about to consume their world.

His harsh preaching resonates with people living under the oppressive rule of Rome. They live with a fading hope of liberation: oppressed, powerless and helpless. He scolds them: “*Who have you come to see, a reed blowing in the wind?*” Have they come to be entertained by the rantings of a madman or are they grasping for relief from their bleak life under occupation?

John’s message warns them of the imminent judgment day that will spare only the repentant. Sinners will be cast into unquenchable fire. John’s harangue is effective. People from all over Judea flock to hear him and be baptized. John reminds them that this baptism is limited in scope: for the remission of sins. He introduces a more all-encompassing baptism by the Spirit and fire that will accompany the arrival of the Messiah. John shakes

By the time he is 30, John is a popular preacher railing against the evil that pervades Jewish life in his time. He preaches a God of judgment and vengeance. He calls people to repentance so they can escape the gathering calamity that is about to consume their world.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS / PUBLIC DOMAIN ARTWORK

'Saint John the Baptist Pointing to Christ,' by Carlo Maratta (1625-1713).

people out of their lethargy and fans a glimmer of hope of redemption. In his dire message of tough love, he prepares the way for the dramatic change that God is setting in motion through the Incarnation.

As John the Baptist's popularity grows, he rejects a celebrity status. It is the Messiah, not he, who will clean house. He describes the actions of the Messiah: "His winnowing fork is in his

hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn in unquenchable fire." Like his followers, John the Baptist believes that the Messiah will liberate Israel from the Roman yoke and restore the house of David.

Even with the sign of a dove and the voice of God at the Jordan River confirming Jesus as the Messiah, John is

baffled by the direction Jesus' ministry is taking. What is all this gentle talk in the Sermon on the Mount? Loving your enemies does not sound like confronting the evil of occupation. Why is Jesus eating with sinners and associating with Samaritans, prostitutes and tax collectors?

No hint of a mass revolt against the occupation. Little talk of "winnowing the threshing floor" and casting the chaff into the "unquenchable fire."

John wonders if he is mistaken. How can he reconcile the incongruity of Jesus stopping for lunch with a tax collector, healing a centurion's daughter and wasting time blessing children when there are Romans to drive from the land?

While in prison John sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus answers: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

We don't know how John responded to this report before his tragic death on the whim of Herod.

John lives up to his calling by using graphic language to get the main message through to his listeners. He shocks people out of the paralysis of their dehumanizing reality. He prepares them for the liberation the Messiah brings, despite John's incomplete understanding of the character of God or the nature of the Kingdom of God.

What are we hearing?

Could it be that the Spirit is drawing us into the unfolding of this very human story with its limitations and contradictions, but also its potential for mindfulness, enlightened passion, humble devotion and spiritual enlightenment? How do our encounters with faith mirror those in the story of John the Baptist?

The Spirit reminds us that, like the

disciples' recollection of those events, our fragmented memories nevertheless retain the central truth of our faith: God incarnate in Jesus entered into history. God incarnate comes as truth and love, bringing salvation and the fullness of life through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, radiating through time to inspire lives of devotion and faith in our day.

The Spirit reminds us that, like the insecure people flocking to the Jordan River to hear John, we, too, experience what feels like the silence of God. We tell stories of our persecuted ancestors, and we see the poverty and illness around us today. Does God hear those crying for healing, justice and liberation? We want to believe that God does, but we can't always see clear evidence of that caring. How can we be jolted out of our paralyzing doubts to bolster our faith?

The Spirit reminds us that, like members of the religious elite, we often approach Jesus' claims with caution. What will it cost to follow the leading of the Spirit? Are we willing to make the sacrifice that it demands? How will following Jesus affect our comfortable lifestyle, our friends, our social status and our careers? Like the powerful ones who came to check John out, we tend to guard what we have achieved and assume we are entitled by our efforts and status. It is hard to let go, to base our lives on the word of a Messiah who threatens to upset the security we have so carefully crafted.

The Spirit reminds us that, like John the Baptist, we, too, have experienced the wilderness of an identity crisis—rejection, isolation, insecurity and depression—with no obvious way forward. We too often consider John's emphasis on hellfire and brimstone as a remedy for the lawlessness around us.

However, our inclination for judgment and violence is tempered by glimpses of the unfolding of the Kingdom of God with its striking evidence of the gentle and nonviolent Spirit at work in the lives of people and communities. The Spirit draws us deeper into the mystery of God. Jesus

reminds us that God's judgment is about justice and the consequences of willful evil. God's central message is reconciliation, love and forgiveness.

The Spirit reminds us that we should not take ourselves too seriously. Like John, we recognize our brokenness, and we humbly respond to the grace and mercy of God. We see ourselves as privileged to participate as extras in the unfolding of God's actions in our day.

Like John the Baptist, we sometimes experience a clear calling. Our Christian calling is not exclusively to specific tasks, but to a state of being that responds to opportunities that present themselves as we live in community, opportunities created by the social and geo-political realities we live in, including the church family.

Listening to what the Spirit is saying in the story of John the Baptist leads us individually and collectively to sober introspection, greater transparency, an

authentic identity, effective messaging, genuine humility, resurgent hope and an inclusive kingdom theology. In our words and deeds, we create the safe and inviting conditions in which people are drawn into a living relationship with God and God's people, where they are nurtured into a mature faith.

The lesson we can take from John the Baptist is: *"Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church."* Let us expect the Word to come alive in us today. ❧



Johann Funk is a retired associate professor of sociology, a former executive secretary of Native Ministries and a Community Peacemaker Teams reservist. The sermon was delivered at Point Grey Fellowship in Vancouver on March 31.

❧ For discussion

1. Who are some examples of biblical characters who heard the voice of the Holy Spirit? How did they respond? How well did they understand the implications of the message? Have you ever felt that the Spirit of God was speaking directly to you? When God speaks to us, how confident should we be that we understand what God is saying?
2. Johann Funk describes John the Baptist as "preaching a God of judgment and vengeance" with a message of "tough love." Does this fit with your perception of John the Baptist? Why do you think John sent a message to Jesus, asking if Jesus was the Messiah? How do you think John responded to Jesus' return message?
3. Funk writes that "we, too, experience what feels like the silence of God." What are the situations in your life where you have longed for God to intervene to bring healing and justice? How much do you struggle with doubt that God cares about these situations?
4. "We too often consider John's emphasis on hellfire and brimstone as a remedy for the lawlessness around us," writes Funk. Do you agree? What are Spirit-led alternative responses to evil in our world?
5. Where have you seen glimpses of reconciliation, love and forgiveness that give you hope?

—By Barb Draper

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✎ Readers write

✉ What should we do?

I have watched with great interest the flight of Russian soldiers from Russia and Ukraine following Russian president Vladimir Putin's conscription of men into the Russian army.

How reminiscent of what many American men did during the Vietnam War. Many of us were conscientious objectors, and we were afforded the path of alternative service in lieu of military service. And there were others who fled the United States and came to Canada, only later to be granted pardons for what was considered an illegal act.

But what about the hundreds of thousands of Russian men and soldiers who are fleeing the Russian regime today? Should we help them in whatever ways we can? Should we offer asylum or initiate monetary and logistical support?

This brings up the dilemma that, from time to time, has faced Mennonite men whenever conscription into the armed forces has confronted us. What should we do?

KEN REDDIG, PINAWA, MAN.

✉ 'On the vanguard of a growing movement'

Re: "Canadian Mennonite online event will explore Indigenous-settler reconciliation," Sept. 19, page 14.

Thank you for the online discussion exploring Indigenous-settler reconciliation with Niigaan, Doyle and Allegra. While it had the ring of preaching to the choir, Niigaan put it into perspective. Few Mennonites are knowledgeable about the issue. Many have failed to internalize the issues involved enough to take concrete action.

I would add that not all Indigenous people are ready to engage in reconciliation with the settler population as well. The trauma, suspicion and psychological pain are still too raw to trust any overtures from settlers towards reconciliation. Niigaan encouraged those who have done the hard and risky work needed to create the conditions for reconciliation, saying they are on the vanguard of a growing movement.

As I listened to how Indigenous people are recovering their culture and identity, it occurred to me that Mennonites' starting point for reconciliation is reconciling their settler privilege with their Anabaptist beliefs. This is a painful journey of self-examination, repentance and embrace of the practice demanded of people of the Jesus way, as essential for genuine Indigenous-settler reconciliation

to grow from symbolic acts, such as land acknowledgements, to solidarity with Indigenous people experiencing cultural, social and economic revitalization that benefits all of society.

We take responsibility for the privileges we received as participants in Canada's colonial project and immerse ourselves in God's love and his particular concern for those who were born into the unjust circumstances of settler colonialism.

By listening to Indigenous voices, we become richer as we discover the face, body and spirit of the Creator and embrace our kinship with all of creation.

JOHANN FUNK (ONLINE COMMENT)

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

Bennett—Daniel Jonas (b. July 9, 2023), to Sheldon and Angela Bennett, Bergthal Mennonite, Didsbury, Alta.

Peters Ens—Norah Katherine (b. Oct. 23, 2022), to Lynette Ens and Matthew Peters, Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Deaths

Cressman—Beulah (Snyder), 98 (b. Feb. 25, 1924; d. Oct. 10, 2022), Nith Valley Mennonite, New Hamburg, Ont.

Doerksen—Myrtle Mae, 85 (b. Feb. 16, 1937; d. Oct. 16, 2022), Sterling Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Cressman—Floyd, 66 (b. Oct. 24, 1955; d. Sept. 21, 2022), Hanover Mennonite, Ont.

Dyck—Alvena (nee Janzen), 85 (b. Jan. 5, 1937; d. Aug. 30, 2022), Springstein Mennonite, Pincher Creek, Alta.

Gerber—Margaret Rose (Swartzentruber), 83 (b. March 2, 1938; died. Feb. 5, 2022), Preston Mennonite, Cambridge, Ont.

Harder—Irma, 91 (b. Nov. 3, 1930; d. Oct. 25, 2022), Charleswood Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Rempel—Dorothy (nee Bergmann), 84 (b. Nov. 29, 1937; d. Aug. 23, 2022), Clearbrook MB, Abbotsford, B.C.

Toews—Susan (Kehler), 95 (b. July 5, 1927; d. Oct. 1, 2022), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Unger—John, 95 (b. June 6, 1927; d. Aug. 2, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Wiebe—Werner, 73 (b. Oct. 27, 1948; d. Sept. 21, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

FROM OUR LEADERS

'Keeping the Ball Rolling'

Jeff Friesen

I recently attended a performance by *crys cole**, a Berlin-based sound artist at a small art gallery in Winnipeg's Exchange District. The piece performed that night was entitled "Keeping the Ball Rolling."

First initiated in 2014, "Keeping the Ball Rolling" is an ongoing work of *cole's* with no intended end, continuously unveiling itself in new ways. In each performance, *cole* takes a five-pin bowling ball and rolls it along the floor. As the ball rolls, microphones set up around the room pick up different timbres and resonances, which build and are then played back to the audience. The sounds shift and and change, as *cole* continues rolling the ball.

The performance attempts to play with the ways in which we live as people inextricably tied to the material aspects of daily life. Each room the piece is performed in will generate its own unique responses. No two performances of the work will be the same. It also shows how we remain involved in the unveiling of something that transcends time and space. No matter where the piece is performed, or when, it will involve the rolling of a five-pin bowling

ball. This is an act repeated, regardless of the context in which the work is performed. The piece draws the audience into a strange state, where the immediate physical realities of a room become haunted by something that exceeds it.

Since August, I have been working at the Mennonite Church Manitoba offices as co-director of Leadership Ministries with Karen Schellenberg, supporting and caring for pastors and spiritual leaders serving the regional church's congregations.

I like to think of this work as participating in a similar performance as that found in "Keeping the Ball Rolling." Hearing more directly from churches across our regional body, my appreciation for how our local contexts give shape to our churches has deepened. No two congregations are the same. The material needs of the people and places we gather with for worship differ from congregation to congregation. Pastoral work is inextricably tied to the contexts in which it is performed, tending to and nourishing the physical lives of those gathering for worship.

Yet it is also work that transcends our material lives. We are called to equip our

congregations to see how the drama of Christ's life and death continues to be performed today. Across time and space Christ has been found among those victimized by the powers and systems that dominate our daily lives. We have seen him working to free the imprisoned; provide shelter for the unhoused; and grant justice to those marginalized by race, class, gender identity or sexual orientation. Regardless of the contexts out of which we work, the drama of Christ's life, death and resurrection continues to be unveiled.

The church, as is said *ad nauseum*, right now is changing. What *cole's* performance reminded me of is that this will always be the case. The church exists as part of a continuous process of the unveiling of Christ. In specific locations, and at particular times, the love and justice of Christ are being performed. This is a performance repeated across time and space. Our task is to help keep the ball rolling. ✎

* *crys cole* spells her name with all lowercase letters.



Jeff Friesen works with Karen Schellenberg, who act as co-directors of Leadership Ministries for Mennonite Church Manitoba.

A moment from yesterday



Ron J. Sider was an inspirational Canadian-American leader in the Christian community. It was his sermon at the Mennonite World Conference assembly in 1984 that spurred the formation of Christian Peacemaker Teams in 1986. His sermon called Anabaptists to be formed by their persecution history to bring hope to the world by being ready to die in the name of peace. Sider went on to found Evangelicals for Social Action. He wrote several books, including, in 1977, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. It has been named one of the hundred most influential books in religion in the 20th century, and it sold more than 400,000 copies in several languages. He died on July 27, 2022, at the age of 82.

Text: Conrad Stoesz /

Photo: *Der Bote* photo collection



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IN THE IMAGE

'Bring your best self'

Ed Olfert

In the final days of October, Holly and I reached an anniversary.

Recently a relative reminded us that, in 1972, five cousins headed to five altars with their partners. Marie, a widow, pointed out that Holly and I would be the only ones to reach the 50-year milestone.

