

CANADIAN MENNONITE

March 29, 2024 Volume 28 Number 6

PEACE SHALL DESTROY MANY

An excerpt and an 'amen'

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The literary gift of the Spirit

WILL BRAUN



A couple winters back, I read *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Rudy Wiebe’s landmark 1962 novel, for the first time. And the second and third.

The story brims with drama, insisting that tensions be faced and latent conflicts in a remote Mennonite enclave be exposed. *Peace* demands rigour.

I hunger for that rigour of honesty. I fear it too, but the hunger is greater.

I love the way my teenage sons, like many youth, call out inconsistencies. They push me ethically and spiritually. Sometimes relentlessly. They compel me to Lenten self-denial and point out actions that do not align with me standing behind a pulpit.

They’re bruising, gentle and funny, in turn. Always searching.

They recognize the complexity of life and look it in the eye.

I see Wiebe’s novel—an excerpt of which appears on pages 14 to 18—doing something similar, though I hesitate to compare teenage quips to a monumental work of literature.

Our church has an odd relationship with literature. While Mennonite writers have exhibited exceptional giftedness—Wiebe received two Governor General’s Awards—much of the value of their work is lost on the church.

Until my later 20s, I did not get literature. I’m a math lover raised in a utilitarian culture. I never took an English class after grade 12. I would

have responded to a novel such as Wiebe’s by saying, “That’s unrealistic.”

It was the writing of Northrop Frye that jolted the right side of my brain to life. Frye, a Canadian Christian who died in 1991, was one of the most influential literary critics of the last century.

I started reading his work to better understand the Bible, but the effect was broader.

“The poet’s speech is . . . linked to something involuntary in the mind, and he can write in the hope that something less inhibited and with greater penetrating power may emerge,” he wrote in *Words With Power: The Bible and Literature*.

Novelists, like poets, do something different than theologians, preachers and historians. They open other doors, tap other realms.

Frye wrote: “As literature asserts nothing, but simply holds up symbols and illustrations, it calls for a suspension of judgement, as well as varieties of reaction, that, left to itself, could be more corrosive of ideologies than any rational skepticism.”

Wiebe does not say which of his characters we should agree with. We can enter the back and forth of the tension, bending, shifting, stretching and growing.

Maybe allowing story and poem to slowly work their magic—a term Frye invokes—is better than arguing a point.

Literature makes the mind and heart more agile.

This is not to discount other forms of expression—like editorials—but to

commend the gift of literature, alongside other gifts of the Spirit, to the reluctant among us.

As Frye discusses, much of the Bible is clearly written in poetic and literary form—consider the Psalms, parables, Jonah—so we do well to open ourselves to these gifts.

Peace Shall Destroy Many can be received as a Spirit-ed challenge to face inconsistencies in faith communities or it can be pushed aside as a flight of fancy. Or it can be welcomed as a great story offering a kaleidoscope of meaning.

It can also be seen as a case study in conflict. On page 20, long-time mediator Janet Schmidt imagines a hypothetical intervention in the conflict depicted in the Wiebe excerpt, and she talks more generally about how we might be able to avoid division by “doing conflict” well.

Emily Summach’s article on page 30 marks her final contribution as Saskatchewan correspondent, a role she has had since November 2021. For the last year she has doubled as Alberta correspondent as well.

As mentioned in the lovely feature she wrote for the last issue, Emily has accepted a full-time pastoral position at Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon. We offer much gratitude for the diligence and warmth with which Emily has carried out her work, and we bless her in her next steps. ☯



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Photo by Sami Matias/Unsplash.

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CM What in the World



Survey says spend more
Fifty-three percent of Canadians say Canada should increase military spending to hit the NATO benchmark of two percent of GDP. Canada is currently at 1.3 percent. Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre says, if elected, he would work toward the NATO target, partially by cutting foreign aid. Source: Angus Reid
Photo: Corporal Alisa Strelley, Canadian Armed Forces



Ultra-orthodox exemption
The 66,000 ultra-orthodox Israeli Jews who are currently exempt from compulsory military service may have to enlist if a contentious new bill is passed. These men currently live on government stipend while studying religion full-time. Source: The Guardian
Photo: Adam Cohn/Flickr

War memorials in Mennonite churches

When it came to our attention, following publication of a February 18 story on the installation of an organ in one of our churches, that it had been designated as a "war memorial," we did a bit of checking and discovered to our dismay that this was not an isolated case. There are other churches which have done so.

The practice apparently stems from the legal possibility that exists for churches to get an exemption from payment of federal sales tax if they attach to their organ a plaque with the inscription:

"Dedicated to the glory of God and in loving memory of those who gave their lives in the service of their country in World Wars I and II."

Beyond the stupidity of such a law, we were shocked that congregations of the peace tradition would bow to this sort of thing. Isn't a principle worth more than a few dollars?

A moment from yesterday



Archivists frown on time capsules because of uncertainty that items will last and the location of the time capsule will be remembered. But who can resist the urge to send a part of our story into the unknowable future? Not the junior boys' Sunday School at Wanner Mennonite Church in Cambridge, Ontario, in 1968.

Text: Lauren Harder-Gissing
Photo: Wanner Mennonite Church/
Mennonite Archives of Ontario

50 YEARS AGO

MENNONITE REPORTER, MARCH 18, 1974



archives.mhsc.ca

CM LET US PRAY

Over 1,000 Mennonites killed in Ethiopia

STAFF

Violence has devastated Meserete Kristos Church (MKC), the Mennonite body in Ethiopia. As of February 12, armed groups had burned 49 MKC churches to the ground, looted and damaged another 81 churches, and killed 1,231 MKC members, including 31 church leaders.

Inter-tribal violence in western Oromiya regional state, home to nearly one third of MKC members, has displaced an estimated 80,000 people. The fighting is between different tribal groups.

In a February 12 memo to Mennonite Church Canada, MKC leaders shared this news and urgently requested prayer.

Over 150 pastors have had their homes and/or farms destroyed or looted. Lost cattle and crops, as well as lost income from ministerial work, have left many pastors

Many have families, friends and loved ones who have been caught in the crisis.

Abebe wrote: "We taught our church members the theology of non-violence and they have been living with all people peacefully for years. Some of the victims' families stated that the losses they experienced were something they could not explain. On behalf of the MKC, I kindly request your solidarity with us during this trial time."

In a February 10 video call with MC Canada Witness workers Werner and Joanne De Jong, MKC leaders Bekele Bejera and Tefera Sori said, "Our believers community do not want to kill anybody from any ethnic group because the word of God teaches us about peace," said Sori. "We are at peace with them, even though they want to hunt us and kill us and displace us. We teach our believers community not to attack anyone, because the word of God teaches us to love our enemy."



Meserete Kristos Church leaders visited a conflict region in Ethiopia in June 2021. Left to right: Gelagay Himiru, Tilahun Wase, Desalegn Abebe, Abayneh Anjulo and Addisu Legesse. Photo courtesy of Mennonite World Conference.

without a means to feed their families.

MKC president Desalegn Abebe wrote that "the violence in western Ethiopia took many innocent lives. The rebel groups killed unarmed people, some of them in the churches."

The conflict has also shuttered banks and schools in the region. Many are grieving and suffering from the trauma of losing spouses and family members.

Some MKC members in the affected area are sheltering people who have fled the fighting.

As of 2020, there were about a dozen Mennonite Church Canada congregations with roots in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

They asked that Mennonites in Canada pray for those affected by the violence.

MKC is the fastest growing and largest Anabaptist/Mennonite denomination in Mennonite World Conference (MWC). According to MWC, in 2022 MKC had 1160 churches and 370,909 baptized members.

MC Canada has launched an urgent relief appeal in support of MKC. To contribute, visit mennonitechurch.ca/international-witness/MKC-relief or call 866-888-6785. ✎

With files from Mennonite Church Canada.

✉ **Solution must be negotiated, not dictated**

I read with interest, and some disgust, Richard Penner's letter ("Readers write") in your January 26 issue and offer a few responses.

First, Penner suggests that, in this conflict, logic and politics are more important than moral and ethical considerations. A key factor in South Africa's move away from apartheid was the push for change which came substantially from "moral and ethical" inclinations and voices. I would suggest that moral and ethical considerations are paramount; they nudge us to consider the humanity of every person.

Second, many would take issue with Penner's contention that "the people populating the place called Israel have done a commendable job of creating a state which is more or less democratic, innovative, productive and generally a pleasant place to live." It is simply not so for most Palestinians.

Third, Penner discounting a two-state solution is based on logic and political considerations alone. If you read Jonathan Kuttab's 2021 book, *Beyond the Two-State Solution*, what is clear is that without the requisite will, it simply is not achievable. One might argue that the model Penner suggests could be imposed, but imposition rarely is a long-term solution.

But most upsetting in the letter is an apparent unwillingness to recognize the depth with which both Palestinians and Jewish folks see Palestine as their place. Given the hostility since 1948, it seems clear that a United Nations-brokered ceasefire, along with peacekeepers and a mandated peace process, will be essential for the creation of two states in which Palestinians and Jewish folks live alongside each other in peace. This will require muscle and courage, alongside patience and persistence on the part of the international community and the United Nations.

This is not a conundrum in which we "recognize the ability of Israeli leadership to run a reasonably successful country," in which we change the name of the country to the "Democratic State of Israel" and "run it like a true democracy in action." There is a long history of mistrust and bloodletting; to address it will require a negotiated process in which the identities of both peoples are respected, required and central.

In the end there must be a solution that is accepted by both Jewish and Palestinian folks. The time to dictate a solution is long past: it will need to be negotiated and it will take years to take root.

The sooner, the better!

BERT C. LOBE, KITCHENER, ONTARIO
(ROCKWAY MENNONITE CHURCH)



✉ **Force Israel to withdraw**

The war in Gaza is in the news. What is happening?

Hamas invaded Israeli territory, treated the people cruelly and took hostages. They started the war. Israel rightfully defended itself and took revenge. They intended to kill all of Hamas before retreating, which is not possible because Hamas is a resistance movement—an ideology which cannot be eradicated with weapons.

Israel has overdone its revenge and is now killing many innocent Palestinian civilians and humanitarian facilities.

We should do everything possible to force the Israelis to withdraw their troops from Gaza and open the borders to deliver the much-needed aid for Palestinians.

HELMUT LEMKE, VANCOUVER, B.C.
(POINT GREY INTER-MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP)

✉ **Between stimulus and response**

It was interesting to read the article by Cindy Wallace and the three responses ("Circling back to simplicity," February 23).

It seems ironic to me that there is a moderate to significant amount of angst among people trying to achieve simplicity in life in the face of things like the onslaught of social media; big, bad corporations; omnipresent 9-to-5 job demands; sweatshop production of clothing; unethical production of food; and the list goes on.