In my years of pre-marriage conversations as a minister, Holly and I frequently talked about the reality of getting through difficult times and conversations. Sometimes, as we described those days, the response would be, "So why did you stay together?" The only answer that slid to my tongue immediately is, "We didn't know we had a choice."

Certainly we knew, and know, that there is a choice. But we were also supported by the models held out to us by parents and grandparents, the affirmation that vows matter. Commitment matters. We were well served by an innate sense that this relationship could not be taken for granted but needed to be cradled in respectful palms.

I'm embarrassed by how many years it took me to learn that when Holly shared something that was troubling her, was confusing her, was making her life hard,

it wasn't at all useful to simply offer solutions like, "Well, try this. Just do that." She was looking for soul support, someone who could hear her hard story and return empathy, but I stepped into my maleness and provided answers.

We had children quickly. In the exhaustion of those early parenting years, we were mostly on the same page, trying to create the best environment for our cherubs. Mistakes were frequent, though, as we were still trying to figure out who we were, individually and as a couple. But our common determination to parent well guided us in mostly sane directions.

Then, as the cherubs grew and began leaving the nest, we looked at each other and wondered: Who will we be now? There were still many years ahead.

Through those years, I was developing a sense of my identity at a spiritual level. "What will make my life good?" That search began to evolve into a spirituality of "awe." A search for "awe." A determination to name "awe."

That search kick-started the reformation of my relationship to Holly.

I acknowledged, to myself and to her, that she could have chosen any one of the millions of better options: better looking, better provider, better

parenting, better listener, better everything.

But she chose me.

The aura of awe extended to viewing her gifts in new and exciting ways, the huge areas of life where she was far beyond me, had much to teach me. That awe extended to the simple and yet hard lesson of loyalty and faithfulness. I could count on her. As I identified and pursued new paths that seemed good to me, she created space for me to explore those paths, even when that meant separation from family and familiar places.

Awe continues to create my lens. I marvel at our children, the important stories of their lives. They have chosen partners that bring remarkable colour and variety. They have produced a new generation that again offers hope to the world through their kind and energetic presence. The future will be good.

Twenty years ago, I realized that depression is part of who I am. I offer my regret and apology to all who bore/bear the brunt of that. Mostly that is Holly, but not exclusively so. The pursuit of finding good supports for that condition now is part of the awe of my life, the conversations that I have, the wonder of possibilities yet ahead.

Give it a shot. Bring your best self. ☘



Ed Olfert (p2peho@gmail.com) gives thanks for good people, good lessons.

Et cetera

New French-language digital library launches

A recently launched website gives speakers of French access to free Anabaptist-Mennonite theological and historical resources. The Bibliothèque numérique anabaptiste (BiNA) digital library follows the model of the successful Spanish-language Biblioteca Digital Anabautista (BiDA) and will serve French distance-learning courses and other users by making these resources freely accessible. The project aims to provide quality theological resources from Anabaptist perspectives to the global church, regardless of their geographic location. It is accessible through the Global Anabaptist Wiki homepage: www.anabaptistwiki.org.



MIND AND SOUL

Writing for the foyer

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

This month's column is precipitated by two written events. In the recent article announcing Will Braun's appointment as *Canadian Mennonite's* new editor, Braun says he "views the magazine as less a pulpit and more a foyer bustling with spirited discussion." Yes indeed!

The other event was an email from *CM* staff suggesting I look at a web comment on a recent column. Even before looking, I wrote in my journal: "Zounds! Love it when someone is engaging with what I've written. TBH [to be honest], especially when somebody is arguing back with me." In other words, audience and writing come into some sort of dialogue. "Faithfulness in the face of facts" in the June 13 issue was a response to emailed comments. Put your thoughts on the webpage, I pleaded, so we can have a broader discussion in the church! Open the foyer!

With that in mind, I went back to look at what sorts of discussion might be happening about *CM* columns I've written over the past four years—those web comments (some of which were later printed as letters to the editor) and any emails or private comments received and saved.

I pitched this column initially as

sociology informing discipleship, the "mind and soul" in operation together. "Informed ethics" was the title of the first column (Oct. 14, 2019). The motivation came after yet another incident of pulpit preaching that moralized on a social issue without doing a deeper dive into some social science. We would never do pastoral counselling without attention to psychology.

Several themes are evident across the 33 columns to date. One was that we should be socially and politically engaged in the issues of our time. With that in mind—given issues like the war in Ukraine, climate change, capitalism, Indigenous rights, or increased polarization—hope is also a major theme. An early column differentiated between optimism and hope (Dec. 9, 2019).

Another theme is that our social engagement has a countercultural perspective, that faithfulness to Jesus means some level of critique and opposition to the dominant ideological and social systems in our world. Can the church—especially the North American churches—do that?

These themes come out in the ways I approach column topics. For example, simple living has been an explicit topic

three times, but it shows up indirectly more frequently. Seven of the 33 columns are directly on environmental topics. But I've written eight pieces that are about a broad inclusion; those included the hidden (Black) history of Ontario, against ethnocentrism via Jonah, or including theologians from the majority world (the fully global Christian community). Other columns have described learning from Muslims, Buddhists, Quakers and Catholics.

The hardest column to write was the most deeply personal. In such a public forum, getting personal is frightening. "See all of me" (Nov. 9, 2020) was about depression. After clicking "submit," my stomach nose-dived past my toes. Had I shared too much of myself? Then someone commented online that this essay led to their first-ever response to *CM*. They described their hope for the church as a foretaste of the coming Kingdom of God. Other people responded privately. The foyer was busy!

In this deeply polarizing day and age, we need venues for open discussion. Add your comments to any item on the *CM* website. Discuss them in the *CM* foyer or the foyer of your own church. This is how we try together to be faithful as the body of Christ. ✎



Randolph Haluza-DeLay has written periodically for Canadian Mennonite and its predecessor, The Mennonite Reporter, since 1995.

Et cetera

New EFC podcast

Last fall the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) launched the podcast "Faith Trends," with the aim of offering "conversations that connect research and ministry." The podcast features interviews with guests on topics such as clergy resilience, women in ministry, Christian contemporary music, Gen-Z and evangelism, and second-generation Chinese evangelicals. The most recent episode deals with Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) in the Canadian context. The podcast can be accessed through various podcast platforms and at <https://bit.ly/efc-faith-trends>.

Sources: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada



 TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

Priests of what are not gods

Joshua Penfold

Abijah, fifth king of Judah, is standing with his 400,000 men on the cusp of battle, badly outnumbered. Jeroboam, king of Israel, confidently stands with his 800,000 men, ready to get this battle started.

But first, Abijah has a speech. *“Don’t you know,”* he says, *“that the kingship belongs to David’s line?”* He goes on to speak of Jeroboam and his *“worthless scoundrels”* rebellion and establishment of an illegitimate kingdom, worshipping golden calves and ousting the Levitical priests so that they can be their own priests.

What Abijah says here about this haunts me. He warns that anyone who goes to sacrifice and worship *“may become a priest of what are not gods”* (II Chronicles 13:9).

What good is it if you’ve recreated a whole faith system and fully devoted yourself, offering sacrifices and assuming the role of priest, if the god you worship is not a god?

King Jeroboam and his scoundrels had earlier been slighted by Rehoboam, the last king of the united kingdom before the split of Israel and Judah, and Abijah acknowledges that his dad was harsh. Abijah gives them, on the battlefield before the bloodshed, a final

chance to stop playing this silly game and return to the true kingdom, worshipping the true God. He warns that, despite the way the numbers look, the Lord is with him and this will not go well for Jeroboam.

Jeroboam ignores the offer. Abijah is right; it is a slaughter. The false-god-worshipping Israelites lose badly and Jeroboam is killed.

I wonder if I’m more like Judah or Israel. As I navigate life, the Bible and my walk of discipleship to Jesus; wrestle with contemporary issues; seek to better understand, honour and learn from different traditions and alternative views; try to hold this all together and discern how to live faithfully—am I holding fast to the Kingdom of God or have I driven out the legitimate priests so that I can become a priest of what are not gods?

I think what I’m wrestling with is a desire to uphold the good and faithful traditions of the church, to listen to the wisdom of those who have gone before me and learn from what has held strong and true for generations, while simultaneously recognizing that wrapped up with that good came some bad, and that religion has a tendency to reinforce itself rather than its message.

Sometimes the only way to honour the past is to break out of some of the cultural and institutional reinforcements that once stood bright and clear as a city of refuge but became a strong and sturdy fortress of protection that now can be little more than retaining walls, imprisoning its inhabitants and preventing them from seeing the beauty beyond. And it is beautiful beyond, but also wild and wondrous, and navigating faithfulness in it requires much wisdom and work.

Do I just want to have my cake and eat it too? I hope to uphold the great and beautiful tradition of the church while carefully and hospitably widening the circle. I think these can and should be two sides of the same coin.

But in this dance of figuring it all out, the story of Abijah is a fair and timely warning: Not everything should have a place. Not all is good. Be careful not to become a priest of what are not gods.

The questions we must continue to wrestle with concerning our own unending story of faith development are: What do we keep? What do we discard? What do we adopt? And what do we create anew by the Spirit’s guidance? ☿



Joshua Penfold
(penfoldjoshua@gmail.com) wrestles with the weird, wild and wonderful written word.

 Et cetera

Churches offer payment for spirituals

A movement in the U. S. is encouraging churches to pay each time they sing traditional “Negro spirituals.” This symbolic action acknowledges the influence of music that originated in the African-American community going back to times of enslavement. “Royalties” are sent to organizations that support musicians of colour and preserve music from the Black community. “The descendants of the people who created this music are still here and still alive,” says Gerami Groover-Flores, president of the Hamilton-Garrett Center for Music and Arts in Roxbury, Mass. “And even if we do not know the names of their ancestors or who the composer is, we can do our part in acknowledging the work that their ancestors have contributed to this body of music that we appreciate today.”

Source: Religion News Service



PIXABAY GRAPHIC

VIEWPOINT

Faith-based environmentalism

An analysis of Canadian Mennonite articles, 2003-2021

Joanne M. Moyer and Julia Gesshe
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

How are Mennonites in Canada responding to the environmental crisis? What kinds of actions are people taking? How are they linking these actions to their faith? Who is involved in this work?

This report describes a research project in which we pursued these questions by investigating the content of *Canadian Mennonite*. The project was initiated by Joanne Moyer, an associate professor of environmental studies and geography at the King's University in Edmonton, and a long-time member of the Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN) council.

As part of her MCCN work, Moyer kept a rough record of creation-care articles in *CM*. Through an ongoing research program investigating faith-based environmentalism in Canada, she hired Julia Gesshe, a senior King's student in the environmental studies program, to do a more systematic study of these articles. As a non-Mennonite, Gesshe brought a fresh perspective to this analysis.

Working under Moyer's guidance, Gesshe identified all articles appearing in *CM* between 2003 and 2021 that had environmental content. (Whenever an "environmental" word was identified, she scanned the article to ensure that the word was used in the proper environmental context.)

In this time period, we found 1,298 articles that explicitly addressed environmental topics, and 562 articles that mentioned them. Then Gesshe sorted the environmental content into categories, including: type of environmental problem; type of action taken; theological interpretations; and organizations involved. Finally, she analyzed



Joanne Moyer, left, and Julia Gesshe analyzed Canadian Mennonite's articles over nearly two decades to determine what was being said about the environment and what was being done about it.

these categories for recurring themes.

What is the role of Mennonite faith and culture in environmentalism?

The research revealed several theological motivations for environmental concern among *CM* contributors. The primary theological categories were stewardship (care for creation out of respect for God, the Creator), and ecojustice (caring for creation out of love for neighbour).

Another common motivation for environmental concern was eco-pacifism, which extends peacemaking to all creation. This motivation aims to reduce the violent exploitation of the Earth and was often paired with stewardship and ecojustice. While these theological elements motivated contributors to care, we found that the unique, action-oriented way in which Mennonites approach discipleship facilitated engagement in environmental action. A countercultural theme was apparent in expressions of discipleship, which may help Mennonites adopt sustainable behaviours that align with their values,

such as simplicity, but challenge broader societal practices.

What do Mennonites care most about?

Climate change, food and agriculture, and consumerism emerged as the top environmental concerns. These problems were often described in terms of the unequal distribution of affluence, environmental harm, and need between life in the West and the challenges facing the majority world.

Consequently, contributors expressed feelings of both responsibility and guilt because their comforts were bought at the expense of the environment and their global neighbours.

What are Mennonites doing?

Our analysis revealed that Mennonite individuals, congregations and organizations are engaging in a variety of creation-care activities. For congregations and universities, greening projects, particularly installing solar panels and community gardens, are common. Alternatively, development organizations, such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Economic Development Associates, are working on promoting sustainable agriculture in developing countries. Individual action often involved what Gesshe dubbed "mindful consumption": reducing consumption where possible and ensuring that all necessary consumption aligns with values and theology.

In practice, mindful consumption is creative and may involve thrift shopping and fixing broken appliances. Activism has also become increasingly popular among congregations and individuals over time.

Concluding reflections

Our analysis showed that Mennonites generally understand the seriousness of environmental problems and agree that action must be taken to address them. While we did encounter a few letters arguing that environmental problems were not important or appropriate for a church magazine, other contributors responded by describing the fundamental connection between environmental problems and issues such as world hunger, and correcting misinterpretations of scientific data.

The pathway by which contributors came to engage in creation care is both generically Christian (stewardship and justice are common motivations for Christian environmentalists), and uniquely Mennonite. We know this because many contributors cited traditions such as peacemaking and simplicity as ideal pathways to stewardship and justice.

While many members of the Mennonite community may take these

traditions for granted, from the perspective of outsiders these attributes are unique and appear to be important in equipping Mennonites to address environmental problems.

There were some gaps, however. We were surprised at how infrequently environmental themes such as nature appreciation and stewardship appeared in the many articles featuring summer camps. We assume the camps are doing this work, but we wonder why they aren't talking about it.

Similarly, many articles about food and agriculture avoided topics such as sustainability, food justice and stewardship.