Individually, we can do little to change these things. What we can do is be willing to be a part of a solution: make reasonable personal attempts to reduce our consumption, be nice to others and volunteer for something if we can.

If you think the solution is to be vegan, avoid air travel, delete your social media and only shop second-hand, and you are fulfilled and happy with this, that is great. But it seems that many people attempting to achieve simplicity are not happy doing those things.

I have a large carbon footprint, but I don't obsess about it. I approve of the carbon tax. I don't fly a "F--- Trudeau" flag. I didn't support the freedom convoy. I shop local, but if I'm hosting a party for 100 people, I go to Costco and load up on food (including many products produced in Canada). If I'm hungry for a McDonald's sandwich, I buy one and enjoy it.

Make choices and be happy with them. As Viktor Frankl discovered, in the space between stimulus and response lies our power to choose.

CHARLIE SMITH, ALLAN, SASKATCHEWAN
(PLEASANT POINT MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ Gratitude generates generosity

My added comments to the informative article "Conscientious taxpayer" (February 23) may not be new to many.

Gratitude generates generosity. Our Canadian income tax policy allows for generous tax-receiptable support of many church and secular organizations. Living more simply certainly can reduce our taxable income. Generous donations also do.

Charitable donations reduce—and sometimes eliminate—federal tax payments which, in turn, lowers military support. That leaves more money under our stewardship and allows us to share more generously.

While I support many government programs, many of them do not support my Christian ideals.

IVAN UNGER, CAMBRIDGE, ONTARIO
(WANNER MENNONITE CHURCH)



✉ Leftwing push

During the years Stephen Harper was prime minister, I recall articles in *Canadian Mennonite* about the high

military spending by the Conservative government.

According to World Bank statistics, the period of Canada's lowest military spending as a percentage of GDP since World War II was 2011-2013, while Harper was in power.

Military spending between 2016 and 2021, under the current Liberal government, has averaged 0.16 percent of GDP higher than during the Harper years and has increased even more in the last two years.

Do we wish to have truth in our articles or are we more interested in pushing the leftwing agenda?

JIM PETERS, WINNIPEG

Editor's note: CM critiqued military spending of the Liberal government in our June 8, 2022, issue and our January 30, 2023, issue.

✉ Mennonite addictions

When I first read Catholic theologian James Alison's warnings about becoming addicted to our own goodness, I thought: This man knows my people. The danger of this addiction is that, if we identify as "good," we need someone else to be "bad."

I was glad that Mennonite Church Manitoba's annual gathering considered and ratified a motion calling for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty. But I was confused by the lack of resistance, because fossil fuels are one of our other big addictions.

Imagine an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting where everyone votes for a ban on liquor stores, knowing they will all be hitting the bottle on the drive home! I read Will Braun's editorial ("Longing for transformation," March 8) as the kind of fearless inventory an AA member might make. He's making us take a hard look at ourselves.

As "progressives" continue to gain power and "conservatives" continue to leave MC Manitoba, will we swap the old signals of virtue for new ones? Set new markers for goodies and baddies, but have the same old contest? Was the lack of dissent at our annual gathering a sign of our united commitment to face our fossil fuel addiction? Or did no one want to be the first addict to stand up in the meeting and admit that they weren't ready to quit yet?

Were we afraid of being shunned? That's not how you beat an addiction. You have to stop pretending. You need a circle you can be honest in. You need people who love you and call you on your bullshit. I think that might be happening in *Canadian Mennonite*. That heartens me.

P.S. Sorry about the bad word. I'm trying to fight my goodness addiction.

MARCUS REMPEL, SOUTH ST. OUEEN'S, MANITOBA
(ST. JULIAN'S TABLE)

✉ **Beg to differ**

While Will Braun concludes from his assessment of the Mennonite Church Manitoba annual gathering that “the overall reality is dim” for the church, I beg to differ (“Longing for transformation,” March 8).

I am grateful for the leadership of MC Manitoba, who organized the day. And I am especially grateful for the work of the Climate Action Working Group (CAWG), the members of which took time in the weeks and months ahead of the gathering to engage with many congregations to talk about the resolution Braun mentions. The members of CAWG also led an online information session ahead of the gathering, and I understand the breakout session at the gathering was lively.

Is a resolution to sign a letter enough? No. Are we talking about the climate crisis in our congregations? Yes. We have to start somewhere.

Had I been quick on my feet at the gathering, I could have said that I, and the congregation I’m part of, support this resolution, in part, because it affirms our commitment to being an intercultural church. The footnotes of the resolution indicated that the Mennonite World Conference Peace Committee also supports the letter—a letter initiated by countries already being devastated by climate change.

If we are a church for all nations, our ears must be tuned to these voices. This may be how we begin to go beyond business as usual.

DORI ZERBE CORNELSEN, WINNIPEG
(HOPE MENNONITE CHURCH)

CM **ONLINE COMMENTS**

✉ **Doing the work**

For those who may want to form their own opinion of Mennonite Church Manitoba’s gathering, I encourage you to check out our [Gathering 2024 page for reports and videos: tinyurl.com/mcmgathering24](https://www.mcmgathering24.com)

While we as MC Manitoba are well aware of our challenges, which exist across our regional churches and indeed across many denominations, neither the present nor the future of the church is nearly as bleak as Will Braun paints it (“Longing for transformation,” March 8).

In fact, all of his practical suggestions for getting down to the nitty-gritty—“I could imagine people huddled in one corner over lunch refining a resolution, Bibles open. Others using precious time to compare notes on newcomer integration. A group of youth pushing decision-makers for more youth nominees.”—are happening all the time, throughout the year, facilitated by our regional church staff.

Again, see MC Manitoba’s [Gathering 2024 page](https://www.mcmgathering24.com), and then check out the other ways we as a regional church are in fact

doing the work of the church—well beyond the important reporting, listening, learning and final decisions that happen at an annual delegate session.

MICHAEL PAHL, EXECUTIVE MINISTER,
MENNONITE CHURCH MANITOBA

✉ **In praise of boring AGMs**

Someone was commenting to me about an editorial in *Canadian Mennonite* critiquing “boring AGMs” (“Longing for transformation,” March 8).

I believe, generally speaking, that a “boring” annual general meeting (AGM) is a really good thing. It means the people in positions we’ve affirmed them in are doing their relational work. That is not to say we are in agreement on every little thing, but that we have been doing the work together consistently to flow with the mission of God and have demonstrated enough competency in ministry to move into a new year together.

On the flipside, “boring” can be bad if the AGM is only catering to a small demographic or people don’t care at all. “Exciting” AGMs are usually a function of a failure of leadership and constituents to listen, to engage, pray, etc. before getting to a vote. God spare us from exciting AGMs. The budget, the ballots, any bylaws, etc. can be handled just like when you candidate a lead pastor. You don’t wait until the vote to work through questions, and a search team does a ton of work before you even get to the pre-vote info and relationship meetings. That’s how every AGM should be approached.

In a church that values believers’ priesthood, we should take the time before AGMs to work through what needs to be done.

SHELBY BOESE, MC B.C. EXECUTIVE MINISTER
(EXCERPTED FROM THE MARCH 13 ISSUE OF MCBC CONNECT)

Be in Touch

• Send letters to letters@canadianmennonite.org. Our mailing address is on page 3.

Corrections

On page 22 of our March 8 issue, we incorrectly identified the Mennonite Church B.C. finance chair as Tim Miller. The correct name is Tom Miller.

On page 13 of our March 8 issue, we incorrectly said Emily Summach attended Langham Mennonite Fellowship in 2016. It should have said Warman Mennonite Church.



Photo by Will Braun.

A church basement tribute

As Mennonite Church Saskatchewan business played out in the sanctuary of North Star Mennonite Church in Drake, a group of women were doing church in the basement. On lunch prep duty were (left to right) Myrna Ewert, Vicky Toporchak, Betty Friesen, Tami-Lynn Lehr, Mary Jean Nicholson, Alvie Martens and Denise Martens.

When asked if it was the people upstairs or downstairs who were missing out, Ewert replied with a smile: “Good things happen here.”

Thanks to all those who do the holy work of nurturing body and soul, especially those who have done so for decades. May God bless the kitchen fellowship. ☘

✉ **Hardly one-sided**

I fully support Lisa Schirch’s assertion that we must recognize how “antisemitism has tainted Mennonite peace witness” in Israel-Palestine for seven decades (“Readers write,” February 23). However, I suggest Lisa ought to have mentioned the significant work that has been done on this in the past number of years, including numerous papers and articles along with a major 2018 conference on Mennonites and Nazism.

I would also like to share my experience on one of the Mennonite delegations to Israel-Palestine that Lisa calls “one-sided” and that “erase Jewish voices.”

I participated in a 2011 Mennonite Central Committee Ontario learning tour. In addition to meeting with Christian Palestinians, Muslim Palestinians and Jewish groups

working non-violently for peace, we met with the Israeli military architect of the “separation wall” (also called apartheid wall) on site who explained why the wall was necessary.

We also spent an hour in the living room of a West Bank settler who defended Jewish Zionists taking over Palestinian land and who advocated for pre-emptive violence against Palestinians. And we experienced a gut-wrenching visit to Yad Vashem, the holocaust memorial.

In all, it was hardly one-sided.

Apart from her lack of nuance here, I want to thank Lisa for her relentless efforts for many years in the struggle for a just peace for both Jews and Palestinians, and for insisting that when Mennonites ignore Jewish trauma and need for safety, we perpetuate the violence.

TIM SCHMUCKER

✉ Grateful to Arli

Thank you, Arli Klassen, for your contributions to *Canadian Mennonite* over the years (“One more on unity and diversity,” March 8).

I have appreciated your perspective and it has helped shape some of how I do life—including reaching out to those I may not have in the past and having a more inclusive circle of friends. Blessings.

LAVERNA ELLIOTT

✉ Inspirational article

I loved the article “Consider the roots,” (November 17, 2023). I think there are more people like me who want to eat more local and nutritious food in the winter but don’t know how. It gets me thinking about how to grow and store more root vegetables.

LAURIE VANDENHURK

CM MILESTONES

Births/Adoptions

Pecarski—Kynlee Alexis (b. Feb. 10, 2024) to Kailey and Nick Pecarski, Poole Mennonite Church, Milverton, Ont.

Thiessen—Logan Thomas and Tegan Louise (b. Jan. 15, 2024) to Andrew and Jen Thiessen, Calgary First Mennonite Church, Calgary, Alta.

Deaths

Enns—Leona, 93 (b. Sep 9, 1930; d. Mar 14, 2024), Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Hildebrandt—Anna, 89 (b. Feb 2, 1935; d. Feb 14, 2024), North Kildonan Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Janzen—Helen, 96 (b. May 19, 1927; d. March 18, 2024), North Kildonan Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Ratzlaff—Vernon Herman, 86 (b. June 16, 1937; d. Feb. 16, 2024), Aberdeen Mennonite Church, Aberdeen, Sask.

Richert—Pearl (nee Janzen), 90 (b. Jan. 5, 1934; d. Feb. 10, 2024), Zion Mennonite Church, Swift Current, Sask.

Wiens—Anna, 69 (b. Oct. 13, 1954; d. Feb. 29, 2024) Zion Mennonite Church, Swift Current, Sask.

Wiens—Jeanne (nee Greengrass), 88 (b. June 1, 1935; d. Dec. 22, 2023), Bethany Mennonite Church, Virgil, Ont.

Zehr—Barbara (Barb) Mae (nee Roth), 94 (b. Aug. 27, 1932; d. March 4, 2024), Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont.

CM PAID OBITUARY



Vernon Herman Ratzlaff June 16, 1937 – February 16, 2024

Vern was born to Jacob and Sara (Voth) Ratzlaff on a farm near Waldheim, SK, where he was baptized in the Brotherfield Mennonite Brethren Church on his confession of faith. He attended Windom school. At age 15, the family moved to Delta, BC, where he completed high school. While working full-time night shifts, he completed undergraduate degrees at UBC in Physics, Philosophy and Social Work, and a graduate degree in Philosophy. He married Helen Koehn on June 21, 1958; they had five children. He enjoyed his teaching years in Sharon Mennonite high school (Yarrow, BC) and at Mennonite Brethren Bible College (Winnipeg) and the University of Winnipeg (teaching philosophy and religious studies), his Mennonite Central Committee assignments in Manitoba and Egypt, and pastoral ministry in Saskatoon, SK, with Nutana Park Mennonite Church (18 years). After retirement in 2005, he served as part-time pastor of the Aberdeen Mennonite Church (SK) for 12 years, and as adjunct faculty of the Lutheran Theological Seminary, from whom he received an Honorary Doctor of Divinity in 2011. He died peacefully in his sleep at age 86. He was committed to the work of the church and its call to teaching, mission, and reconciliation. Phil. 2:5-8.

Vern was predeceased by his wife, Helen, of 56 years, his parents, and his siblings: Matilda (Art) Unruh; Frieda (Nick) Unruh; Jack (Agnes) Ratzlaff; and Sadie (Herman) Schuetze. He leaves to mourn his children: Shirley Ratzlaff; Patricia (Perry) Ng; Norman Ratzlaff; Diane (Kevin) Friesen; Bruce (Darlene) Ratzlaff; and grandsons: Reuben, Micah (Amber), and Stephen (Molly) Ng; Samuel and Louie Friesen; other relatives and many friends. A Memorial Service with Livestream will be held May 29, 2024. In lieu of flowers, contributions to Mennonite Central Committee are encouraged. [MourningGlory.ca](#)

Please send Milestone announcements, including congregation and location, within four months of the event. Send to milestones@canadianmennonite.org. For deaths, please include birth date and last name at birth when applicable.

Indigenous relations are not science fiction

Jonathan Neufeld

It has been more than eight years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report, including 94 Calls to Action that various levels of government and religious communities committed themselves to implementing.

Indigenouwatchdog.org is one of the sources I turn to for a thorough and current assessment of the implementation of the Calls. As of March 1, 2024, they report 13 Calls to Action as completed, 47 “in progress,” 19 “stalled” and 15 “not yet started.”

When the topic of conversation surrounding Indigenous relations is on the Calls to Action, I have heard individuals or congregations occasionally distance themselves from feeling any responsibility or power to influence whether or not the Calls are realized in Canadian society.

My hope, though, is that we continue to remember that one cannot opt in (or out, for that matter) of Indigenous relations. From coast to coast, we are neighbours—living on the same lands, walking the same streets, breathing the same air, sustained by the same earth and loved by the one Creator. It is never a question of our being in relationship, but rather what sort of relationship we seek to nourish and incarnate.

I recently heard Elder Adrian Jacobs, senior leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation for the Christian Reformed Church in Canada, describe our collective path as “polishing the



Photo by Lukas Hartmann/Pexels.

tarnished silver of relationship.”

That landed with me as further affirmation of the relationship waters we all swim in, and the invitation for everyone to work toward a polishing. A restoration of connection, marked by truth-telling, curiosity, appreciation, listening, trust and (re)conciliation.

I remember being called out by a Haudenosaunee elder in a workshop. I suggested that reconciliation is akin to science fiction work, working towards a relationship that has yet to be imagined. Her direct response was to correct my perspective and remind me that treaty has always been, and will always be, the relationship that Indigenous communities have offered their neighbours.

We don’t need to imagine anything

else. We need to polish the relationship that is already named.

Part of the polishing process is attending to the Calls of Action, seeking to understand the Indigenous knowledge around treaty and engage in myriad other reforms and recommendations that have been named as needed.

This polishing has opportunities in denominational, regional and congregational contexts. In 2016, MC Canada repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery, our collective response to Call to Action 49. Important action, but repudiation doesn’t immediately describe what we are for. It does not immediately impact relationships in any concrete way.

If we understand repudiation not as a finish line, but rather akin to a starting pistol calling us toward (re)conciliation, then, it is my hope, MC Canada can be a resource and encouragement to the regional Indigenous relations working groups and through them to regional collectives and congregations who are rubbing shoulders with Indigenous neighbours on a daily basis. Thereby, polishing the commitment we all have to live toward a future of reciprocity, mutual appreciation, sharing and peace. ☿



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DEEPER COMMUNION



JUSTIN SUN

Voices from other worlds

I remember it like it was yesterday.

I clutched the oversized cup of bubbly liquid in my hands. The room was dark, and I navigated the stairs frightfully. We were late. I was with my brother, sister and dad. We fumbled our way to our seats. I sat down just in time to glance up as the big blue letters appeared.

“A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...”

Then that iconic theme came blasting through the theatre, the title card STAR WARS came into focus and I was in—transported to another universe as picture and sound did exactly what they were designed to do to a five-year-old experiencing a movie in a theatre for the first time.

More than that, however, as I look back to 1999, I have a good feeling that at that moment I knew I was experiencing a turning point in my life.

I knew at that breathtaking juncture: that I was taking my first steps on a journey with novels, films, TV and plays to people and places near and far, familiar and foreign, fantastical and fantastically mundane.

Without these journeys—without Anakin, Kira, Stark, and more—I would not be who I am today. Other than those brief teenaged-years when I was “too old for fairytales,” I have always been enthralled by stories and drawn to

the power of imagination—character, genre, setting, conflict and symbols working together to become more than their parts.

Though my interests have matured (some would dispute this), I remain fascinated by the tales we tell and the people who tell them.

Why and how do people tell stories? Why has storytelling been ubiquitous in civilizations for thousands of years, both forming and mirroring who we are?

In my work, I, like many pastors, struggle with the evolving state of Western faith, religion, spirituality and the related institutions.

In this struggle, many I know turn to business strategies, charismatic personalities or new affiliations in hopes of carving out a space amidst unpredictability. From what I can see, the results have been as mixed as their methods.

No one can offer a surefire solution to the multifaceted and intersecting struggles we as churches face en masse today. Sometimes, I’m not even sure we can clearly articulate the struggle.

In it all, through countless meetings, visioning processes and strategic plans, I wonder about the underlying stories we tell ourselves. How much of our struggle is natural to communities throughout church history and how much is context-dependent and due to our current shortsightedness?

Years from now, will we look back and laugh or cry? How much of our struggle is due to an imagination calcified by a lifetime of being told (sold): “This is what faith looks like”?

At risk of mixing stories and angering fanbases, the recent release of *Dune: Part Two* has me dwelling not on

“Lucasian” space operas but “Herbertian.” The sci-fi adventure film’s scalding and provocative evaluation of colonial religions, charismatic messiahs and amenable populations subject to extremism has me pondering my work. I feel unsettled as my established narratives are pushed.

That is exactly where I find hope.

I hope that in our struggles as Christians in the 21st century we turn not only to so-called grown-up things; I hope we also return to stories, including the sort that capture five-year-olds. For we carry stories everywhere we go; they underly much of what we believe to be good, right and true.

When asked who we are, we often turn to stories; and it is stories written long ago that we trust to bridge our faith to the faith of our ancestors (even when we want to believe in systematic theological treatises instead).

Maybe, on top of all the grown-up things we must do as churches, a tale or two, good enough to unsettle imaginations, might be exactly what we need. Perhaps we might discover that the stories we tell and care about tell us something back in return; and maybe if we’re extra-attentive, we may discover God is in the stories all around us—whether in the pew or the theatre.

What stories are you attentive to today? ☞

Justin Sun serves as youth pastor of Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond, B.C. He graduated from Columbia Bible College in 2020. He can be reached at justin@peacemennonite.ca or on Instagram @PsJustinSun.



Wild

These days, I sit with stories shared by Indigenous friends. Many of the stories hold a vision of the world as a community of beings, only some of which are human. Seeds and humans relate as siblings. Birds summon the rain. Trees hold memories of ancestors.

These stories compel my attention. They also unsettle my imagination. I struggle to understand what it means to recognize seeds as siblings, or to grasp the responsibilities this sort of relationship may require.

As I ponder these stories, I feel an invitation to return to stories that have shaped my imagination and faith, and to read them with new eyes. In her book *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics*, Mari Joerstad speaks of the biblical writers' attention to a world where humans are only one creature among many who relate and respond. Trees grieve deforestation and express joy when exiled communities return. Land fights, vomits, receives comfort and rejoices.

Perhaps these stories are simply metaphor. Then again, perhaps metaphor, like fantastical sci-fi adventures, allows us to hear voices from other worlds and invites us to pay attention to the wild creativity of God within a community of many beings.

– Anika Reynar, student of religion and environmental management at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut



Found

“What stories are you attentive to?” Justin asks a fantastic question.

We are surrounded by many competing narratives, from the personal to the political to the cosmological, all vying for our attention, all claiming to tell us the truth about who we are and what we are to do, think, believe or hope for.

I spend Mondays at the local jail, where I serve as a chaplain. I recently had the opportunity to sit down with a former gang member, Satanist, and self-professed nasty dude. He is illiterate and wanted help with a Bible study he was working on with his cellmate.

The question before him had to do with the story of the lost son in Luke 15. He had never heard the story and asked if I could read it to him. Together we attended to a story about a guy who blunders to the far edges of ruin, then comes crawling back for scraps only to be dragged into a party thrown in his honour.

The story of a love that, to quote Francis Spufford, “never shudders at the state we’re in.” It was a beautiful reminder that the stories we tell matter more deeply than we often realize. ✎

– Ryan Dueck, pastor at Lethbridge Mennonite Church, Lethbridge, Alberta



Upended

When I was a small child, my family underwent an enormous tragedy, and I found solace in stories. I read *Little House in the Big Woods* a dozen times, learning from the characters' courage and dignity in the face of struggle. I needed this story; it carried me through.