While there is much work to do to address the growing climate crisis and other environmental problems, we were encouraged by the depth of commitment and action that emerged from this research and hope that its insights encourage and facilitate further commitment and action. ✎



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NEWS

COVER STORY

Amish Mennonites commemorate 200 years in Canada

By Barb Draper
Editorial Assistant

Of all the events planned by the Amish bicentennial committee for this fall, the most popular were the hymn sings held at Maple View Mennonite Church near Wellesley, Ont., on Sept. 11, and at East Zorra Mennonite near Tavistock on Sept. 25. Both events had between 200 and 300 people.

“Singing a capella, four-part harmony with a church full of eager singers was for many both nostalgic and soul-nurturing,” said Fred Lichti, one of the planners.

Hoping to appeal to a wide spectrum of people with Amish heritage, including congregations that do not use musical instruments in worship, the hymn sings did not have accompaniment and were led by song leaders from a variety of local congregations.

The one hymn that was not in four-part harmony was “*Das Lob Lied*” (“The Praise Song”). A song from the 16th century, it is

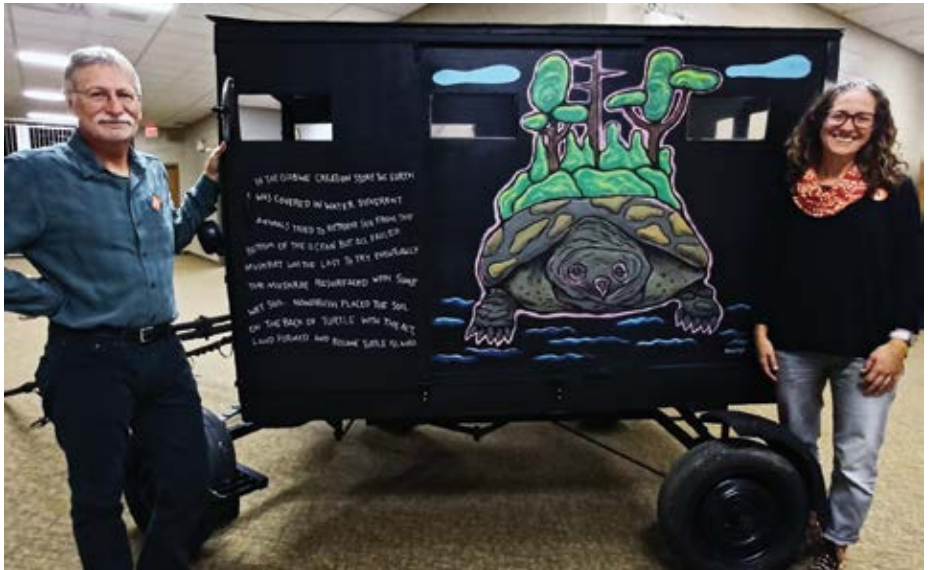


PHOTO BY FRED LICHTI

On Sept. 30, the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, Dave Neufeld and Rebecca Seiling talked about Indigenous history and issues as part of the Amish bicentennial celebrations. This side of “The Landed Buggy” exhibit depicts the Ojibwe creation story.



PHOTO BY BARB DRAPER

Among the artifacts and memorabilia at Steinmann Mennonite Church was a display of traditional Amish clothes and explanations of how dress changes at different stages of life.

still used in all traditional Amish worship services everywhere. The hymn is sung very slowly, with about three or four notes for each syllable, and each verse takes about five minutes to sing.

The committee found a traditional Amish song leader to teach a core group of about 25 how to sing it the way it is done in Ontario Amish worship services. At the hymn sings participants only sang one verse.

Many people found it difficult to sing that slowly, and Lichti heard the comment, “I am so glad we have given up that style of music.” On the other hand, there were those who found the chant-like singing brought back poignant memories of their childhood.

When the committee began planning, its first decision was which year to commemorate. Although the first Amish families

did not migrate from Europe until 1823, the committee chose to keep in step with the sesquicentennial celebrated 50 years ago in 1972. It was in 1822 that Christian Nafziger arrived in Waterloo Region and then returned to Europe, recommending that Amish families settle there.

Another major question for the committee was how to celebrate this settlement story while recognizing that Indigenous Peoples were harmed in the process. Acknowledging Indigenous history became one of its priorities. Stories of Indigenous history were included in the heritage bus tours, and two events focused on the Indigenous story.

On Sept. 30, Canada’s National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, 120 people met at Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden to hear David G. Neufeld speak on “What stories have we not been telling,” and

Rebecca Seiling, Indigenous Neighbours engagement associate for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario, speak on “The Landed Buggy,” a buggy decorated to reflect the web of connections between the land, Indigenous people and settlers. The following day, at Crow Shield Lodge, not far from Steinmann Church, an Indigenous awareness workshop was led by Clarence Cachagee.

“By the end of the bicentennial events, I felt that an impact had been made, and there was an increased awareness of Indigenous history and issues,” said Neufeld.

The Thanksgiving worship service on Oct. 2 ended a busy weekend. Focusing on gratitude, the service involved people across a spectrum of Mennonite and Amish congregations. Because of generous sponsorship from local businesses and from the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, expenses for the events were covered so that offerings taken at the hymn sings and the Thanksgiving service raised more than \$6,000 for MCC to use in refugee and Indigenous Neighbours programs.

Another important part of the Amish bicentennial celebration was the exhibit of artifacts and memorabilia arranged around the perimeter of the large gym at Steinmann Mennonite. This impressive display was open to the public throughout the weekend of Sept. 30 to Oct. 2.

“What began as a fairly simple display of early documents and books kept growing,” said Lichti. “Artifacts and antiques evoke storytelling and, once news got out that we were bringing together such items, donors began calling to offer their artifacts and stories.”

In the end, there were more than 200 items originating from families in the Ontario Amish tradition. Each item was identified and dated along with the donor’s name and other details.

One of the most valuable artifacts was a name plate by Amish folk artist Barbara Ebersol, which was discovered just in time for the exhibit. It was somewhat by chance that someone cleaning out an aunt’s old house mentioned the artwork to Lichti, who recognized its value.

The heritage bus tours were also popular, but space was limited. The half-day bus tours began in Wilmot Township and



PHOTO BY BARB DRAPER

Among the displays was a video with people speaking the German dialect still used in traditional Amish homes. The sign asks, ‘Can you speak Pennsylvania German?’

travelled to townships to the southwest toward Tavistock, with comments about how the community navigated change and assimilation over the years. The noon meal was a traditional Amish Sunday noon communal meal of bean soup, bread, apple butter and cheese.

The “Up the Nith” all-day tour followed the northwest expansion of the community towards Milverton, where the Old Order Amish are located today. The second half of this tour focused on Old Order Amish history and culture. For many of the tour participants, a highlight was the 45-minute visit to a parochial school, where they could observe the students being taught.

In reflecting on these bicentennial

celebrations, Lichti wonders whether future generations will have a sense of Amish heritage. “After the Amish Mennonite Conference of Ontario dropped ‘Amish’ from its name in 1963-64, and adopted the name Western Ontario Mennonite Conference, we still thought of ourselves as Amish Mennonites,” he said. But he believes the integration of various Mennonite streams in Ontario has resulted in a loss of Amish identity.

Lichti does not lament this reality, though, saying, “Affirming the diverse and multicultural composition of the congregations of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada is probably more useful for moving into the future which God has for us.”



PHOTO BY FRED LICHTI

Leah Cressman and her daughter Norah try to figure out what the antique tools are used for at the display of Amish artifacts and memorabilia at Steinmann Mennonite Church.

Walk with us

*MC Eastern Canada, Hamilton Mennonite Church
helping out urban church plant*

By Maria H. Klassen
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

Earlier this year, the Meeting Place, an urban church plant in Hamilton, Ont., joined Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and was welcomed at the annual church gathering.

The Meeting Place started about 15 years ago under the leadership of Sue Carr, formerly a Mission Services Hamilton chaplain.

At first they met in a back room of the Mission Services building on Sunday afternoons. A glass side door led to the street and, as curious people joined and numbers grew, they moved to a larger room and became known as the Meeting Place.

People began to come, usually men at first, hungry for the gospel and food. Initially no coffee or food was served, but people still came for Bible study. This time together always ended with the hymn “Amazing Grace.” Eventually a meal was prepared by the Mission Services staff.

As Carr says, “People came hungry and went away fed.”

When the crowd grew to 60 or 70 people, with standing room only, a new location was needed.

About eight-and-a-half years ago, Carr



PHOTO BY SUE CARR

The Meeting Place meets at 541 Eatery and Exchange in Hamilton.

helped to found a non-profit coffee shop, 541 Eatery and Exchange, housed in an old bank building on Barton Street in East Hamilton. The Meeting Place began meeting in the airy, welcoming space.

Before the pandemic, about 40 people gathered together on a Sunday afternoon, sharing a service and a meal prepared by the café staff. During the pandemic, services were sometimes held in a park or

someone’s backyard, weather permitting. On most Sundays, though, they met via Zoom, but not all members had access to computers and the internet.

Services have begun again at the café, although it is not yet open for indoor dining. The group is currently smaller, but Carr hopes the Meeting Place will grow in numbers again.

During the last two years the Meeting

Place joined with the Commons, which was a former MC Eastern Canada congregation. Initially, both groups were going to worship together and share leadership of the services for one year. However, they met only one Sunday, which felt like extended family visiting, and then the pandemic closed all services and buildings.

The Meeting Place was introduced to MC Eastern Canada by the Commons, which motivated the Meeting Place to ask for membership in the regional church.

Carr is retiring from her work at 541 Eatery and Exchange and hopes to focus on more outreach with the Meeting Place.

Connections are being made within MC Eastern Canada. Students from Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, and McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, have done internships at the Meeting Place, which is part of TrueCity, a movement of local churches seeking to bless Hamilton.

Hamilton Mennonite Church has become the Meeting Place’s Mennonite sister church, walking and serving alongside the small congregation. ❧

RJC PHOTO / TEXT BY EMILY SUMMACH
Sometimes getting an education means getting dirty. That was quite literally the case for Grade 10 students at RJC High School in Rosthern, Sask. Students in RJC’s grade-based peacebuilding initiative, Imagine, spent a day digging potatoes at the Seager Wheeler Farm. Students then delivered the produce to Good Neighbours Food Centre, a local organization that helps to address food insecurity.



Point Grey leaves MBs

The fellowship's ties to MC B.C. remain

By Henry Neufeld
Vancouver

Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship asked the British Columbia Conference of Mennonite Brethren (MB) Churches to be released from conference membership, which was granted on Aug. 15.

In its letter of request, the church wrote: "Given the . . . requirement that every church be led by a pastor [or designated leader], we acknowledge that we are not aligned with the bylaws and polity of the MB Conference. We have therefore decided to request to voluntarily withdraw from the BC Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches . . ."

Since institutions such as Columbia Bible College and Mennonite Central Committee have been effective for many decades, in part because they are inter-Mennonite, Point Grey wished to bring that same level of cooperation to the congregational level in British Columbia.

While many individuals felt that it was about time this was happening, certain MB leaders were not pleased that Point Grey wished to relate to both of the province's two major Mennonite conferences. "You can't serve two masters," was a phrase used.

Point Grey's leaving was a "prayerful and deliberate . . . process of discernment over the past several years . . . and [the church] came to a unanimous decision at our annual meeting on Jan. 29, 2022," the letter stated.

Signed by church moderator Veronica Dyck, the letter continued: "We deeply care about our relationships and connections with Mennonite conferences and institutions."

Point Grey continues as a member of Mennonite Church British Columbia and, at the same time, continues to support several MB-related institutions.

From its inception in 1986, the fellowship was openly inter-Mennonite. That small group formed the core of a much



PHOTO BY JANICE KREIDER

On a Sunday in Advent, Point Grey traditionally sings the Christmas portions of Handel's Messiah. This photo was from the fellowship's 2015 rendition.

larger group that purchased a former convent near the University of British Columbia (UBC) campus, establishing the Menno Simons Centre as a university student residence.

The fellowship's founders, representing at least three Mennonite groups, decided to meet Sunday mornings for worship in the centre's chapel. By renting the chapel, the fellowship helped the centre meet its substantial monthly mortgage payments. By hiring neither a pastor nor staff, the fellowship's members were able to make additional donations to the work of the centre.

A key feature of Point Grey's services is the 15 to 20 minutes of discussion immediately following the sermon, when the whole fellowship reflects and comments on the morning's topic and readings.

J. Evan Kreider, a founding member, said, "We learned to listen to each other and hear divergent views, acknowledging the different heritage each brought." He noted that Jesus' disciples didn't always agree, either with each other or with Jesus, and the leaders of the early church had serious differences of beliefs. But they learned to continue working together and

supporting each other.

Kreider noted that highlights of Point Grey's worship include singing both four-part hymns and contemporary songs, hearing multiple voices and points of view from the floor-level pulpit, and having people sit in an intimate three-quarters circle to more easily sing, pray and share

together.

Another of the fellowship's founding members, John Friesen, has been active in the MB conference both provincially and nationally his entire life. The fellowship's leaving that movement has been difficult for him and others. Friesen said of the decision: "[W]e couldn't meet the [MB] bylaws. . . . We don't have the leadership style by which they operate. . . . The centralization of power is the problem. . . . Control is the issue. . . . The new bylaws give the MB Executive more power."

Selling the centre's building meant that its chapel is no longer available for the fellowship's services. Since the sale coincided with the arrival of COVID-19, Point Grey's 50 congregants have met primarily on Zoom.

Even though it has many commuting members, the fellowship is looking forward to meeting in person, possibly monthly, with other services continuing to be held on Zoom.