Years later, reading Louise Erdrich and other Indigenous novelists, I began to see how my formation in stories of pioneer resilience came at the cost of dehumanizing Indigenous peoples. Laura Ingalls Wilder's writing had been a gift to me, but at some point I had to mourn its failures.

I had to let other stories upend my assumptions.

With Justin, I believe stories are profoundly powerful. I often wonder what stories shape my imagination now? What stories shape my children, and my students and my church community?

What stories do we need to release, either because we have outgrown them or because they did harm all along? What old stories do we need to cling to, hoping with Walter Brueggemann that the path forward is forged by remembering? What new stories do we need to welcome so that we can be utterly surprised and changed? ✎

– Cindy Wallace, professor of English at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan

PEACE SHALL DESTROY MANY

An excerpt

By Rudy Wiebe

“Fly, you heathen,” thought the young Thom Wiens to himself as the World War II fighter jets took their training flight over him and the four horses plowing under his rein in a rocky field hewn from forest.

The Mennonites of the fictional village of Wapiti in northern Saskatchewan had sought to leave worldliness behind, only to have the thunderous death machines swoop intimidatingly, intentionally low overhead.

From this first scene of Rudy Wiebe’s 1962 landmark novel, Peace Shall Destroy Many, tension compels the story forward, toward an inevitable eruption, or series of eruptions, such as the one in the excerpt below.

The passage is set in an abruptly called Monday night church meeting on a warm but unsettled June evening. The characters include, in order of appearance:

- Pastor Lepp (maker of “peace”)
- Thom Wiens (earnest teenage protagonist)
- Reimer (chairperson of the church meeting)
- Brother Franz Reimer Junior (leader of church youth committee)
- Deacon Block (not the pastor but the powerhouse, the guardian of Truth, the person who loaned most community members the money that enabled them to settle in Wapiti)
- Brother Joseph Dueck (young, educated, sincere teacher, concluding his first year in the community)

Minor characters include Brother Rempel (church member), David Wiens (missionary sent to Indian by Wapiti church), Aaron Martens (church member) and Herman Petkau (church member). –Eds.

Pastor Lepp was reading, in his precise German, about “being at peace among yourselves.” Hearing that solemn warning, Thom could hardly doubt what the sudden reason for the church meeting might be, but the serene brotherliness about him was reassuring. Their church did not have quarrels: the problem would be solved and the matter concluded.

A silence lengthened about Thom, and he looked up to find Reimer gazing thoughtfully at the slip of paper. The issue for the hasty meeting was about to be broached. He could sense everyone with him sitting coiled with curiosity, almost knowing. Abruptly, Thom felt cheap for them. The church was meant for greater things! He saw Pastor Lepp rise and face them. When the Pastor spoke, Thom could understand why he was re-elected year after year.

“Certain younger and older members of the church have expressed concern about the young people’s meeting held last Friday at Poplar Lake. An outdoor gathering for the young people alone like this has never been held before, but the Church Board felt, when the Youth Committee presented the suggestion, that no harm would be done. Now no one has felt that the meeting itself was actually wrong, but several brethren have mentioned that certain aspects of it were not in the best Christian traditions of our church. This matter must be clarified. There is no need for ungodly gossip to develop. The Church Board has asked Brother Franz Reimer Junior, as leader of the Youth Committee, to explain what happened. If there are any questions, they can then be asked.”

The exact objections would come shortly, Thom knew, but who could possibly have complained? Everyone had been so

moved. Young Franz, slender face peaked in seriousness, rose near the front; Thom glanced at Block whose handsome face with its crest of iron hair concentrated, expressionless as granite, on the speaker.

As Franz spoke with gradual fluency, Thom remembered. Scalding coffee in enameled cups; jam sandwiches eaten squatting; high laughter of the girls under half-hushed pines; still-hot sand by the lap of the lake with the sun blazing down to the tree-line; songs sung to the lost echo of the wilderness: nothing could deface that evening.

Two definite issues were shaping in Thom’s mind as, with the first question, Block took over the meeting. Thom felt a faint uneasiness for Joseph, but also vast relief, for what he himself had so long hesitated to mention would now be bared to all.

“In what language was the evening program carried out?”

“The singing was in German, but Brother Dueck spoke in English.”

“Was this by decision of the Youth Committee?”

“Well,” Franz’s discomfort was evident, “actually no one spoke about it one way or the other—obviously it was to be German. But at the lake Brother Dueck pointed out that there were some people there from both districts who were not Mennonites and could not understand German. Also, we noticed some Indians within hearing distance, and so he suggested he speak in English.”

“Could I say a word, Brother Chairman?” Joseph’s voice cut cleanly from the back of the church. Everyone stirred expectantly. “Could I ask why it is so important that the church know I spoke in English?”

Thom could feel all eyes turn with his towards Block. The



Deacon rose, his voice almost puzzled, “I think that must be clear to anyone. We as a Mennonite Church hold our services, whether for young or old, in German. Why has that changed?”

“I’m sorry, but I still do not understand,” Joseph’s voice insisted as Block made a gesture to sit down. For a moment Thom had the impression they were all merely bodies separating these two giants talking over them. Even Mr. Reimer did not call them to order. “Is the church as a whole objecting that we had a service at a lake-shore in English? Agreed, this is new in Wapiti, but is there something *wrong* with it? It seems to me that Christ held several services by a lakeside and he did not even use English—he spoke in Aramaic.”

Reimer’s voice cut across the sprinkling of overt laughter, “I must ask the brother to speak with Christian respect.”

Beyond the window, the sunken sun etched the black roof-line of stables. Thom thought, Not that way, Joseph. Joking is the worst. Joseph’s voice was slightly stiffer now:

“I apologize if I spoke disrespectfully before. But I still do not understand. When we hold a service where some are present who cannot understand German, but all can follow English, why—?”

“You are wrong,” Block’s voice was cold. “Brother Rempel tells me he understood nothing of what you said. Only later was it explained to him.”

“Why, yes—,” it was the first time that Joseph had stumbled, even slightly, for everyone knew that Rempel understood very little English. Joseph paused, as if understanding the gravity of the situation for the first time. Of the older people, only Block knew English to speak it with comprehension.

Tension tightened over the church. Despite his concern, Thom found himself strangely elated when the peering suspicion about him retreated to the defensive as Joseph spoke:

“I addressed the *young* people in English for only one reason: at least four in the group could understand no

word of German. Since I was speaking on non-resistance and believe it to be based on the love the Christian has received from God, Franz was persuaded that my using English would benefit them also. How can we dare keep the gospel to ourselves? This church has sent David Wiens and his wife as mission workers to India, but if we are concerned that those half-way around the world hear the gospel yet allow no syllable to escape to unbelievers living beside us, then I wonder if

‘You young people will ruin the work that God has given us if you neglect the teachings of your elders.’

Wapiti Church is concerned with spreading God’s Word or having the record in the conference yearbook of being the smallest church in Canada to support a missionary couple.”

For an instant there was no stir. Then, as if compelled by unbelief, one by one the congregation turned to look back at Joseph. Even from the teacher, Thom could not quite believe it.

The chairman spoke into the silence, discomfort edging his voice, “Well, brethren? Time is passing.”

The rustle of turning to study the

clock on the wall eased the hush. Then the Deacon rose to face them.

“When, by the grace of God alone, we were able to escape the terror of Russia and come to Canada, we were as destitute as it is possible to be. We had nothing—only debts. Yet despite the Depression years, I know no one doubted but God would see us through. We all believed that the faith of our fathers which had carried them across lands and seas was with us still. And all of us agree that our children know the

once confessed Christ in this church and who have since gone the way of sin because the world offered new enticing things. If their example teaches us anything, it is that we *must* hold to *everything* we have ever believed! We can drop no iota! Especially in these days when the war madness grips this good country that has given us shelter. *If we are to have a witness in the land we must remain firm in the ways of our fathers!* You young people will ruin the work that God has given us if you

back their faith with their lives.

“Then the final question: how are we today expressing this Love in the comfort of Canada? If we have followed the War that is ripping the world now, I think we know the answer. Given a war situation, we Mennonites can practice our belief in Canada only because other Canadians are kind enough to fight for our right to our belief. The godless man then dies for the belief of the Christian! Further, is it even possible for us *not* to participate today? Ultimately, even the

farmer works for the War because he produces the food that makes fighting possible. Mere refusal will not do: positive action alone is possible.”

“Brother Dueck!” The Deacon’s voice overwhelmed all, steel eyes flaming. Joseph’s voice was snuffed; the sound and the look a bolt to blast everyone.

“You criticized the church before *that* group? You took pains to speak a language they could all understand to slander our church?”

The silence was deafening.

“I was not concerned if what I said made the church look fine or not. I wanted everyone to know our only concern is to find the Truth. If the Truth is unflattering, then we know what to do.”

Joseph’s voice washed gently against the rage still twitching the Deacon’s face. Block’s voice hit like a hammer.

“Can one even grasp how unbelievable it is that anyone in this church should make such an accusation before—Indians?” In his pause, Thom sat numb. At the lake, these ideas had gripped them all, yet now Joseph alone bore the brunt, as if, having been told formally that these ideas were wrong, they could all wash their hands in silence. The older faces before him were set in rigid rightness. “How could



Photo by freestocksorg/Pexels.

Bible and the traditions of our fathers because we have been separated from the worldly influences which bother many other Mennonite churches. We also know that much of this separation has been brought about because we have held to the German language in both church and home. Our church depends on these young people; if we who remember the old home in Russia grow lax, we will quickly find that we no longer care to come to church. Only too well do we remember with an aching heart those young men who

neglect the teachings of your elders.

“The brother tells us that he spoke in English that all might understand. We want to believe his good motives. Would he tell us what he said?”

“Gladly. I have my notes here—I worked them out in German anyway. I outlined my ideas in the form of questions. First: what is the basic force in the Christian’s life? Using Scripture, I tried to give the answer as Love. Second: how has this Love been expressed in the past? History shows that Mennonites have not hesitated to

you so tear the unity of the church—”

“Was it so wrong,” Joseph cut in, “to tell those ‘half-breeds and Indians,’ as you call them, what they already know for themselves? They know that when war was declared, we all, on the instant, professed a love for our fellow men, men thousands of miles away whom we had never seen, a love which they, living beside us for fourteen years, had never felt. How can they believe us? Was it wrong to tell them we realized our failure—”

“You,” charged the Deacon, the scar at his right temple a dull red, “having lived here nine months—”

“Brethren, brethren!” Reimer interjected.

“What are we trying to do here?” a new voice sounded. Thom recognized the high voice of Aaron Martens.

“There is some truth in what Brother Dueck has said. We need some self-examination, not accusations.”

“I agree,” Herman Petkau’s voice was strong. “What have we done for them?”