The Pacific Centre for Discipleship, which owned the centre, is developing plans for a much larger student facility and chapel across the streets from both the UBC and Regent College campuses. ❧

Zoom baptisms in a time of pandemic

By Emma Siemens
CM Intern

In a time when hope was hard to find, expressions of faith became even more significant. As a ritual necessitating proximity and touch, baptisms were something Mennonite churches across Canada struggled to maintain and accommodate within the public-health restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the uncertainty of the pandemic, however, committing oneself to faith through baptism became an act of hope worth the accommodation.

“There was a stretch there where I was thinking, well, in the spirit of Anabaptism, we could get on Zoom, and ‘I’ll baptize you, you baptize me,’” says pastor Phil Campbell-Enns about baptisms happening from home. “Realizing that people are leaning on their faith to get them through this time, why don’t we lean on it all the way?”

Campbell-Enns and Judith Friesen Epp, co-pastors of Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, conducted three baptisms within the stricter provincial public-health restrictions of the pandemic. While all of these baptisms were able to happen in person at the church, the “faith conversations” the young adults participated in before their baptisms were held over Zoom.

The pastors organized these conversations in March 2021, when they realized their congregation included an especially large group of young adults interested in baptism. With no sure end to Manitoba’s public-health restrictions preventing group gatherings in sight, these young adults were invited to discuss faith-related topics with guest speakers online.

“We wouldn’t have been prepared to do that in the first two, three months [of the pandemic],” Campbell-Enns says. A year of making similar adjustments, however, made this online gathering seem almost normal.

In fact, he says the online format of these conversations allowed more people to participate than an in-person format.



PHOTOS BY BRENDA SUDERMAN

Mackenzie Nicolle was baptized by Pastor Judith Friesen Epp at Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, a year ago this month. She waited until Manitoba’s public-health restrictions were temporarily loosened to be baptized. The province went into a full lockdown the following month.

“Four years ago, if somebody had suggested it, . . . the idea would’ve seemed ridiculous,” he says. “Now it’s still not ideal, but I think we would still use it as a supplement.”

Once three of those participating in these online conversations decided they wanted to be baptized, they were faced with the difficulty of establishing a date for their baptisms in an unpredictable future.

“There, the pandemic just required a pile of flexibility,” Campbell-Enns says.

Mackenzie Nicolle, one of the three baptismal candidates, waited for restrictions to lighten temporarily to be baptized. Nicolle, then 25, was able to gather with close friends after her baptism, but travel restrictions meant her parents and

grandmother watched her baptism online from their home in Saskatchewan.

“That was actually a lovely part of having it on livestream,” Nicolle says. “That probably wouldn’t have been able to happen in a non-pandemic time.”

For Nicolle, the pandemic contributed to her decision to get baptized in the first place.

She says that, while many people found attending church by Zoom difficult, working on Home Street’s technical team to facilitate this online worship allowed her to feel more connected to the church than ever before. It also gave her a sense of grounding overall when she needed it.

“For so long I wasn’t able to go anywhere,” says Nicolle. “I didn’t go in any houses for

six months. I was in my apartment and one other friend's apartment, and that was it. But then every three weeks, I got to go to church. . . . Home Street continued to be, physically, a home."

A few months after joining the technical team, she accepted the invitation to participate in the "faith conversations" open to those interested in baptism. When determining the topics they would cover in these conversations, Nicolle voted for "doubt."

"Part of why I didn't get baptized prior to the pandemic was I often felt like I needed to know, and be certain, in everything," she says. "I was already starting to understand the mystery of things, and that it was okay to not know." The unpredictability of the pandemic "really brought that home."

"That maybe was also part of the reason I didn't wait until after the pandemic to get baptized," she says. "I just felt like I was surviving, and this felt like something I could choose. . . . I didn't always feel like I could choose a lot of things during the pandemic."

Although Home Street is now able to worship in person once more, Nicolle says she sometimes misses the clumsiness that came with worshipping online.

"I would think how this feels like God's work being done, with everyone trying to

News brief

UMEI Project Renew update

UMEI Christian High School in Leamington, Ont., has enthusiastically embarked on a school renewal project. Project Renew began in the spring and is well underway. The project addresses the need for sustainable enrolment numbers at the school and is tackling the issue on many fronts. Project Renew asks for donations totalling \$800,000 over the next two years, the largest single request by the school in its history. More than \$300,000 has been raised already. The funds are being used to offset the cost of tuition for some students and provide transportation to and from the school, which is out of town. This has positively affected the school's enrolment this year. The board has moved the recruitment duties to staff members, engaging Chani Wiens as the half-time director of enrolment and community engagement. The administrative duties have been shuffled to allow the principal, Sonja Bedel, more time to work on big-picture initiatives. The school is also planning some renovation and fundraising projects that will be undertaken by volunteers.

—BY BARRY BERGEN / SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE




UMEI FACEBOOK PHOTO

Project Renew asks for donations totalling \$800,000 over the next two years, the largest single request by the school in its history. More than \$300,000 has been raised already.

do it together, but it not quite working," she says. "But also, we're trying our best, so that became meaningful." ❧



Natasha Neustaedter Barg, left, transferred her church membership on the same Sunday morning that Mackenzie Nicolle, right, was baptized at Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg in November 2021. The two enjoyed collaborating on the choosing of hymns that were sung during this service.




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 Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

Singing the song of peace

Theatre of the Beat returns to Saskatchewan stages

Story and Photos by Emily Summach
Saskatchewan Correspondent
OSLER, SASK.

After a “too long” hiatus due to the pandemic, Theatre of the Beat is once again on tour. The theatre company, based out of Toronto, delighted audiences in Saskatchewan with its production of *Selah’s Song* recently.

According to its website, “Theatre of the Beat is a Canadian touring theatre company working to catalyze conversations on social justice and its intersection with the beliefs of the communities in which we find ourselves.”

Selah’s Song tells the story of a young woman whose country is living in the midst of a decades-long war and all the pain and societal consequences that go along with that. What can one individual do in the face of such large-scale issues? This is the question that the young protagonist faces, and audiences are drawn along on the journey with her. The play was performed in both Osler and Rosthern, Sask., as part of a cross-Canada tour.

The production features an ensemble cast of four actors, an array of charming puppets and music written by Brian Moyer Suderman, a Mennonite singer-songwriter whose music can be found in the new *Voices Together* hymnal.

The play was impactful for theatregoers of all ages.

“*Selah’s Song* was great,” said Heather



Audience members settle into pews for *Selah’s Song*.



The warring rulers, Hocken Grabber and Loopen Snatchem, seek to make amends as *Selah* and her father look on.

Peters of Saskatoon. “It took a complex subject, generational civil war, and made it accessible for all viewers. My seven-year-old, Rehema, was drawn into the story when they asked us to sing along with *Selah* and the people. I loved how the play demonstrated that small actions matter, that they can grow, and that anyone can bring about positive change in the face of injustice. It also prompted Rehema and I to have conversations about risk, bravery and civil disobedience. The next morning, she woke up singing, “Won’t you sing, sing, sing with me. Sing a song of peace,” from one of the songs in the play.

It is this kind of impact that drew actor Malia Rogers, who played the title role of *Selah*, to audition for the play.

“Being cast in this show is a dream,” she said. “I love being a part of theatre that

inspires conversations between different perspectives. Theatre can really help to inspire change. I also love that going on tour, often visiting rural communities, welcomes people who maybe aren’t the first people who would choose to go to a theatre production. Making theatre happen outside of these ‘big city theatre bubbles’ is something that I’m really passionate about.”

Pastor Patty Friesen of Osler Mennonite Church echoed Rogers’s sentiments. She worked with other area Mennonite churches to help bring *Selah’s Song* to Saskatchewan.

“I had seen Theatre of the Beat perform a different play at Wildwood Mennonite Church [in Saskatoon] before,” she said. “The effectiveness of live drama is really something special. We enter into the



Malia Rogers, Sara Jarvie-Clark, Zach Parson and Christina Leonard perform one of the original songs, written by Bryan Moyer Suderman.

story in a different way, versus watching something on a screen or listening to a sermon. People were excited to be able to go to a theatre performance again. That’s really a privilege we didn’t have during the pandemic. She said that 85 people attended the performance at Osler Mennonite Church.

Friesen and other members of the planning group also saw the event as an outreach opportunity.

“We put an ad in the local paper for the play,” she said. “I’m always interested in opportunities to draw people into church in non-Sunday morning worship-related ways. Theatre of the Beat did a great job of taking really adult themes like conflict and systemic injustice and using what we often think of as ‘children’s tools’ to tell the story—like music and puppets. So it’s effective for both kids and adults. *Selah’s Song* was certainly timely, considering global conflicts, like the war in Ukraine. As Anabaptists, it’s a good way and a good time to be reminded of our peace values and principles.”



Actors Christina Leonard and Malia Rogers take time to converse with a young fan after the show.



MULTIFAITH CLIMATE ACTION PHOTO / TEXT BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

People of many faiths gathered at the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) in downtown Winnipeg on Oct. 19 for a mass prayer action for the climate emergency. The group, which included numerous Mennonites and students from Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, called on RBC to divest from fossil fuels and invest in green and sustainable energies. According to organizers, the bank is Canada’s largest financier of fossil fuels, investing more than \$262 billion in the industry since the 2016 Paris Climate Accord. Multifaith Climate Action, a new grassroots group in Manitoba, organized the event. To view a video of the event by Meghan Mast, visit <https://bit.ly/rbcprotest>.



PHOTO BY JESSICA EVANS

Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) development associate Reynold Friesen, back row second from left, and CMU director of development Dori Zerbe Cornelsen, back row third from right, hosted an Alberta alumni gathering at Theatre 1308 in the basement of Calgary Inter-Mennonite Church, on Oct. 14.

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PEOPLE

'I just know God is using our experience for his kingdom'

House fire helps MDS volunteer empathize with disaster survivors

By John Longhurst
Mennonite Disaster Service

As a project director with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada, Jim Reimer knows it can be stressful for homeowners to cope with the loss of their house.

He just never expected to experience it firsthand.

That's what happened on July 6 when, late at night, he was awakened from a deep sleep by his wife Marlene, who heard their dog barking. She looked outside the window and saw a vehicle on fire.

After calling 911, they evacuated the house, hoping they could put it out themselves. But the fire was too big, soon jumping to the garage and then to the house itself.

"These things spread a lot faster than you can imagine," he says, recalling that night.

The local fire department put out the fire, but the house—their home in Steinbach, Man. since 1983—is likely a total loss.

"It was unbelievable, just absolutely unbelievable," he says. "These things happen somewhere else to someone else, but not to you."

The fire most likely started in a pinched extension cord plugged in from their camper to the garage.

"It was just an accident," he says. "One of those things that happen."

What isn't accidental is how people have responded to help Jim and Marlene, parents of four grown children.

"We've experienced a lot of positive things in the aftermath of the fire," he says. "The generosity of people is incredible."

In addition to the damage to the house, Reimer—who owns and operates a plumbing and heating business—also lost all his tools, inventory, company vehicles and equipment.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM REIMER

As a project director with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada, Jim Reimer never expected to experience the loss of his house firsthand. But that's what happened on July 6 when, late at night, he was awakened from a deep sleep by his wife Marlene, who heard their dog barking. She looked outside the window and saw a vehicle on fire that soon spread to their garage and then their home in Steinbach, Man.



"We lost virtually everything, but we're okay," he says.

Fortunately, the couple, who are part of Steinbach's Evangelical Mennonite Church, were able to recover some personal items from less damaged parts of the house. This included their precious photo albums, which didn't even suffer water damage.

Looking back, Reimer knows they are fortunate. "If not for the dog barking, and my wife being a light sleeper and hearing the dog, we might have died," he says.

'God at work'

When he looks in the rear-view mirror at the fire, Reimer sees "God at work."

This includes how the experience is helping him empathize more with those people MDS helps—people like Alicia, a woman in Elkhorn, Man., who also lost her home to a fire.

That's where Reimer is directing an MDS project to rebuild her house.

Unlike his situation, Alicia doesn't have the same kind of supportive community, resources and insurance to help her recover from the fire.

"That's where MDS comes in," he says.

"We can be those things to her."

The fire at his house also opened doors to help him find volunteers and contractors in nearby Kola, about a 15-minute drive from Elkhorn.

In mid-July, he was invited to share about his experience at the Sunday morning service of Kola Evangelical Mennonite Church.

"I was able to share about our disaster with them, and how they can help someone else who has experienced a disaster," he says.

After sharing, members of the church offered to help MDS assist Alicia and also passed along contact information for others who could be of assistance to complete the project.

At the same time, the fire also helps him empathize with Alicia better. "It's definitely given me a deeper understanding of what she has gone through," he says.

As for the fire itself, Reimer doesn't try to understand why it happened. "I just know God is using our experience for his kingdom. The Lord has blessed us. Now I can pass that blessing on to Alicia and others through MDS." ❧

An 'accidental' visiting scholar

Story and Photo by Dan Dyck
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
WINNIPEG

Like a gem miner with a headlamp, Natalya Venger scans microfilms, hunting for treasures rescued from Russian archives now stored at the Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA) in Winnipeg. She is here from Ukraine to study Mennonite colonies under Russian nationalism in the early 20th century.

It was a time of great upheaval for Mennonites. She wants to know how they navigated through civil unrest, a collapsing monarchy and then a revolution. It seems like more than an academic pursuit, as though her research might shine light on how ordinary Ukrainians can cope with the Russian invasion of her country.

The irony is poignant. The very thing she is studying has once again reared its head, one of the reasons she is in Winnipeg.

The petite, fair-haired, 58-year-old professor from Dnipropetrovsk National University calls herself an “accidental” visiting scholar. It is a convenient coincidence: she is on a sabbatical that offers her safe haven from the war.

The arrangement was aided by Aileen Friesen, co-director of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, with funding from the Plett Foundation. They met when Venger was studying Mennonite entrepreneurship under a Fulbright Scholarship some 15 years ago.

“North American scholars are no longer able to visit Ukraine. Natalya’s knowledge of the history of south Ukraine, of the land and its people, helps to facilitate new conversations and new research trajectories,” Friesen wrote in an email.