“Brethren,” the Pastor rose in calmness, but the lines of his face seemed more deeply scored, “such shouting and personal reprimands are most unbecoming to a church meeting held among Christians. We wish to discuss this most serious matter, true; but in love, as Christ behooves us. We all, old as well as young, want to believe our brother that what he said at the lake he believed to be the truth. He acted impulsively, but who is perfect. I am sure that many good things were said at that meeting. If the brother will apologize for some of the unwise statements he made that night, and heed himself to be more judicious in the future, I’m sure we are all ready to forgive and forget.”

Block was firm: “I ask pardon for my impulsive words. And I gladly and wholly agree with Brother Lepp. It is getting late. What harm has been done cannot be helped now.”

There was a rustle as Joseph arose for the last time. Beyond his own numbed incapacity, there welled in Thom the overwhelming feeling that something of immense value was being abused

here. As if Joseph’s beliefs were being used to coerce him into the virtue of asking forgiveness where there was nothing to forgive.

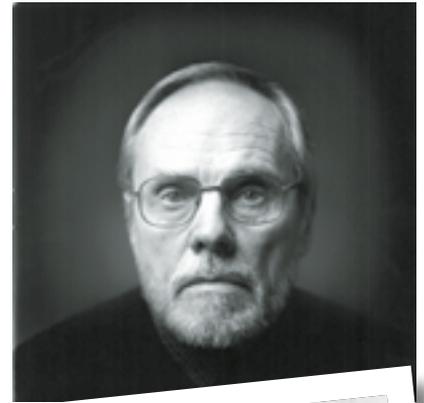
Joseph spoke: “How can I think that my saying two words, words I could not ever mean, would make all well? How can two words of mine erase all that has been done in Wapiti for fourteen years? How can man’s *words* ever change anything?”

“This year has meant a great deal to me. Personally, the warmth of your welcome—all of you—could not have been more Christ-like. But we Mennonites, every one of us, are not better than other men. There can be no other reason for our being spared war duty and possible death on the battlefield than that we are to be so much better witnesses to Christ here at home. Understanding the truth only brings with it greater responsibility of action.

“I had not planned to say any more, but since we are apparently at the point where we must separate, let me clarify my position. I hope someone will be willing to carry on the Sunday afternoon Bible class that I began with the non-Mennonite children in school, for my army call, which was postponed during last winter because of teaching—as was explained to the School Board when I came, I was really only ‘on loan’ from the draft—my call has come again and I must leave on June 20. I will go into training in the Restricted Medical Corps. As a Christian I must *do* something about the misery in the world, even though there are aspects about the Medical Corps none of us like. I find I cannot—lose myself behind a bush and pretend the misery is not here. I cannot talk of giving a bit of my time when others are giving so much more. I am sorry if I have appeared ungrateful after all your kindness.”

Joseph had told no one. The furore this calm statement roused ebbed about Thom. He cared nothing for the concluding efforts of the Pastor and the chairman, or Block’s heavy silence.

He arose, obedient to Reimer’s



Author Rudy Wiebe (top). Photo by JD Sloan. Wiebe at a peace rally (bottom photo) in Edmonton in 1983. Photo courtesy of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies.

gesture for closing prayer, but he heard no word.

As the deep voices about him echoed “Amen,” his mind could only dully comprehend that in all the talking that evening, no one had disposed of any of Joseph’s questions. They had not even been considered. ❧

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Was Wiebe fired?

By Will Braun

When *Peace Shall Destroy Many* was published in 1962, depicting fundamental contradictions in Mennonite practice, it caused turmoil in the church.

At the time the book came out, author Rudy Wiebe served as the inaugural editor of the newly formed *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, the Winnipeg-based, English language national magazine of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) conference.

That posting did not last.

I have often heard informally that Wiebe was fired. Wikipedia says he was “asked to leave.”

Wiebe himself pointed me to a 2012 article in which he said, “I was not fired. I resigned before that could/had to happen.”

Peter Peters recalls those turbulent days. His late father-in-law, H.F. Klassen, who served as general manager of Christian Press for the MBs, recruited

Wiebe to serve as editor of the *Herald*. He would have been the person to fire Wiebe had it come to that.

Not that he would have wanted to.

The first thing Peters shows me when I sit down to interview him at his Winnipeg apartment is an original copy of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, inscribed “with respect and affection,” to H.F. Klassen.

Peters emphasizes that Klassen valued

literature, particularly Russian literature, and appreciated Wiebe. As Peters recalls, Klassen and his wife found the contention around Wiebe’s novel “distressing.” There was “no doubt they respected [Wiebe],” but there was tension in the community.

Peters believes it was a “very good thing” that the book was published. At a recent study of the book at his church, “nobody found it controversial.” ☞

The Herald

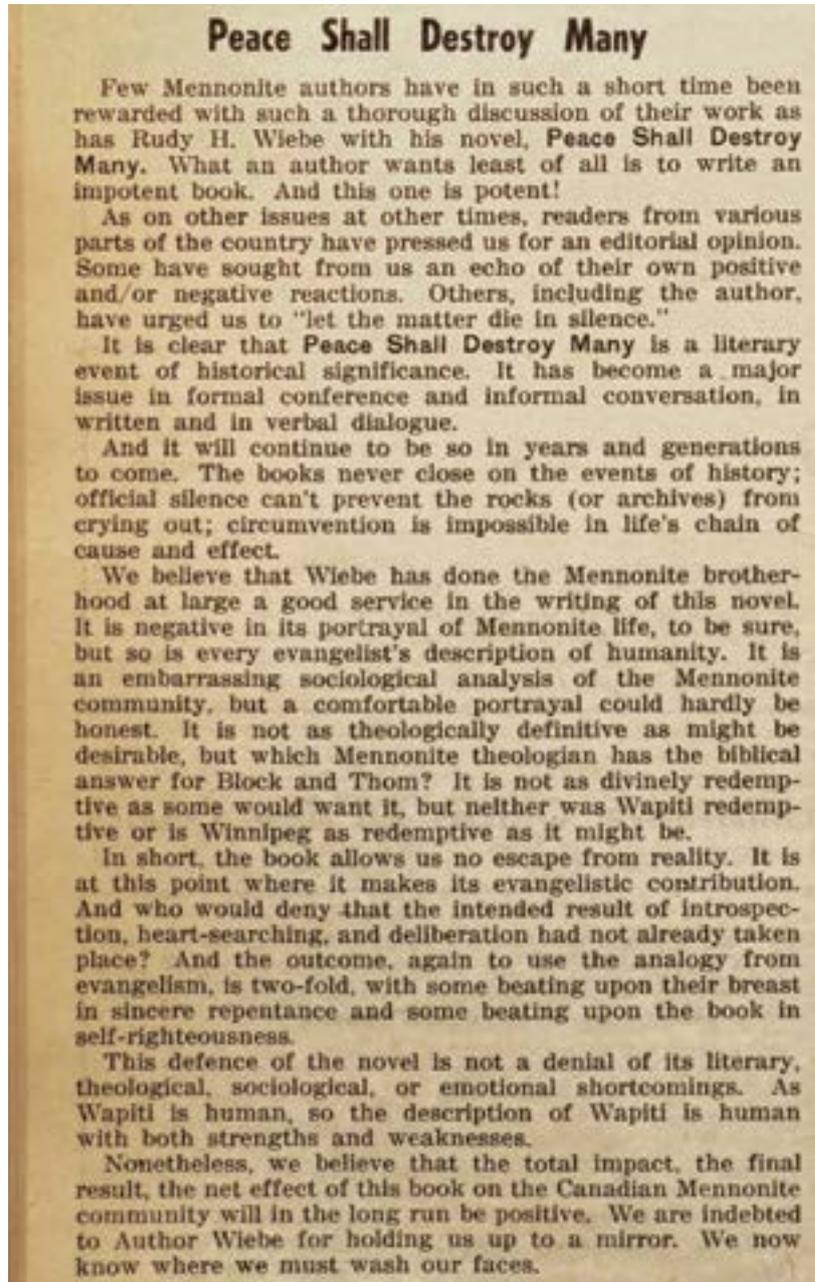
In the first issue of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, January 19, 1962, the Canadian moderator Jacob Quiring stated that this new church paper was a “silent messenger, charged to perform a great mission and to proclaim a glorious message.” Throughout the 18 months I was the *Herald’s* first editor (73 issues), I found these words powerfully challenging and encouraging.

I believe it was this work . . . which helped me discover a lifetime of writing.

It taught me the many exacting disciplines of words: of speaking, reading, writing and also the enormous responsibility of publishing—of making words public.

To be invited to edit the *Herald* was a gift for which I profoundly grateful. ☞

– Rudy Wiebe, excerpted from the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, January 2020



– The editorial in *The Canadian Mennonite*, April 11, 1963



Mediating Wapiti

Q&A with Janet Schmidt

By Will Braun

Janet Schmidt has worked in mediation, facilitation, coaching and training for 35-plus years. She also taught related university courses from 1994 to 2009. Schmidt attends River East Church in Winnipeg. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What unique dynamics come into play when conflict occurs in the church context?

Two things come to mind. One of them is a real fear of conflict because people are afraid to hurt each other, or afraid to experience the negative side of conflict. They don't know how to do it and have experienced the negative consequences of conflict done badly.

So there's a fear of engagement, maybe more so in religious settings.

The other thing that's unique is how we use scripture to justify our positions. We want to get it right, which is a good thing. We want to be on the right side of following Christ, so we look to justify our positions by proof-texting or using scripture that, in many cases, was not intended to be used in that way. This has the effect of silencing people.

What guidelines would you recommend for church groups experiencing conflict?

Number one: identify the thing that needs to be examined and talked about. What do people see differently?

Number two: give the conversation time. Depending on what the issue is, it could be months, it could be years.

The process needs to give people time to examine the issue over time, and change their minds as they hear other people's arguments—and I'm saying both sides change their minds.

It requires an absolute, honest, safe

conversation so people can ask questions, share their thoughts, share where they are at and do it without communicating that, "if you think differently than me you are not following God."

When a group is dealing with a contentious issue, one of the things I often do between meetings is to challenge people to have coffee with someone they disagree with, instead of talking with like-minded people and building their case. Make

Dialogue never killed anybody.

coffee appointments with one or two people you disagree with and spend equal time sharing what you believe and listening.

You design a process that allows movement. Everybody gets to talk. If you just do open meetings, where people stand up and talk in a group, certain people will dominate those conversations, and it tends not to work.

So more time needs to be spent in small groups with people bringing information back and making sure everybody has the opportunity to speak.

And then in that context, people need some skills in order to be able to argue well. If the moderator does not make it safe, and people are allowed to question

others' belief or integrity, and don't get called out on that, then it begins to shut down conversation.

Many of us don't have a lot of skills. And we see peace as the absence of conflict, which is our only definition of conflict—versus seeing conflict as exploration of disagreement.