Interest in Russian Mennonite settlers is recent among the Ukrainian people. When the newly independent country opened access to secret Mennonite files in the early 1990s, Venger’s professor sent her to the regional archives in search of a research topic. Here, she first learned of Mennonite colonies, and she was astonished.

“After two weeks, I understood that



Natalya Venger leans against an offspring of the Chortitza oak tree in Ukraine on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University. The original Chortitza oak tree was an iconic landmark on Chortitza Island in the Dnieper River. It was estimated to be between 700 and 800 years old when it died.

it would become the subject of my life. Mennonites were a small group, but they were involved in everything. Their [path] indicated all the changes in the Russian empire. I see so many connections with the history of the Ukrainian people,” she said.

Venger recalls how Ukrainians embraced North American Mennonites visiting the country in the 1980s for heritage tours. Some of those visitors saw great social needs, and they established numerous charitable efforts to help.

“It’s very good for Ukraine to have this kind of denomination. They’re very productive in changing the world around them. It connects to the roots of their faith,” she said.

She has come to the conclusion that “I can’t understand the history of Ukraine without the Mennonites’ presence.”

Conrad Stoesz, the MHA’s archivist, sees Venger making a unique contribution to the Mennonite story. Her ability to read Russian documents and her connections to archives in Ukraine and Russia is a gift.

“She is a networker by nature, building rapport and relationships with people, which encourages sharing of knowledge

and energies,” he said.

Venger has no idea what kind of home she will return to when her visiting scholarship ends on May 31, 2023. In her heart, she feels Ukraine will emerge victorious. But if Russia succeeds, she believes “they will try to force us to change our identity.”

Friesen admires her strength, saying, “She is determined and has a strong moral compass, which keeps her calm and focused during this overwhelming moment in Ukraine’s history.”

Venger connects online with family and friends daily for updates on the war. It is not psychologically healthy, she admits, saying, “Just a year ago my future was predictable, and I thought about what I would do in 10 years.”

So far, the flat in her building in Dnipro remains intact. Her husband Oleg, who has studied history and law, has been pressed into service as an officer in the Ukrainian military. He cannot legally leave the country. An adult daughter lives in New York.

Some Sundays she will venture out to visit a Ukrainian Orthodox Church, where the language and the people feel familiar. Other Sundays she’ll attend a Mennonite church, where she feels “very comfortable.” Faith helps her believe in the future, in justice. At church, she feels able to talk to God. “Faith helps me to keep my soul and my sentiments in order, to be strong,” she said.

Over the years of her studies, and especially during her current stay, Venger has found a strong sense of community among her Mennonite colleagues. She feels welcomed, cared for.

For now, Venger’s personal circumstances and her life’s work have intersected in Winnipeg. It’s the right place to be for this moment. She is safe, putting in hours, hoping to glean insights into how a small group of Mennonites managed political upheaval more than a century ago, hoping her work will ensure Mennonites are not again hidden away in secret files. ❧



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Generosity changes everything

Author inspired by service, family and faith

By Jessica Evans
Alberta Correspondent

“History, art, music, leadership and culture are sweet salves in difficult times,” says author Robert Proudfoot, a member of First Mennonite Church, Edmonton, since 1992. “When people of different backgrounds interact respectfully, learn positively and thrive through collaboration, my spirit soars. I speak out against injustice but celebrate when we overcome by peaceful means.”

Proudfoot has published four books within the past four years, including a novel, *Come by Here, My Lord: Seen in a Mirror Dimly*, set in southern Africa during the turbulent 1970s; a biographical sketch within historic Edmonton called *A Playful Policeman Meets the Citizen-Making Teacher*; a 50-year-old East African travel memoir, *Amateurs on Safari*; and a collection of short stories, poetry, essays and photographic depictions of artwork called *Enduring Art, Active Faith*.

When asked what inspires his writing, he speaks of his heritage, his family and his experience travelling the world.

“I explore places both rural and urban, for beauty and synergy that God creates,” he says. “When I hear God’s voice and see his love in action, I want to share experiences. I am concerned with balancing natural and human aspects, and ensuring that peace and prosperity are secure for everyone.”

He started at a young age, winning a national poetry competition in Grade 5, then interviewing his grandparents about their lives and times in Edmonton 120 years ago, for a Grade 9 class social studies project on historic Edmonton. He presented their reflections during Edmonton’s 200th anniversary celebration as a city in 1994 and in *A Playful Policeman Meets the Citizen-Making Teacher*.

His Grade 11 English teacher in southern Africa encouraged him in his tale “The Guard,” that was published in *Enduring Art, Active Faith*, the story of a British



Robert Proudfoot

man’s interaction with his grim Zambian night watchman working a dangerous job while taking night school to become a school teacher.

Proudfoot’s mother was a writer who encouraged him from a young age to put pen to paper himself. She struggled to publish essays and memoirs while raising seven children, but Proudfoot later published her thoughtful works in two of his books after she died.

He also recently published an essay for the Alberta Retired Teachers’ Association’s *News & Views* magazine, called “Family teachers,” which describes the influences his parents and grandmother, who were all teachers, had on his upbringing.

His writing is very much influenced by his experiences living and travelling abroad, both as a child and adult. He and his wife Valerie served in Nigeria with Mennonite Central Committee from 1988 to 1991.

“I spent seven years living and/or working in Africa, which pointed me towards ‘others’ in Canada, particularly Muslims and Indigenous Canadians,” he says. “My father worked as a technical education advisor in Zambia, Tanzania and Ecuador; established an academic program for international students at Northern Alberta Institute of Technology; and sponsored several refugees from Sudan and Ethiopia to Alberta.”

His heritage is also an important part of both his writing and his own self-awareness.

“My grandmother and great-grandmother were Indigenous Mi’kmaq women from Prince Edward Island, but I struggle with knowing that my white ancestors participated in the forced deportation of Acadians and also supported residential schools,” he says. “Although I grew up in relative privilege, I struggled with the idea of colonialism and apartheid in southern Africa but by visiting prisoners and doing peace walks, I journey with marginalized peoples towards finding an equitable

society for all.”

Proudfoot is transitioning from a career in environmental consulting to becoming a full-time creative writer and is an active member in a general fiction writers circle through the Writers’ Guild of Alberta. He has plans to engage a traditional publishing house to bring forth two more novels—*Be Careful What You Ask For* and *A Dangerous Journey*—that form a trilogy with his 2020 novel, *Come by Here, My Lord: Seen in a Mirror Dimly*. These novels celebrate friendships that young people developed across racial and socio-economic barriers enforced by colonialism and apartheid in southern Africa during the turbulent early 1970s.

Another title that is in the works is *Like Flowers of the Grass*, a novel set in the prairie landscapes of southern Alberta from 1980 to 2020 that explores aspirations and struggles of free-spirited and hardworking Albertans.

“These Albertans advance their bold society within Canadian confederation,” he says, “despite drought, fires and floods; boom and bust economy; flirtations with separation; and health pandemics. It is a cautionary tale modelled on the biblical Epistle of James, regarding ambitious plans by wealthy people, which briefly prosper but then fade away like flowers of the grass.”

He volunteers with MCC Alberta as a board member and Thrift Shop counselor, and previously provided governance oversight to the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Village Goods, Fair Trade Edmonton, Forests Without Borders, and the Edmonton Mediation and Restorative Justice Centre, where he volunteered as a trained mediator from 1992 to 2005. ✎

Proudfoot’s books are available through CommonWord.ca as well as his website, www.proudfootfamilyart.ca.



FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

God's mission in Anabaptist communities

By James R. Krabill
Mennonite World Conference

The relationship of Anabaptism and mission is a hot topic, and the field continues to expand to include a number of disciplines and sub-disciplines emerging that attempt to integrate a vision that is both missional and faithful to the Anabaptist message—and to wrestling with what precisely that means.

Our principal preoccupation as the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Mission Commission is exploring and implementing ways to strengthen Anabaptist communities in their witness and service to God's mission.

What are the best ways to do that? Is it through:

- Printed and online resources?
- In-person gatherings?
- Virtual conversations?
- Storytelling?
- Preaching?
- Bible studies?
- Seminars?
- Testimonies?

The Mission Commission wants to hear from the global community which of these is most helpful.

In the meantime, however, we need to remind ourselves that we are not the first to carry out this task. From the earliest days of the Radical Reformation nearly 500 years ago, Anabaptists were impassioned with the desire to share their faith and model what the church should look like in serving others.

Many of these efforts exist only in oral form and currently remain out of reach to the broader faith community. Others have been recorded in written form and are scattered around the world in archives, church libraries and personal collections.

In 1984, a first attempt was made to compile a published list of some of these written materials by and about Anabaptists in mission. Later editions in 2002 and 2012 updated the list. It now includes several thousand entries in multiple languages

of journal articles, books, book reviews, unpublished documents, dissertations and conference papers.

This is an incredibly important resource to God's Anabaptist-people-in-mission. And it is available on the MWC Mission Commission website at <https://bit.ly/mwc-bibliography>.

But the Mission Commission is also aware that we need to update it once again to make the list searchable and inclusive of more diverse voices from the MWC family around the world. We will work on this over the next few years. In the meantime, enjoy this valuable resource and stay tuned for updates. ☘

To offer your feedback to the mission commission, email info@mwc-cmm.org.

James Krabill is chair of the MWC Mission Commission.



SCREEN SHOT COURTESY OF JAMES KRABILL

In September, the MWC Mission Commission met on Zoom with 40 mission and service leaders from more than 20 countries.

CMU Press announces new books

CMU Press
WINNIPEG

At the Mennonite/s Writing Conference held this October at Goshen (Ind.) College, Winnipeg's CMU Press announced upcoming publishing projects to the writers and academics in attendance.

Following the successful June 2022 launch of a book of literary essays, Dora Dueck's *Return Stroke*, the publisher's next project will also be literary: a historical novel by Sarah Klassen, *The Russian Daughter*, in December.

New releases scheduled for 2023 were also revealed. The first three titles in the new Lyrik Poetry Series, featuring David Waltner-Toews, John Weier and Sarah Klassen, will arrive next spring. Each



title will be a "New and Selected Poems" by a well-known Mennonite poet. The editor of the series is poet Nathan Dueck, who teaches at College of the Rockies in Cranbrook, B.C.

Two collections of essays edited by Robert Zacharias of York University are also forthcoming. *In Search of a Mennonite Imagination* will be a collection of literary

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

criticism from the past 75 years. The volume will offer work by dozens of key writers who have helped shape the critical conversation about Mennonite writing.

Zacharias states: “Much of this discussion has been scattered across difficult-to-find journals or out-of-print books. For the first time, readers will have a full selection of the critical work celebrating and interrogating the Mennonite literary phenomenon.”

The second volume edited by Zacharias will gather key scholarly essays by Hildi Froese-Tiessen, a longtime English

professor at Conrad Grebel University. *Beyond the Binary: Essays on Mennonite/s Writing* will gather work by a scholar who has been called “the godmother of Mennonite literary criticism.”

According to Zacharias, “Hildi Froese Tiessen is a primary figure in the establishment of Mennonite writing, but her essays have yet to be collected. We’re going to change that.”

Sue Sorensen, head of CMU Press, says she was delighted by the response to the upcoming titles: “These will be books of great interest to both Canadian

and American audiences. For Mennonite writers, that national border doesn’t matter much. The conversations flow back and forth, and there’s lots of conversation and mutual support.”

CMU Press has been publishing since the 1970s, specializing in theology and Mennonite history and biography.

“We’ll continue to publish in our traditional areas, but we’re broadening our scope for more variety in the future, keeping in mind that we are always a university press. And that means we promote excellence,” Sorensen says.

‘Resistance’ is not futile

By David C. Cramer

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary
ELKHART, IND.

Nearly 50 AMBS students, faculty and staff gathered in the library of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) on Sept. 28 for a celebration of the release of *Resistance: Confronting Violence, Power, and Abuse within Peace Churches*, edited by Cameron Altaras and Carol Penner. The event featured a presentation by author and co-editor Altaras, who visited the campus from her home in Washington State.

This book is the latest volume to be released by the Institute of Mennonite Studies (IMS), the research and publishing wing of AMBS.

During the event, Altaras shared her own story of experiencing abuse at the hands of a Mennonite pastor and finding the courage to speak of the abuse many years later.

“When I finally spoke, seven other women came forward with their stories about abuse by the same pastor,” she told the audience. “This was my first experience of how personal storytelling brings us out of isolation and empowers us to heal in community.”

Altaras explained how—out of their own personal experiences, as well as their academic research and professional experience related to the topic of abuse—she and Penner joined forces to collect



PHOTO BY RACHEL A. FONSECA

Cameron Altaras with the book she co-edited with Carol Penner, *Resistance: Confronting Violence, Power, and Abuse within Peace Churches*.

stories of other people who have survived or confronted violence and abuse within Anabaptist churches. More than 30 people entrusted them with their stories, resulting in this collection of 34 essays by abuse survivors; survivor advocates; and other storytellers, poets and academics.

Regarding the choice of the title *Resistance*, Altaras said, “Because this book is situated within the particular religious context of the Anabaptist tradition—and Historic Peace Churches—we were faced with the emphasis on ‘nonresistance’ to violence, based on the Anabaptist interpretation of words attributed to Jesus in Matthew 5:39—to not resist the evildoer and to turn the other cheek.”

She described how she and Penner chose the book’s title to challenge this traditional Anabaptist emphasis on nonresistance: “This book addresses ways in which theology has sanctioned and justified harm, and asks how we might honour the Anabaptist theology that has shaped us and, at the same time, resist evil and seek healing for those who are harmed. We use ‘resistance’ in our title to pay tribute to the power of survivors of such harms.”

Altaras spoke of how the book confronts not only sexualized violence, but also the related violence of colonialism; the Doctrine of Discovery; and various forms of oppression and “othering” based on racial identity, gender and sexuality. She noted that these forms of violence are often related and overlapping, “causing suffering under an intersection of multiple webs of oppression.”

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

PHOTO: FLICKR.COM/TRAVIS_SIMON

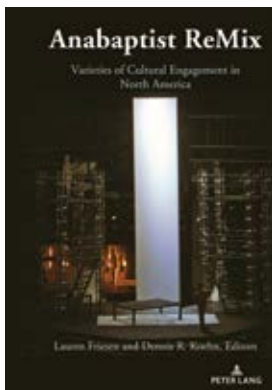


2022 Fall list of Books & Resources

Theology, Spirituality

Anabaptist Political Theology after Marpeck. Weaver, J. Denny, Gerald J. Mast and Trevor Bechtel, eds. Cascadia Publishing House, 2022, 262 pages.

This collection of essays explores the life and ideas of Pilgram Marpeck of the 16th century and reflects on Marpeck's significance for the church today.



Anabaptist ReMix: Varieties of Cultural Engagement in North America. Lauren Friesen and Dennis R. Koehn, eds. Peter Lang, 2022, 478 pages.

This academic book is a collection of essays that examine how Mennonites have adapted to the modern world from a variety of perspectives. It explores several themes, including ethics, community, faith and culture.

Bridgefolk: An Anthology of the Mennonite-Catholic Theological Colloquium (Bridgefolk Series). Gerald W. Schlabach, ed. Pandora Press, 2022, 570 pages.

This collection brings together four previously published Bridgefolk booklets surveying dialogues on martyrdom, peace-making, baptism and policing.

Expecting Emmanuel: Eight Women Who Prepared the Way. Joanna Harader. Herald Press, 2022, 130 pages.

The daily devotions in this book are designed to be used during the Advent and Christmas season. They are based primarily on five women from Jesus' genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary. There are also resources for worship and small groups, and original artwork by Michelle Burkholder.



A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence: Key Thinkers, Activists and Movements for the Gospel of Peace. David C. Cramer and Myles Wertz. Baker Academic, 2022, 188 pages.

This book takes a fresh look at what has been said about nonviolence, and each of the eight chapters identifies a different stream of Christian nonviolence. Cramer

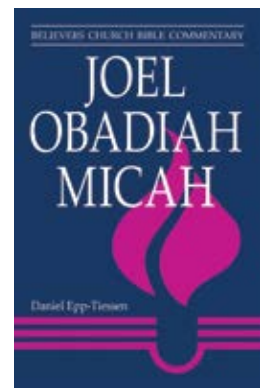
is a Mennonite pastor who also teaches at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.

Intercessory Prayer and the Communion of Saints: Mennonite and Catholic Perspectives. Darrin W. Snyder Belousek and Margaret R. Pfeil, eds. Pandora Press, 2022, 240 pages.

This book is a collection of presentations at conferences in 2015 and 2016 sponsored by Bridgefolk, a Mennonite-Catholic ecumenical organization that explored the practice of intercessory prayer and the doctrine of the communion of saints.

Jesus Takes a Side: Embracing the Political Demands of the Gospel. Jonny Rashid. Herald Press, 2022, 175 pages.

Anchoring his arguments in Scripture, the author states that it is the responsibility of faithful Christians to get involved in assisting those who are oppressed in our society. He identifies neoliberalism, whiteness and violence as things that need to be challenged.



Joel, Obadiah, Micah: Believers Church Bible Commentary. Daniel Epp-Tiessen. Herald Press, 2022, 208 pages.

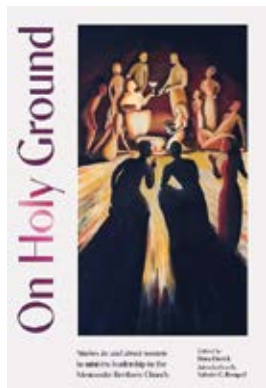
This Bible commentary from an Anabaptist perspective is the 35th volume of the series. Epp-Tiessen examines these minor prophets in light of the larger biblical story. He has been teaching at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, since 1998.

Making Wars Cease: A Survey of the MCC Peace Section 1940-1990. Urbane Peachey. Pandora Press, 2022, 320 pages.

Peachey was the executive secretary of

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

the MCC Peace Section binational from 1975 to 1986. This book tells the story of the witness of MCC's Peace Section, which worked with governments on issues of conscription and peacemaking.



On Holy Ground: Stories by and about women in ministry leadership in the Mennonite Brethren Church. Dora Dueck, ed. Kindred Productions, 2022, 201 pages.

In this collection of essays, commissioned by the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission, 16 women tell their personal stories about ministry leadership in the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Reading Evangelicals: How Christian Fiction Shaped a Culture and a Faith. Daniel Silliman. Eerdmans, 2021, 286 pages.

To explore what it means to be evangelical in North America, the author examines five novels published between 1979 and 2008 that each sold more than one million copies. The authors are Janette Oke, Frank Peretti, Tim LaHaye, Beverley Lewis and William Paul Young.

Resistance: Confronting Violence, Power, and Abuse within Peace Churches. Cameron Altaras and Carol Penner, eds. AMBS Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2022, 480 pages.

The editors have collected a wide variety of stories from those who have experienced abuse in Anabaptist denominations. They suggest that teaching nonresistance can make the abuse of power extra damaging.

Spiritual Caregivers in the Hospital:

Windows to Competent Practice. Third Edition. Leah D. Bueckert and Daniel S. Schipani, eds. Pandora Press, 2022, 348 pages.

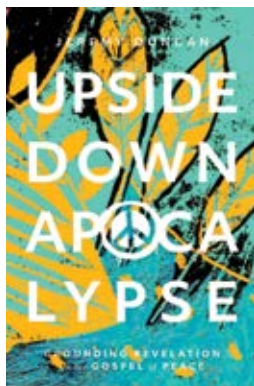
First published in 2006, this resource for healthcare chaplains has been re-issued.

Theology at the Border: Community Peacemaker Teams and the Refugee Crisis in Europe. Hadje Cresencio Sadje. Pandora Press, 2022, 109 pages.

Using the concrete reality of the refugee crisis in Europe, this book develops a theology for Community Peacemaker Teams.

These Songs We Sing: Reflections on the Hymns We Have Loved. Carla Klassen. Pandora Press, 2022, 214 pages.

A few years ago, the author began a blog reflecting on a familiar hymn each week as well as providing a musical arrangement. This book is an expansion of the project to include broader reflections on 52 hymns.



Upside Down Apocalypse: Grounding Revelation in the Gospel of Peace. Jeremy Duncan. Herald Press, 2022, 208 pages.

The author argues that the pop theology of the Left Behind series has misinterpreted the images found in the Book of Revelation. It is actually a message of peace and encouragement to the early church.

When We Belong: Reclaiming Christianity on the Margins. Rohadi Nagassar. Herald Press, 2022, 215 pages.

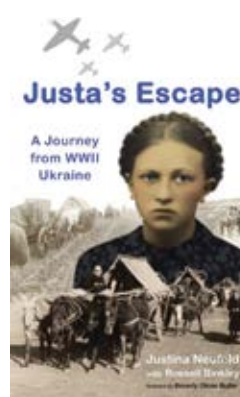
A pastor and church planter, this author from Calgary reflects on his negative experiences with a Christian church overly influenced by white patriarchs. He explores ideas for improving the church

experience for people on the margins.

A World of Faith & Spirituality: Yours, Mine, Theirs & Ours, Diversity in Manitoba. Ray Dirks and Manju Lodha. Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, 2022, 216 pages.

For 10 years the authors led workshops together where students created artworks expressing their faith. With more than 800 colour photos, this book highlights Indigenous spirituality, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and many other faith traditions present in Manitoba.

History



Justa's Escape: A Journey From WWII Ukraine. Justina Neufeld. Wipf and Stock, 2022, 186 pages.

This story about a Mennonite family's escape to North America during the tumultuous years of the Second World War is told from the viewpoint of a young girl. It is designed for young adult readers and is a retelling of Justina Neufeld's *A Family Torn Apart*.

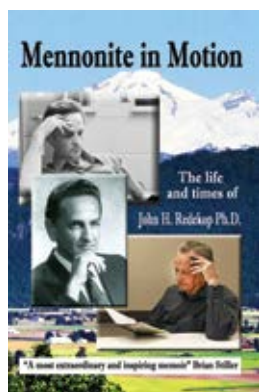
Memoir of an Unimagined Career: 43 Years Inside Mennonite Media. Melodie M. Davis. Masthof Press, 2022, 212 pages.

In telling her personal story, Davis's 43 years of working in Mennonite media also provides a history of the founding organizations of today's MennoMedia. She saw vast changes during her career from print and radio to video and web-based ministries.

A Mennonite Draft Dodger in Canada: A Memoir. Samuel Steiner. Privately published with Amazon, 2022, 155 pages.

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

With honesty and humility, Sam Steiner tells the story of how the son of generations of Mennonite church leaders became a draft dodger. Also included is historical information on the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, the creation of Mennonite Church Canada and the challenge of early female pastors.



Mennonite in Motion: The Life and Times of John H. Redekop. Fraser River Books, 2022, 400 pages.

John Redekop taught political science at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont., for many years and then also at Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C. He spent many years in leadership in the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches as well as other organizations.

Simply Sacred: Stories from School. Joanne Wiens. Privately published with Word Alive Press, 2022.

The stories from this collection are reflections on the experiences of a former principal of Menno Simons Christian School in Calgary.

This Very Ground, This Crooked Affair: A Mennonite Homestead on Lenape Land. John L. Ruth. Cascadia Publishing House, 2021, 396 pages.

John L. Ruth, a Mennonite historian, examines the story of how his ancestors took over the homeland of the Indigenous people of the Delaware Valley. He recognizes that his previous histories of Mennonites in Pennsylvania did not properly acknowledge this displacement.

Walking Together: Intercultural Stories of

Love and Acceptance. Edith von Gunten and Neill von Gunten, Mennonite Church Canada, 2022, 234 pages.

The stories in this collection come from the long ministry of Edith and Neill von Gunten, who worked in Black and Indigenous neighbourhoods. As well as telling stories, it explores issues of injustice and racism.

Other books

Because of Perry. Melody Steinman. Privately published with Volumes, 2022.

Although Perry Steinman was born with Down Syndrome, he made a significant impact on the lives of others. His hope and enthusiasm were gifts for his faith community. The book is available at <https://volumesdirect.com>.

Bridges Over Fences: Culture to Culture. Gordon Lobe. Privately published, 2021, 285 pages.

Gordon Lobe has collected a variety of stories about interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Saskatchewan. The appendices provide information about the Indian Act and its impact.

The Burden of Light. Michael Buhler. Privately published with FriesenPress, 2021, 132 pages.

This collection of eight short stories explores questions of spirituality for those living on the edge of society and ways they can encounter the divine light.



A Cheesy Christmas. Barry Bergen. Privately published with Blurb Books, 2022, 100 pages.

When Ricotta Stilton, a beautiful small-town cheesemaker, is invited to compete in the International Cheese Festival, she didn't expect to meet the dashing Prince Emmetal. Will romance blossom in the cheesiest of circumstances?

Flyaway. Sarah Ens. Turnstone Press, 2022, 120 pages.

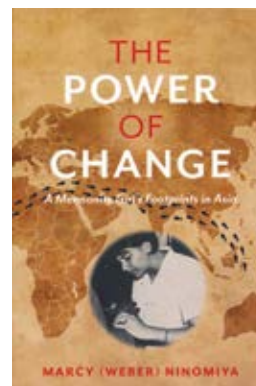
This is Sarah Ens's second book of poetry. She explores the interconnectedness of the world, wondering how the birds and prairie grass of Manitoba have been affected by her Mennonite family's migration from Ukraine.

Grace Can Lead Us Home: A Christian Call to End Homelessness. Kevin Nye. Herald Press, 2022, 208 pages.

The author lives in Los Angeles, where he works to reduce homelessness. He uses his own experiences and anecdotes to explain the issues around insufficient housing and calls for Christians to be respectful and to extend grace to those who have no homes.

Menno in Athens: A Novel. Ronald Tiessen. Pandora Press, 2022, 200 pages.

The narrator undertakes a pilgrimage to Greece, where he visits various historic sites and reflects on his Anabaptist heritage.



The Power of Change: A Mennonite Girl's Footprints in Asia. Marcy (Weber) Ninomiya. Privately published with FriesenPress, 2022, 400 pages.

In the 1960s, Marcy Weber left rural Ontario to work with Mennonite Central Committee as a nurse in Vietnam. Concerned about helping others, she and

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her husband worked in Asia for more than 50 years. She describes her varied and interesting experiences with warmth and humour.



Return Stroke: Essays & Memoir. Dora Dueck. CMU Press, 2022, 232 pages.

As well as several personal essays, this book includes Dueck's memoir, beginning with her several years living in the Paraguayan Chaco. An award winner, Dueck has also written four books of fiction.

The White Mosque: A Memoir. Sofia Samatar. Catapult Publishing, 2022, 336 pages.

While writing about a group of Mennonites who travelled from Russia to central Asia in the late 19th century, the author also reflects on her own experience as a Mennonite of colour growing up in the United States with parents from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Wild Ride: A Journey of Transformation. Sherill Hostetter. Resource Publications, Wipf and Stock, 2022, 166 pages.

Sherill Hostetter writes with deep emotion about her life and search for God in the midst of trauma and questions about ministry.

Resources

Accessible Communications Webinar, Parts I and II. 2022, 60 minutes each. Available at Anabaptist Disabilities Network website under "Resources" and "Webinars."

These recent webinars give information on how faith-based print and digital

communications can provide meaningful access for individuals with disabilities.

A Creative God: The Visual Arts in Worship. Prepared by Together in Worship. 2022, 45-minute video.

This video documentary is a free resource about using visuals in worship. Produced by Rebecca Slough (AMBS) and Jerry Holsopple (EMU), it is available at togetherinworship.net. A discussion guide is included.

Mennonite Quarterly Review. April 2022, published by Goshen College, the Mennonite Historical Society and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 190 pages.