In the Peace Shall Destroy Many excerpt, what would you say to Pastor Lepp?

He said Joseph needs to ask for forgiveness. I would have a private conversation with him, and I would say, "what is Joseph to ask for forgiveness for; what did he do wrong, other than making everyone a bit uncomfortable?"

When you ask the person who is pushing for change to ask for forgiveness just because they are asking a question—and there's clearly some people who agree with him—it doesn't make it go away. [The conflict] just goes underground.

And it actually escalates [the conflict] even though you can put a lid on it for a while.

What would you have done if called on to facilitate a subsequent meeting of Wapiti Church?

Before the next meeting, I would talk to Pastor Lepp, Reimer (the chairperson), Deacon Block and Joseph, to see where they're at and where there might be some ability to have the conversation in a better way.

Number two: when I bring everybody together, depending on where everyone is at, part of what I would be trying to do is to look at the presenting issue: do we speak German, or do we speak English?

And what I'm hearing as I read this is that Deacon Block wants to preserve German to protect what they have, to have the community be safe, to not lose members, to not become worldly. That's his fear. I would want to know—for people who think German is really important—why is it important? How does it protect you?

Usually when there's change, people who are advocating for the status quo are afraid of losing something that is valid. It's a valid fear.

People who are advocating for change, like Joseph, feel the community should be reaching out to the [broader] community, and be more relevant, and share the gospel.

The people who want change are often advocating for what they believe is a better way.

The two positions are: speak English, speak German.

But why speak German; why speak English?

What are the needs, wants, fears, concerns [underlying those positions]?

So you move down into the issue. Then you start to talk about where people agree.

Then, ultimately, you say, "how do we address the fears and embrace the hope. Is there another option that is some hybrid or some creative solution in terms of keeping what we have and following the great commission," which I think is what Joseph is advocating.

But the fear for Block is just too big, and others will agree with him too. So we have to explore that.

Whatever side we are on, we have to acknowledge each other's hopes and fears, and usually they are not wrong, in my experience.

How do Anabaptist values inform your views on conflict?

The Anabaptists very much talked about everybody having the right to

have a voice and to be part of a process of decision-making and to struggle with issues together.

For me, Anabaptism includes the willingness to take the time, which is hard in this world, to actually talk about things that matter and to move forward together.

When we're arguing about something or see something differently, that is completely normal. It happens all the time.



Photo (opposite) by Katie Moum. Photo (above) by The Vegan Monster/Pexels.

I would say we are called to be Christ-like in the midst of dialogue and conflict, and we should learn how to live with that and be with that in a good way, in a peaceful way.

Often people in conflict situations say, "I just want to get it over, let's just decide, and then we can just get on with church. Then we'll be where God wants us to be."

But talking about differences and different perspectives is being the church, and maybe it is the greatest test of being the church.

On a surface level it would often seem that the safest thing to do is to avoid conflict. How do we work past that?

One of the things that shocks me about the Mennonite church is that we claim that we are peacemakers but we don't teach how to be peaceful in the midst of

disagreement. It is simply a skill.

We might have a Sunday school class once every five years on how to talk about difficult things. But that does not change our embedded belief that conflict is risky and scary.

We should teach people how to disagree and to practice it—to build the capacity to not react when you hear something you think is dangerous, to stay with someone in a conversation where you deeply disagree.

And if you can keep it safe for both people it actually builds connection.

What I see in some churches that do it well, is that, let's say 80 or 90 percent of the people say [a particular decision] makes sense and they want to move in [a particular] direction—and there's still the 10 percent of people who either chose to stay because they have been treated with respect and dignity, and/or they leave but stay in relationship with that community.

If churches made good use of the skills you speak of, could we avoid divisions?

Absolutely.

People in our field have lots of ideas of concrete ways of doing conflict that could help moderators or chairs to lead better processes and meetings. I don't know why people don't reach out. I think they think, "I'm the chair, so I've got the skills, and I don't need help—anybody can lead a meeting."

Yet history would tell us a different story, with all the church splits.

Dialogue never killed anybody. Honest, open dialogue, in which I listen and learn from you and your experience and you do the same thing back for me—that doesn't hurt. That makes me wiser.

One of the things we say in our business is that understanding does not equal agreement.

It seems to me that people are afraid to talk to people who think differently than them because then they [feel they] have to agree with them or something like that.

I think we're called to understand each other, and I can understand you and still absolutely disagree. When I know where you're coming from and you feel heard, it creates a bond. ☺

Changed views on Palestine

By Saulo Padilla, Mennonite Central Committee

In 2015, when a resolution called “Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine” was proposed at the Mennonite Church USA convention, I watched how many of my Latino and Latina brothers and sisters went to the microphone to express their support for Israel. I was not surprised. I knew exactly where their convictions came from.

I grew up in Guatemala in evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Our songs, Sunday school teachings and sermons were filled with Christian Zionist theology that declares God’s will to be the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and the duty of Christians to support Israel. Some churches even display an Israeli flag in their sanctuary.

The songs I learned as a child were about the God of the armies of Old Testament Israel. In that congregation, as in later evangelical and Hispanic Mennonite congregations in Calgary, Alberta, and then in Goshen, Indiana, our worship included songs about the God of Israel who cuts the heads off our enemies. Our readings were primarily from the Old Testament and depicted violence and genocide. In our worship we celebrated the deaths of the enemies of Israel.

It is no surprise to me that many who come from similar theological frameworks do not question the actions of the Israeli government in this current moment. They see the state of Israel as a David coming up against a Goliath, believing that Israel continues to be the little biblical nation it once was amid empires, and not the world superpower it is now.

I remember as a child that some of my family members who owned guns would celebrate and show them off every time they acquired a gun made in Israel. It was as if they were holding David’s slingshot. I was taught to believe that the nation and state of Israel were the people of



Saulo Padilla walks by the Israel separation wall in 2017 at Aida (Ayda), a Palestinian refugee camp situated north of Bethlehem in the West Bank. MCC photo by Saulo Padilla.

God—no questions asked. It was sinful to question this belief. I did not understand the nuances, history or political implications.

I held that Zionist vision of Israel for most of my life. That is, until I studied history and theology at Goshen College in the Hispanic Ministries program. Theology professors such as Juan (John) Driver and Ron Collins were instrumental, patient enough to help me deconstruct these violent narratives and reconstruct a new Anabaptist peace theology with a different vision of God, Jesus and Israel. A new eschatological vision. I learned that the Bible is not flat. There is a mountain in the gospels, where we stand with Jesus and can see and understand the rest of the Bible—Old and New Testaments—through his teachings, vision and mission.

So, when the “Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine” resolution was proposed at the Mennonite Church USA convention in 2015, and my Hispanic/Latino(a) brothers and sisters opposed it, I knew what was happening. I knew exactly where that opposition came from. In

that instant, I decided to join the “Come and See” Israel-Palestine Working Group, which was composed of various Anabaptist agencies and organizations.

The objective of the working group was to educate leaders in our denomination about Palestine and Israel and to join a learning tour of the Holy Land that included a visit to both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. The proposal was to send 100 leaders. The goal was exceeded. More than 110 Mennonite leaders signed up, including most of my Hispanic/Latina(o) brothers and sisters who I saw walk to the microphone that day in Kansas City.

As we extended the invitation, some stated, “I am pro-Israel and will not change my mind.” For some, even on the learning tour, that narrative persisted for a few days. But that mindset was challenged as we listened to stories from people on both sides of the Israeli separation wall and as they witnessed the oppression that Palestinians are experiencing.

In 2017, I joined a learning tour group that included leaders from MC USA Iglesia Menonita Hispana (Hispanic Mennonite Church), a few Anglo Mennonite leaders and an African American couple. We began to get a sense of the apartheid experience as soon as we arrived, seeing the strong segregation and oppression of Palestinians under a brutal military occupation.

As we passed through Israeli immigration and customs, one woman was held for interrogation. She had been so excited and joyful as we landed. But when she came out of the immigration and customs area, she was almost in tears. We, Latinas(os), share some physical features with ethnic groups in the Middle East (I was constantly asked if I was Lebanese). From that moment on, we felt the tensions and racial segregation. Three days into the learning tour, the African American woman in our group wanted to return to



A group of MCC supporters and staff receives a tour of the Israeli separation wall from Jamal Juma of Stop the Wall, as part of a learning tour in May 2017. MCC photo by Elizabeth Kessler.

the U.S. She felt unsafe, referencing the Jim Crow times in the U.S.

In addition to visiting the typical Christian “holy sites,” we went behind the walls which very few visitors cross. We walked through checkpoints, reminding us of the challenges undocumented members of our congregations face in the U.S. We visited Palestinian refugee camps and Israeli settlements. We enjoyed the hospitality of Christian Palestinian sisters and brothers near Bethlehem, and listened to stories from Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. At Bethlehem Bible College, we learned about the complex Christian theological perspectives on the land.

We planted olive trees in the West Bank, near Israeli settlements built against international law. The settlers wanted to displace the Christian Palestinian farmers. Due to Israeli laws stipulating that uncultivated land can be taken by the government, planting trees and keeping the land productive was necessary to keep the land in the hands of these families

who have lived and farmed the lands for generations. We learned that the conflict is not Muslim-Jewish, or Jewish-Palestinian, it is between the State of Israel and anyone who opposes the expansion of its occupation—in some cases, even against Jewish people of conscience who oppose the illegal expansion and displacement of Palestinians.

By the end of our learning tour, we were not able to consider the single story of our Christian Zionist upbringings anymore. Our belief system and theology had been changed. Most of our leaders who had claimed unwavering support for Israel started to speak out about Palestine and Israel. No longer could they speak about it as a one-sided narrative.

As a result, at the Mennonite Church USA convention in 2017, Hispanic Mennonite and people of colour leaders were some of the first to approach the microphone to speak in support of the Seek Peace resolution. We did not forget about the people or the land of Israel. Our new narratives held the complexity

of the stories we heard and of the shared humanity of Palestinians and Israelis. We committed to read and study the Kairos Document put together by our Christian brothers and sisters in Palestine and Israel. We committed to speak out.

As we witness the atrocities of the recent violence in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, I am reminded of that commitment. The invitation here is simple: For those of us who visited Palestine and Israel during the Come and See tours, this is the time to share and talk about our experience. Pull out your photos, notes and souvenirs. Speak with your congregation, family and friends.

This is the time to use our Christian political leverage to call for a permanent ceasefire and a just resolution to the conflict. This is the time to embrace complexity in a world where media often simplifies narratives, promotes misinformed stories and fuels conflict. This is another moment to relentlessly seek peace. ✎

Climate Action **For Peace**

More frequent and **unpredictable**

How climate change and flooding affect farmers in Bangladesh

By Linda Espenshade

Until last summer, Hena Khatun didn't even try to plant vegetables on her postage-stamp-size property. Every year the floodwater from the nearby Jamuna River threatened to cover the small section of land where she lives in the northwest of Bangladesh.