Six essays in this issue examine the role of Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite collaboration with Nazism in the 1930s and 40s. Individuals such as Benjamin Unruh and Jacob Luitjens are closely investigated. The July 2022 issue also has an article by Aileen Friesen.



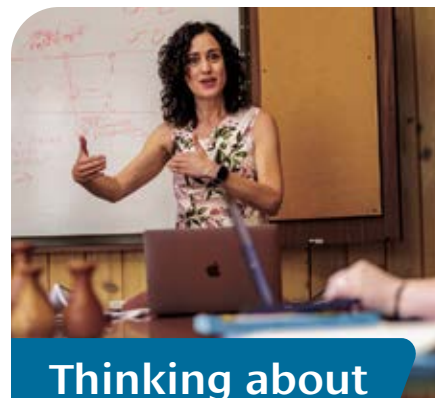
Mennonite World Conference Assembly 2022 videos. <https://mwc-cmm.org/stories/watch-it>.

The Mennonite World Conference YouTube channel has a variety of videos, long and short, of singing, workshops and worship services from the July 2022 assembly in Indonesia.

—COMPILED BY BARB DRAPER
BOOKS & RESOURCES EDITOR

Many of the featured titles on the book list are available for purchase or to borrow from CommonWord Book Store and Resource Centre in Winnipeg. For more information, visit commonword.ca or call 204-594-0527 or 1-877-846-1593.

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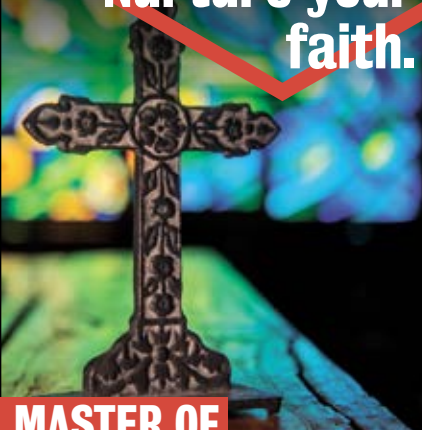
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FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

New titles chosen for Common Read

MennoMedia
HARRISONBURG, VA.

Mennonite Church U.S.A., MC Canada and Herald Press have chosen three new titles for the 2022-23 Common Read. Beginning with *When We Belong* by Rohadi Nagassar this fall, the Common Read will continue in January with *Grace Can Lead Us Home* by Kevin Nye, and *Finding Our Way Forward* by Melanie Springer Mock next April:

• **When We Belong: Reclaiming Christianity on the Margins** is written for Christians who know the pain, isolation and loss of identity that comes with the struggle to be seen in churches. Writing for and about those who feel there's no place left to belong, Rohadi Nagassar, a multiethnic pastor, points people to Jesus, whose love knows



no bounds. For everyone who wants to join in building radically inclusive communities, Nagassar offers a hopeful vision for how to get there.

• **Grace Can Lead Us Home: A Christian Call to End Homelessness** tells true stories of people experiencing homelessness: their successes, the challenges and everything in between. Author Kevin Nye, who has spent years working in homeless services, demonstrates that housing insecurity is solvable and offers practical applications for people to get involved at any level. Jesus has something to teach us all about grace—something that could change the landscape of homelessness entirely if only we're ready to hear it.



• **Finding Our Way Forward: When the Children We Love Become Adults** draws on the latest social-science research and the author's own interviews with young adults to explore the extraordinary pressures they face. Melanie Springer Mock, a college professor and mom of four adult children, offers tools to help young people negotiate spaces that they see as unjust in their lives. Disagreements with our adult children can be difficult, but our relationships can be transformed as together we find our way forward. ❧



Common Read participants can join the authors on live Zoom events each quarter. Books are available in Canada at commonword.ca.

New from **Dora Dueck**

Return Stroke

essays & memoir

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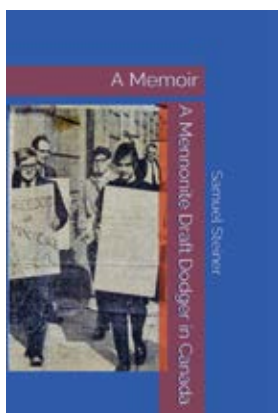
BOOK REVIEW

Sam Steiner's memoir reflects on life

A Mennonite Draft Dodger in Canada: A Memoir.
Samuel Steiner. Privately published with Amazon, 2022, 155 pages

Reviewed by Barb Draper
BOOKS & RESOURCES EDITOR

While working on his book *In Search of Promised Lands: A Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario*, Sam Steiner began writing a weekly online blog about his research, and occasionally he would include personal stories. In this memoir, *A Mennonite Draft Dodger in Canada*, he has expanded and updated those personal blog stories.



As the consequences of this action appeared on the horizon, he finally allowed his friends to assist him in avoiding arrest.

He writes with affection about the Mennonites who helped him find his feet in Canada. He says, "Sue Clemmer became my emotional lifeline as I adjusted to a new world

and battled my guilt feelings for not going to prison." The couple were married in the summer of 1969, less than a year after he came to Waterloo Region, Ont.

Over the next decades, he played an important role in Mennonite circles. Employed at the library and archives at what was then Conrad Grebel College, Steiner also began to sit on church conference boards and committees.

He writes: "I served as secretary on almost every committee I joined. I believed that as the memory of the committee, the secretary's work was often as significant as that of the chairperson." His participation on many committees gave him an inside look at Mennonite church politics.

He reflects on the integration of three Mennonite conferences in Ontario into the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada. He was very involved in the process, and writes, "I believed I had made a difference in the process and have always felt the creation of

[Mennonite Church Eastern Canada] was a good decision." He is also positive about the creation of MC Canada, but he questions whether the merger that formed MC U.S.A. was a good move in the long run.

His writing projects have also made a contribution to the Mennonite community. As well as a biography of Jacob Y. Shantz, he wrote a history of Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ont., and the definitive history of Mennonites in Ontario.

Sue's work also greatly influenced Sam's life, especially after she became a pastor. Her ordination was part of what he describes as "the second wave of female ministers among Ontario Mennonites," and he says St. Jacobs Mennonite Church was a good place for her to begin her ministry.

He experienced several congregations from the inside as Sue served at different congregations. He makes a few astute comments about each of these congregations.

Sam writes with honesty and keen insight about the major events in his life and his community. He writes candidly about pain and turmoil, including church politics and Sue's illness and death. He reflects on his own spirituality with integrity, never pretending something he does not feel. Anyone who knows Sam personally or is interested in his perceptions of the Mennonite church will find this book interesting. ✎

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

BOOK REVIEW

Novel examines Mennonite ethics in Second World War

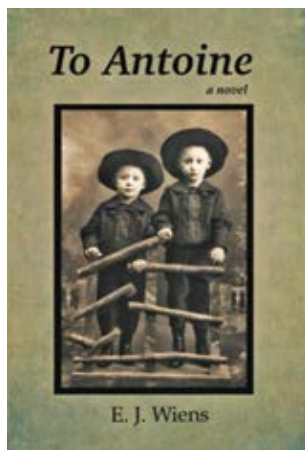
To Antoine.

E. J. Wiens. Gelassenheit Publications, 2022, 404 pages.

Reviewed by Barb Draper

BOOKS & RESOURCES EDITOR

E. J. Wiens has written a powerful story that explores the question of Mennonite collaboration with the Nazis during the Second World War. He sets this question within the broader context of Mennonite history and helps the reader to understand the nuances and moral discrepancies faced by Mennonites who fled Russia (present-day Ukraine) in 1943.



The book also raises other questions, including whether Mennonite churches in Canada have been guilty of harbouring war criminals.

To Antoine is written as a series of letters by an elderly Mennonite living in Canada, to someone he knew in his childhood and as a young adult. Through these letters, set in the early 1990s, Peter Enns reflects on his life and his experiences before, during and after the war.

Normally I do not find novels written in this letter format to be inspiring, but in this book it works. I found myself so caught up in the story that I often forgot I was reading a supposed letter. Wiens's writing style is compelling, and his characters are convincing.

In an online interview with the publisher, Wiens says he chose this style so that he could write in the first person, but also make the narrator "cantankerous." He wanted the narrator to be honest and critical with himself and his

community, so that the reader can be continuously challenged.

"I wanted the structure to allow the narrator to argue with someone he respects but also has some reservations about," says Wiens. "This puts pressure on the narrator not to lie."

Antoine, to whom the letters are written, is not a Mennonite but was very well known to the

narrator in his childhood and then in Berlin immediately after the war. The reader is kept in suspense throughout the novel, wondering exactly what happened in Berlin to explain the friendly but cautious attitude of the letters. The puzzle of Antoine is a hook, keeping the reader engaged.

As Peter Enns sits on his park bench in Winnipeg, reflecting on his life, he describes the 1930s to 1950s as "[a] time when all the moral compasses spun crazily in their binnacles [a built-in housing for a ship's compass], when the coordinates of good and evil were tossed about in a swirl of rival manias." He suggests that it was a bit of a miracle that anyone survived, as they were "caught between the Soviet hammer and the four-pronged hook, the chaff between two millstones."

These words are written near the beginning in a kind of introduction. Most of the novel is written in much simpler language, often with dialogue.

Wiens scatters German words throughout, but not in a way that makes it unclear.

The general outline of the story is not surprising for anyone familiar with this part of Mennonite history. The narrator leaves his homeland as the Germans retreat. He joins the German army toward the end of the war but, when everything is over, he finds himself among millions of other refugees trying to escape from the Soviet army. After many adventures he settles in Paraguay with help from Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and later moves to Canada.

Very little in this story is morally simple. Even the role of Peter Dyck and MCC in helping refugees after the war is seen from an unusual perspective. The question of "who is a Mennonite" becomes very muddy in this context.

I smiled when I read the final paragraph in which the narrator overhears an amusing conversation. Wiens concludes his book with the hint that no one should judge the actions of an earlier generation without understanding their history. ❧

To Antoine is published by Gelassenheit Publications, a project of Jonathan Seiling of St. Catharines, Ont., that aims to publish works in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. This book is available at commonword.ca.

Read an interview with the author, E.J. Wiens, on the next page.

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

Author explains why he wrote *To Antoine*

By Maria H. Klassen
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

How does one go about writing a novel? For author Erwin J. Wiens, the idea for his book *To Antoine* came to him about 30 years ago and haunted him for about 10 years before he began to do some serious research. The first draft was finished nine years ago.

In the 1950s, Wiens's parents sponsored a relative from Paraguay to come to Canada; it was a mother and her two children. The father had disappeared in the Soviet gulag in 1938. As a young child, Wiens overheard some of the stories she told his parents about Stalinist Russia and the Nazi occupation, about being refugees in Germany, and then life in Paraguay.

At the time, they didn't mean much but, as he grew older, he asked more questions, and his relative, as well as others, were willing to answer them, giving him insight into their turbulent past. He consulted diaries and memoirs that fell into his hands, and he read widely in published books and essays.

He had also studied and taught English literature, and his field of expertise was the early modernist era, roughly between 1890 and 1940, when authors such as Yeats, Eliot and Pound—also Mann, Broch and Brecht, among others in Germany and



Erwin J. Wiens

France—struggled heroically to articulate a vision that would stop the drift of European culture into barbarism.

According to Wiens, these authors veered between the extremes of fascism and Soviet communism, and the only ideology they all held in contempt was bourgeois capitalism.

"I thought I might come to a clearer understanding of this period if I used the Mennonite experience as a kind of lab specimen that I could put under a microscope to study the viruses that had infected the whole body of European society," Wiens says.

And so he threaded many themes together in *To Antoine*. He has the narrator, Peter, a peasant boy from a Mennonite village, become friends with Antoine, the orphaned son of provincial Russian nobility and a German *haute bourgeoisie* mother. Antoine is dropped on the doorstep of Peter's family, and Peter is fascinated by him, as they are opposites in so many ways.

Wiens has his character write to his friend as if talking to him directly after a long separation.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

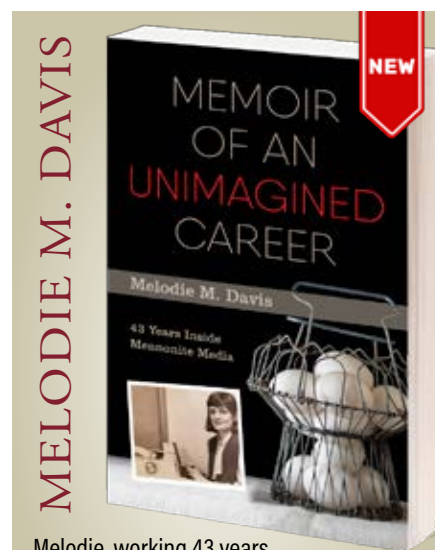
was active in Germany helping Mennonite refugees escape to Paraguay or Canada and, in the novel, MCC plays a role in Peter's escape to Paraguay.

Wiens says his novel was written before the current debate among historians about Mennonite complicity in Nazi horrors became "a hot subject." He tried to deal honestly with those issues.

When Wiens chose to write about the Mennonite refugee experience after the Second World War, he felt that several excellent novels had been written about those who escaped the Soviet Union in the 1920s, but few had focused on this group of Mennonites. "My novel began as an act of homage to their courage in a time and place when they often had to make painful compromises," he says.

Wiens says his characters are pure fiction, but some will no doubt seem familiar to those whose families lived through these years. ❧

Read a review of *To Antoine* on the previous page.



Melodie, working 43 years with Mennonite Media, digs inside to reveal the workings of the agency as it endeavored to communicate the love and compassion of Christ on issues of the day to an increasingly secular public. (212p., \$16)



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BOOK REVIEW

Bridges over fences in Saskatchewan

Bridges Over Fences: From Culture to Culture, 2nd edition.
Gordon Lobe, ed. Privately published, 2021, 190 pages.

Reviewed by Ernest Epp



B*ridges over Fences* provides in story form an impressive portrayal of first-hand experiences of non-Indigenous populations interacting with, and living next to and among, Saskatchewan's Indigenous populations located on historically established reserves. These are first-hand accounts of people who met, conversed, negotiated property and farming arrangements, and contracts with Saskatchewan's Indigenous and Métis neighbours.

Author/editor Gordon Lobe also involved Indigenous people in the preparation of this interesting book, as evidenced by the written foreword by

Harry Lafond, an Indigenous educator and past chief.

This easy-to-read book has stories that are generally positive, revealing that true living relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens haven't always been as acrimonious and distrustful as portrayed almost daily in the current public media.

At the same time, Lobe does not ignore the fact that the Canadian national plan of the time was established for the benefit of new immigrants destined for settling the open prairie of Saskatchewan. The plan that emerged relegated Indigenous residents to

subjugation, subservience and poverty. The appendices provide information on these policies.

It is truly heart-warming to read stories that speak of mutual respect, support, and an irrepressible spirit of survival and cooperation, as citizens of Mennonite, Catholic, Doukhobor and Ukrainian communities forged positive relationships with their Indigenous neighbours. ☸

Ernest Epp is a past principal of Rosthern Junior College high school.

"An inspiring Mennonite memoir"

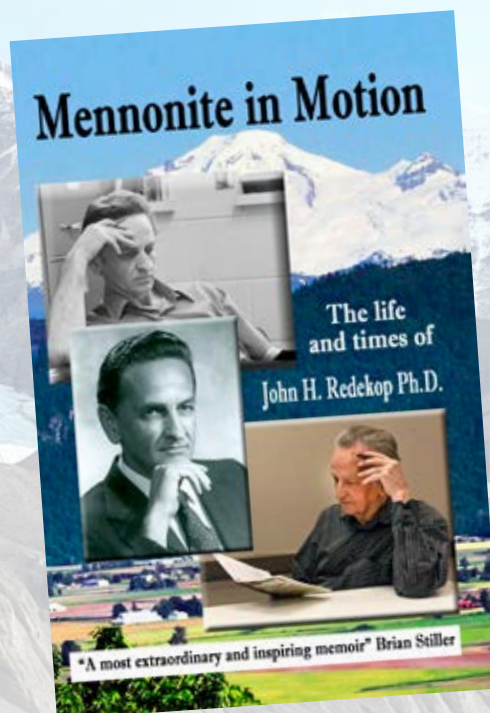
"Mennonite in Motion is an engaging and compelling tome of a read....a bounty and beauty of a book." Dr. Ron Dart

"It reads like fiction but it's a real story of a great man of faith."
Dr. Peter Nikkel

"His observations and reflections are insightful, stimulating and frequently touching."
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Dr. Janet Epp-Buckingham

"This book tells the story of a truly fascinating and full life."
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FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

Pastors meet for coffee and books

By Jessica Evans
Alberta Correspondent

“We marked up our books like crazy with the things we wanted to talk about,” says Tany Warkentin, pastoral leader at Springridge Mennonite Church in Pincher Creek.

A group of five pastors in southern Alberta have been meeting at quaint coffee shops to discuss books on topics of interest. The group consists of Caleb Kowalko, pastor of Calgary First Mennonite Church; Bill Christieson, pastor at Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary; Ryan Dueck, pastor of Lethbridge Mennonite Church; and Will Loewen, pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Calgary; and Warkentin.

The group began when two pastors wanted to take their love of books and learning beyond a few informal words over coffee on the sidelines of formal events, and into their own intentional space. Mennonite Church Alberta’s newly hired church engagement minister, Steven Giugovaz, fanned the flame by encouraging pastors to build relationships between congregations and between pastors.

“I think the motivation was, in part, that some of us are externally motivated to get helpful and nourishing reading done,” says Kowalko. “I personally had a growing stack of books that I really wanted to get to but found it hard to motivate myself. Getting a group together motivated me to read, while also connecting us better together in our lives and ministries.”

Every month, the five alternate between Nanton and Claresholm coffee shops to make the trip shorter for those coming from surrounding areas. The approximately one-hour drive for most doesn’t seem to deter the group from meeting.

“We do click really well,” says Warkentin. “I’ve never been in a book club and I have never been drawn to a book club, so the fact that I really look forward to this is telling.”

They have been meeting monthly since the beginning of the year, and were adamant about it being an in-person



PHOTO BY A BLACKWOOD COFFEE CO. SERVER

Pictured from left to right: pastors Will Loewen, Bill Christieson, Caleb Kowalko, Ryan Dueck and Tany Warkentin enjoy coffee and a book at Blackwood Coffee Co. in Claresholm, Alta.

gathering and a small, intimate group for the coffee-shop setting. They take turns choosing the books, which can be faith-based or chosen for personal interest reasons. They then order lunch, coffee or snacks and have informal conversations around the book.

“Some people have audio books, some have e-readers and some come with a very marked-up book,” says Warkentin. “We underline things that struck us, bring them to the group, and the conversation just goes.”

The group started with *The Baby and the Bathwater* by Robert J. Suderman, which was conveniently sent to churches as a resource. Then followed *Healing Our Broken Humanity: Practices for Revitalizing the Church and Renewing the World* by Grace Ji-Sun Kim. *Fight Like Jesus: How Jesus Waged Peace Throughout Holy Week*

by Jason Porterfield was then chosen as the third book.

On her turn, Warkentin suggested *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps* by Richard Rohr.

“I chose from books that I have at home and have been wanting to read. This one sounded very interesting to me,” she says. “It turned out to be a pretty powerful book for all of us.”

The book is based on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, and the author makes connections with how well they align with the gospel, and how powerful and Christlike the steps are.

“I really find Richard Rohr’s writing directed right at me, his ways of thinking really hit me,” Warkentin says. “We all have addictive tendencies in the way we think, the patterns we follow, even though we

(Continued on page 38)

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

**ONLINE NOW!**at canadianmennonite.org**'A Creative God' resources launched**

A new group of resources exploring visual arts in worship in intercultural Anabaptist congregations is available now.

canadianmennonite.org/acreativegod**MCC begins meat canning season**

As Mennonite Central Committee begins its 2022-23 meat canning season, the need for food around the world is growing.

canadianmennonite.org/meatcanning**Grebel prof contributes to global Bible study**

This past summer, Derek Suderman taught courses in Cuba and Thailand to resource the global Mennonite church.

canadianmennonite.org/dsteaches**Grebel launches new strategic plan**

Conrad Grebel University College's president provided an overview of Grebel's new strategic plan during the college's AGM last month.

canadianmennonite.org/grebelplan*(Continued from page 37)*

know they aren't healthy patterns, in the way we respond, and they are all addictions if you think about it."

The variety of books also offer education in areas of large-scale peace responses and inner workings that are relevant to everyday life and work. The pastors use the group to sharpen their critical thinking skills and offer five different perspectives, even though they may have similar thinking in many ways.

"You think about things deeper, and it's good to get different perspectives," she says. "We ask questions like: 'What do you actually think about that?' 'Where do we get that from?' Let's go a little deeper."

"The conversation is still very engaging even if it doesn't always directly talk about the book, adding in our own experiences, thoughts and interests," she says.

"The value of the group is getting to know one another, and feeling safe to share about ministry and life," adds Christieson.

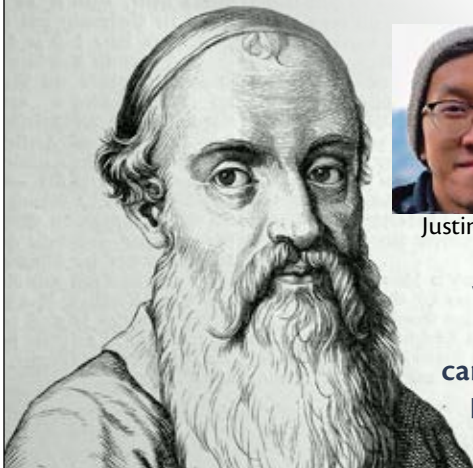
Meeting in the early afternoon, the group says that Blackwood Coffee Co. in Claresholm is a favourite spot, both for its famous squares, but also because the owner, a local pastor, is very welcoming to the group.

"Just knowing that they are fine with us taking a large table for several hours, even over lunch, is reassuring," says Warkentin. "He told us that we are very welcome there."

The group shows no signs of petering out, with many more books to read and many more conversations to learn and grow from. ☺

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November 16

Why I am a MennoniteJoin Online Media Manager **Aaron Epp** and guests to talk about current events in the church and the world.

Justin Sun



Moses Falco



Kim Penner

Watch *Canadian Mennonite* for details or go to canadianmennonite.org/events
Held on Zoom, 8:00 pm ET

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FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

News brief

Growing a Generous Church wins Word Guild award: Author Lori Guenther Reesor rejoices

MISSISSAUGA, ONT.—Church stewardship books need not be dull. Judges in the 2022 Word Guild competition recognized my creative, story-filled book on how to encourage generosity at church as an “enjoyable and informative read.” As a first-time author, I rejoice because, after much academic writing, I wanted to write a stewardship book Christians would enjoy reading. *Growing a Generous Church: A Year in the Life of Peach Blossom Church* received the award of merit in the “Christian Non-fiction, Spiritual Formation” category. “A professionally executed book with a delightfully unique method of presentation using stories to express ways of growing a generous church,” said the judges, who also noted that the “pleasant, uplifting voice of the author did much to support the Christian ideals of increasing generosity.” I researched Christian giving in Canada for my doctor of ministry degree at Tyndale University, Toronto, and have consulted with a variety of denominations. I wrote this book to be a good steward of the stories entrusted to me. The book is available online at commonword.ca.



—BY LORI GUENTHER REESOR

Kate Kennedy Steiner, assistant professor of music and director of church music and worship at Grebel. Topic: “Music, liturgy and the making of medieval Scotland.” **Nov. 25-26:** Nairn Mennonite Church, Ailsa Craig, hosts its annual Christmas event featuring live music, crafts and a tea room. (25) from 6:30 to 9 p.m.; (26) 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. **Dec. 11:** Menno Singers presents “Lessons and Carols” at Trillium Lutheran, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit www.mennosingers.com. **April 1, 2023:** Menno Singers presents “Rachmaninov’s Vespers,” at Trillium Lutheran, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m. For more information,

visit mennosingers.com. **May 5, 2023:** Menno Singers presents its “Spring Concert,” at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit mennosingers.com.

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



Classifieds

Employment Opportunities

Come work with us!

Mennonite Church Canada invites applications for the following positions:

- Communications Coordinator (.33 FTE)
- Indigenous-Relations Coordinator (.5 FTE)
- Climate Action Coordinator (.5 FTE)
- Associate Executive Minister (.5 FTE)

Full job descriptions are available at mennonitechurch.ca/get-involved#careers.

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Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
Dec. 12	Nov. 28
Dec. 26 <i>Digital Issue</i>	Dec. 12
Jan. 16	Dec. 23
Jan. 30	Jan. 16
Feb. 13 <i>Focus on Education</i>	Jan. 30
Feb. 27 <i>Focus on Camps</i>	Feb. 13
March 13	Feb. 27
March 27	March 13

Calendar

British Columbia

Dec. 10, 11: Avent Vespers with the Abendmusik Choir, at 7:30 p.m. (10) at Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, Abbotsford; (11) at St. Philip’s Anglican Church, Vancouver.

Saskatchewan

Dec. 11: “A Very Shekinah Christmas” event, at Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim, at 2 p.m.

Manitoba

Until Nov. 12: MHC Gallery, Winnipeg, presents “In the world, but not of it,” a photo exhibition of Hutterites by Tim Smith. Masks recommended. **Nov. 20:** Mennonite Community Orchestra, in collaboration with goodwill partner Mennonite Disaster Service, presents a concert reflecting on the power

of love; at Lutheran Church of the Cross, Winnipeg, at 3 p.m.. **Nov. 25:** CMU campus visit day, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. **Nov. 30:** CMU hosts a virtual open house, at 6 p.m. For more information, visit cmu.ca/virtual-open-house. **Feb. 3, 2023:** CMU campus visit day, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. **March 10, 2023:** CMU campus visit day, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Ontario

Until Dec. 16: The Grebel Gallery, Waterloo, presents “Unmasking, breathing, moving forward,” an exhibit of 17 Indigenous, Black and racialized artists responding to their experiences of COVID-19. Gallery hours: Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. **Nov. 5:** Conrad Grebel University College and University of Waterloo open house, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Nov. 24:** 2022 Benjamin Eby lecture, at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m. Speaker:



Liana Nickel glues a piece to the mosaic art project she designed at Level Ground Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, B.C. Members of the congregation are adding to the work collectively, with the theme 'New growth, deep roots.'

'New growth, deep roots'

Church creates mosaic art piece by piece

Story and Photo by Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

Members of the Level Ground Mennonite Church family in Abbotsford have been working collectively for several months on a mosaic art project in the church foyer. Since the pandemic, they have been going through a time of transitioning and revisioning as a church, solidifying how they define church membership and discerning directions over the next five years and beyond.

The theme of the picture is "New growth, deep roots," in keeping with the congregation's current discussions about openness to new growth and directions. It depicts a tree with branches reaching to the sky and roots extending underground, along with a sun, wind, mountains and a dove. The roots refer to the former West Abbotsford Mennonite Church, established in 1936, a founding congregation of the current church body.

"The mosaic is a way for everyone to take

ownership, a way of creating something beautiful together in a time of uncertainty and transition," says Liana Nickel, who designed the art piece on plywood.

The idea for the project grew out of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the church began contemplating what membership means and asked, "How do we re-establish a culture to know each other?" she says.

The multi-coloured tile pieces for the mosaic are broken with a hammer and fitted into place puzzle-style. Leftover tiles from the church kitchen make up the frame of the new work of art. Level Ground's members of all ages have been taking part in gluing and fitting the tile pieces on their way into or out of church on a Sunday morning or at other times.

"It's fun to see people working on it," says Nickel, "and anyone can participate!" Plans are for the mosaic to hang in the church foyer when completed. ☼