Unfortunately, the constant cycles of flooding aren't going away – with climate change the rising waters are only coming more often. While these northern communities have always experienced regular flooding, as climate change continues to worsen, the floods are more frequent and longer lasting. “If you talk with the people, they will say that earlier, the flooding was one time or two times in a year, but now it is four or five times,” says Arefur Rahaman, food security and livelihoods coordinator for MCC in Bangladesh.

Alongside the flooding, farmers are also facing drought at other times of year. They used to be able to count on six distinct seasons throughout the year, but now the seasons blend together.

This means farmers increasingly don't have enough to provide for their families, causing stress and conflict within a community. “They're suffering, and they're in stress for their food security,” says Rahaman. “If you are hungry, no peace will work in your mind. So, to be in peace firstly, you need food.”



Hena Khatun at her smart house in Bogura, Bangladesh, where she produces vegetables and has livestock with support from MCC partner MPUS. Keeping her vegetables and livestock above ground-level means they can survive the regular flooding that is becoming increasingly common due to climate change. (MCC/Fairpicture photo/Fabeha Monir)

MCC partners in Bangladesh are helping communities adapt to climate change. For example, one partner Maitree Palli Unnayan Sangathon (MPUS) is helping riverside residents like Khatun grow food in ways that protect the plants from flooding. After learning these new techniques, Khatun has vegetables growing in sacks on an 8-foot-tall bamboo structure called a 3-D garden. Bottle gourds, a favourite ingredient in Bengali cooking, grow on vines across her bamboo canopy.

Khatun has also learned to protect her animals from the floods, the female goat she received from MPUS has a safe refuge on a raised platform inside her shed.

Another unusual technique MPUS teaches is how to make a floating garden. Made with water hyacinth, a naturally buoyant plant, the gardens will rise with the river, allowing farmers to grow crops despite the flooding.

Learning to grow food despite the challenges of climate change is critical for families living along the river says Rahaman. “Through our technologies, participants will be able to build the capacities so that they can sustain during disaster ... it will make them understand that at least we have something to survive so I don't need to make conflict with others.”

In Bangladesh, and around the world, MCC partners are helping communities adapt to climate change. But they can only do so much on their own. Learn how you can support communities like Khatun's at ClimateActionforPeace.com.

Check out mcc.org/climate-action-bangladesh (or scan the QR code with your phone) to see a video of a floating garden in action!



Congregation steps up in absence of pastor

By Madalene Arias
Eastern Canada Correspondent

When the people of Danforth Mennonite Church in Toronto realized they needed to carry on without a pastor, they took a closer look at “the things that a pastor really does.”

Mike DeHaan, who is chair of the church council, says the circulation of responsibilities officially commenced on February 1, the day after Stephen Reist’s term as interim pastor concluded.

The church is looking for a new pastor but finding ways to function well in the meantime.

Seated on a bench in the church lobby, DeHaan discussed how they broke pastoral duties down to three main components: administrative work, pastoral care and preaching.

The worship committee looks after preaching, which means tracking down available guest speakers to come at least one Sunday each month. Alternatively, they ask people within the congregation to lead a service.

They also come up with ideas for new events, as a pastor would.

DeHaan says this saves money for the church, but it also entails a lot more work for the worship team.

Average Sunday attendance is in the 30s, with another 10 joining by video call.

The administrative team also ensures clear communication among the various groups and committees within the church.

With respect to pastoral care, DeHaan says, “normally, you would expect a pastor to have a finger on the pulse of who requires pastoral care.”

But in the absence of a pastor, the congregation selected four individuals to sit on the ministry support team. Keeping track of that pulse looks different now.

Shannon Epp joined the ministry support team after the gift discernment committee asked if she might consider it.

“We seek to have our eyes and ears around the congregation,” says Epp, one



Danforth Mennonite Church in Toronto.
Photo by Madalene Arias.

Sunday afternoon in the worship hall. It’s practical work, she adds. It means staying around before and after services to mingle with attenders.

It’s paying attention to those people trickling in before a service begins, noticing absences and remembering those not present via video call.

People who form this part of the church life must also work with a high level of discernment and coordination in determining when and how to become involved in a situation.

For circumstances that are more complex or challenging, the group discerns how to seek advice outside of the ministry support team.

The goal of every step they take is to provide people with the best help possible for their specific situation, and they must never compromise confidentiality.

Epps adds that running a church without a pastor requires a reliance on the generosity of church members. It also makes her think of the early church, a time before hierarchies emerged.

When following up with people who request prayer support, they coordinate to ensure everyone is covered to

avoid scenarios where one person receives multiple check-ins and another never hears back from anyone. Not hearing back “really hurts,” says DeHaan.

All of these things combined still do not cover everything that a pastor would look after, especially one working in Toronto.

Danforth Mennonite sits within a block of a busy intersection, with people heading to or from the downtown core in their vehicles, bikes or via public transit.

The white vinyl building with stained glass windows disrupts a series of brick shops with signs of various fonts and sizes.

DeHaan says it’s not unusual for strangers to knock on the door and in one breath say, “I need to talk to a pastor,” to anyone who opens. “Our ministry is not just the people who attend church,” says DeHaan.

It’s also important to be prepared for those situations where a pastor is required by law, like weddings for instance. Deaths and subsequent funerals also tend to demand a pastor’s presence.

For these types of situations, the congregation has sought out an emergency “backup” pastor. DeHaan says it has been challenging to find someone for this role because they cannot provide a definitive term for their services.

DeHaan notes that Danforth has been accustomed to long-term pastors. One pastor led the congregation from 1964 to 1984. An interim then filled in before another pastor served pastor for 13 years. After that an interim pastor stepped in again, before Tim Reimer served from 1999 to 2021.

DeHaan says the congregation always had a team or group of people who served to support the pastor. He credits this tradition for the congregation’s ability to shoulder pastoral work now. ▮

LIFE IN THE 80s

Model As, bucket lists and dwelling in God

An interview with Fran Schiller

By Carla Klassen



Fran Schiller, 87, grew up on a farm near Goshen, Indiana, the ninth of 10 children. She attended Goshen College, where she found her faith strengthened and her eyes opened to a new world beyond life on the farm.

After teaching for a few years, she met her husband, Eric, a Canadian from Toronto, at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Together they spent time in the civil rights movement in Georgia and then served for three years in Tanzania with Mennonite Central Committee. They worked overseas two more times: Eric trained water engineers at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania while Fran taught at the multi-cultural school, and later they worked in Senegal in the area of solar water pumping.

Currently, they live in Ottawa, where Fran attends Ottawa Mennonite Church.

What is your earliest memory of church?

My earliest memory of church was us kids all squeezing in our Model A Ford to get to church on time.

What is your best memory of church?

My best memory was the beautiful Christmas program in which the entire congregation gathered to listen to us kids from Sunday School recite parts of the Christmas story—followed by a special reading and more singing, with an

orange given to each child afterwards. It was my first time speaking in public. An important event!

What is your most difficult memory of church?

My most difficult memory was my favourite brother being “examined” by the whole congregation on why he wanted to attend a missionary training institute.

Tell us about the people who influenced you the most.

My mother and father and our little grandma influenced me the most. Also, the loving aunts and uncles and men and women at church who always greeted us kids with love and interest.

Can you share a favourite book, passage, poem or song?

My mom sometimes quoted the poem “The House by the Side of the Road” [by Sam Walter Foss]. I then memorized verse two of that poem and came to share its values: “Let me live in a house by the side of the road / Where the race of men go by, / The men who are good, the men who are bad, / As good and as bad as I. / I would not sit in the scorner’s seat, / Nor hurl the critic’s ban, / Let me live in a house by the side of the road, / And be a friend to man.”

What do you wish young people knew about growing old?

Young people do not understand old age because their bodies and minds are young, and they are full of energy and dreams of how their lives will be. They can’t comprehend what it is like to have less energy and to have to move slower and think slower.

What is the hardest thing about getting old? What is best?

Having to move slower and think slower and with less energy is the most difficult to accept, I think. But I did have what I call my great insight into growing old several years ago. Two things happened close together: I walked to my medical appointment in leisure because I had started out in time, but when I arrived at the office, the lady behind the counter got a pained look on her face and informed me that my appointment was the next day. I chuckled and replied, “Well at least I didn’t run to get here.”

The next incident occurred when I drove fast, parked and raced through the foyer of our local theatre. The ticket man asked where I was going. I replied, “To the free movie.” He said, “It’s next week.” I chuckled and said, “Well at least, I didn’t miss it.” Then I went home and bashed out a short email to our two adult kids, saying that I just had this great insight into growing old. “Growing old,” I typed, “isn’t fun, but it’s funny!”



What do you wish someone had told you about aging earlier in life?

I had great examples all my life seeing people aging with grace and acceptance—my parents and grandmother, aunts and uncles, neighbours and people at church. When one reaches the horizon of transition, one is ready to listen to advice that change is coming and that preparation, good humour and faith can help to adjust these lifestyle changes one will need to make. But each of us has our bucket list and we carry on bravely, trusting that our body, mind and spirit will somehow find inner and outer reinforcements to carry us forward. Eric and I have been blessed to reach the age of 87 together.

If you had one chance at a sermon, what would it be about?

I would appreciate exploring the meanings and promises in 1 John 4:16b: “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” ☞

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**Anabaptist Mennonite
Biblical Seminary**

Cedar Valley a faith-based community centre

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

Cedar Valley Church in Mission, B.C., often has a full parking lot, and not just on Sunday mornings. Each week, 500 to 1,000 people enter the doors of the church building to meet with various groups using space there. “We’ve opened our campus up as an ‘affordable, flexible, faith-based community centre’ to be a blessing to our neighbours,” reports Pastor Michael Turner in the church’s annual report.

Activities in the building include literacy development, cultural celebrations, fundraisers, preschool, fitness, youth programs, community events and international student programs.

“Every one of them an incredible life that Jesus longs to reach,” continues Turner. “It has been my pleasure to be

present and engage with most of this campus life, and the heart of our vision is that we aren’t just friendly landlords but that we are building relationships and partnering with our guests.”

One of those ministries is Jesters Theatre: Youth Unlimited, a Jesus-centred outreach for teens and young adults. Last year, Cedar Valley opened its space to host the program, which sees up to 50 young people participate in theatre activities twice a week. In February, Jesters Theatre performed a student musical in the church auditorium.

United Way came alongside Cedar Valley’s community involvement several years ago to help the church identify and meet real needs in the immediate neighbourhood. One such project has been

the annual community Easter Egg Hunt. Another is the Community Cupboard located at the church, which contains a supply of essential items and food items for those in need. It receives 12-18 visits daily.

“Just before Christmas, we were able to give out over 20 hampers that were packed and prayed over at our October 5 Sunday service,” reports Turner. “Through our many campus groups we found more than enough connections to meet the needs of families and love being able to share the love of Jesus in this way. At the heart of all this, we want to be present and involved in the lives of those in our growing neighbourhood. It is so encouraging that we’re quickly becoming known as the fun and supportive church next to Griner Park,” concludes Turner. ☞

Two notable actions at Manitoba AGM

By Aaron Epp
Associate Editor

Delegates welcomed a new congregation into Mennonite Church Manitoba and passed a resolution to endorse a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty at the regional church's annual gathering on March 1-2.

More than 160 people, including 104 delegates from 31 of the 39 MC Manitoba churches, gathered at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Winkler.

Fanosie Legesse, who serves as intercultural church minister for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, spoke on Friday evening and Saturday morning, in addition to a breakout session.

"You all have what is needed to become intercultural church," he said. Noting the great opportunity presented by the hundreds of thousands of newcomers arriving in Canada each year, he asked: "Are you ready?"

In the breakout session, Legesse, who grew up in Ethiopia, also gave practical suggestions for engaging newcomers (see sidebar).

A large delegation from the Vietnamese Mennonite Church in Winnipeg told the story of their community during one of the breakout sessions.

River East Church joins

River East Church is the latest congregation to join MC Manitoba. The Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba (MBCM) voted in January to expel the church unless it "returns to an active embrace of MBCM member church expectations by May 30, 2024."

The church has a statement of full inclusion, including same-sex marriage and the possibility of LGBTQ+ persons in leadership.

The church has 205 members, with an average Sunday attendance of about 130.

In a letter sent to MC Manitoba



Fanosie Legesse, intercultural mission minister for MC Eastern Canada, gave two keynote presentations. Photo by Darryl Neustaedter Barg.

executive minister Michael Pahl that was shared with delegates, River East moderator Reynold Redekopp described the church as "a Jesus community for the world," where the guiding values are prophecy, wisdom and compassion.

"We value connections within the Anabaptist world and at this point we feel that (River East Church) would align well with (MC Manitoba) and the work being done through (MC Manitoba)," Redekopp wrote.

MC Manitoba staff and River East leadership have been in conversation for 18 months about the possibility of River East joining the regional church.

The vote to accept the church as an affiliate member was 101-3.

MC Manitoba to sign call for treaty

Delegates passed a resolution that will see the regional church sign a letter calling on governments to develop and implement a

fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty.

States that would sign on to this treaty would agree to wind down their use of fossil fuels and transition to using clean energy. Signatories would be held accountable to their commitments.

The MC Manitoba Climate Action Working Group (CAWG) spent about six months developing the resolution, visiting churches to talk about it and participating in other online and in-person forums to engage the MC Manitoba constituency.

"To me, [MC Manitoba] signing on to the call for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty is important because it signals a commitment of the church to live into a new imagination for how we live in the world—one that chooses life, justice and wellbeing for all," CAWG member Marta Bunnett Wiebe said in a short video about the resolution that was shown to delegates.

During a breakout session, Bunnett

Wiebe said, “we recognize this isn’t the only way to take action—far from it. A non-proliferation treaty prompts us to ask: So what? What are the implications of that? How might we be called into other ways of acting?”

Two delegates voted against the resolution.

Projected deficit in 2024

Pahl reported a \$36,000 deficit for 2023. This will be covered by reserve funds. That follows a \$176,828 deficit in 2022 and two previous surpluses.

“Because 2023 gave us our clearest picture since 2019 of what a normal year looks like, we are on more solid footing as we look ahead to 2024 and beyond,” Pahl said.

MC Manitoba’s 2024 budget includes a projected deficit of \$16,125, within 0.5 percent of the total budget.

Staff changes will reduce expenses in 2025 and beyond.

Melanie Neufeld, director of mission engagement, is reducing her hours from 1.0 FTE to 0.75 FTE, which took effect on March 1. Meanwhile, Kathy

Giesbrecht, director of congregational ministries, is retiring effective May 1, at

which time the position will be concluded. “Both of these staffing changes were voluntary and based upon personal

changing financial realities for us as a regional church.”

“We’re doing more together than any of us could ever do alone: supporting each other’s congregations; supporting our pastors; and facilitating regional, nationwide and international ministries,” he said. “God is good.”

Practical advice

Fanosie Legesse was asked: “So what if a newcomer family walks into our church on a Sunday morning—what should we do?” Below is a summary of his response.

Wash their feet. In other words, serve them. If they are new to the country, chances are they came out of much more of a high context culture. Here they don’t have the connections. They probably feel vulnerable and anxious. In Canadian culture, we tend to not be invasive with questions. Many other cultures are different.

After some introductory comments, you can ask: “Do you have a good place to live? Do you feel safe? Do you have someone to help you get provincial health cards? Do you have enough food? Have you been able to find a grocery store that has the food you like? Schooling for children?” etc. If you find a need, meet that need—wash their feet—if you sense the openness.

If people stay around, offer a place to be involved. Don’t force them into your template, but see what gifts they can offer, and use them.

Invite them into your home. Share your life with them. Be the people they can depend on. ☘

circumstances,” Pahl said, “though they were both in part prompted by the

something to give. Thanks be to God.” ☘

Tributes to Giesbrecht

During the final plenary session, Pahl and numerous pastors paid tribute to Giesbrecht.

“It’s a great day to be the church.’ I can’t count how many times you’ve said those words,” said Phil Campbell-Enns, pastor at Home Street Mennonite. “Because of you, we believe those words more deeply. It is indeed a great day to be the church.”

Giesbrecht expressed her thanks.

“I walk with a deep, deep gratitude that the church made room for one such as I,” she said, adding that she is grateful for the support and encouragement she received from her parents. “We don’t get anywhere unless someone believes we have

Dear Church and Dear Kathy,

On behalf of the wider church family, and particularly the youth ministry crew here in Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, I wanted to share a few thoughts as we bid formal farewell to our beloved friend, sister in Christ, mentor and colleague in arms, Kathy Giesbrecht.

Early on in my ministry with MC Saskatchewan, I discovered the deep joy that is working with Kathy. From her, I learned the art of alliteration, the stirring of the Spirit and the kindness of the Kingdom, all critical in youth and young adult ministry.

And from the very beginning, I have been in awe of her ability to see, nurture, and call out the gifts of the younger generations of the church.

On my desk is a well-faded sticky note that says, “be Kathy G to someone else!” written after a particularly uplifting and affirming conversation.

To spend time with Kathy is to learn how to love and be loved, how to learn while teaching, and how to cry tears of laughter and sadness and gratitude in the same conversation. It is to suddenly find yourself filled with infectious joy, energy and knowledge that there is a place for

you in the church.

It is to dream crazy dreams about what it means to be church, and to watch the seeds of those dreams turn into more than you could ever ask for or imagine.

To know Kathy G is to know God’s love for you. It is a gift that fills your cup, and it is a gift for which I will always be grateful.

For all that you are to us, and all that you will continue to be for the church, Kathy, thank you.

God’s richest and deepest blessings to you. ☘

—Kirsten Hamm-Epp, regional church minister, MC Saskatchewan

Klassen urges outreach to neighbours at Saskatchewan annual gathering

By Emily Summach
Saskatchewan Correspondent

The gospel begins with ‘hello.’ This was the challenge Doug Klassen, executive minister for Mennonite Church Canada, gave to those gathered for the Mennonite Church Saskatchewan Annual Delegate Sessions on March 8-9 at North Star Mennonite Church in Drake, Saskatchewan. Over 80 people attended, including 49 delegates from 21 of 22 MC Saskatchewan congregations.

The theme for the weekend was *Rekindling Relationships*.

The planners of the event placed a strong emphasis on sharing stories, worshiping together, and providing time for people to connect informally.

“The theme felt like a natural way of naming how much we want everyone to find again how good it is to share in each others’ lives. For some folks, that probably meant reconnecting with someone from a congregation on the other side of the province. For others, it maybe was rediscovering some part of the work we do together,” said Josh Wallace, MC Saskatchewan’s church engagement minister.

Presenters acknowledged that the landscape of the Canadian church and culture has changed drastically since the pandemic. While addressing pastors and church leadership, Klassen, the keynote speaker, encouraged listeners to be cognizant of these challenges. “The pandemic has weakened our social ties,” he said. “It [has] flattened our sense of connection and community.”

He affirmed that people are desperate to talk, to find a place to be their “realist” selves. Klassen suggested that church can be a place of hope in a culture of “scattered and thin connections.”

He emphasized the need for relationships, and for building community with our neighbours, especially beyond the



Mennonite Church Saskatchewan Annual Delegate Sessions at North Star Mennonite Church in Drake. Photo by Will Braun.

walls of the church. “The experience of church can be bewildering for people. Stand up, sit down, bow your head, sing this song,” he said. Klassen suggested instead following in the footsteps of Jesus, by opening up our homes, inviting people to a meal, and building relationships.

“According to Jesus, the gospel isn’t figured out in the synagogue, it’s figured out in the homes of sinners and tax collectors,” he said.

Even as the agenda moved into official business sessions, the emphasis on relationships remained. When the MC Saskatchewan staff and moderator shared their annual reports, they each invited up one person to share about the impact that relationships have had on their ministry. One of those people was Don Froese.

Froese is wrapping up as interim pastor at Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon. While Froese had been in pastoral ministry for many years, this was his first time serving a Mennonite Church Canada congregation. He shared that serving at Mount

Royal drew him into a new, deeper understanding of his Anabaptist roots. “I always thought I was Anabaptist,” he said, “turns out I was an evangelical.”

Froese encouraged MC Saskatchewan to realize the “unique, special gift” they have to offer, especially in relation to young people who are looking for a way to integrate their faith with peace and justice work in the world. “The Spirit is blowing,” he said.

Still, relationships are not without growing pains. The departure of Laird Mennonite Church from MC Saskatchewan in the past year was noted. The Laird representative who had been invited to attend could not make it due to an urgent personal matter.

The most significant motion at the session resulted in delegates voting overwhelmingly to grant Youth Farm Bible Camp (YFBC), one of three MC Saskatchewan camps, independence. The motion was put forward by the MC Saskatchewan Camp Study Subcommittee, which has been operating and considering the matter for some time.

The camp is on land near Rosthern owned by MC Saskatchewan. The next step is for the regional church and the camp to develop a lease agreement.

The discussion prior to the vote reflected the sadness that some delegates felt about this change. Ric Driediger, a YFBC board member, likened the change to a child growing up and moving out—“[YFBC] is ready to leave the nest,” he said, “but MC Sask will always be their parent.”

Delegates passed a budget that closely reflects the 2022 budget. Last year, the regional church incurred a shortfall of \$12,000.

As previously announced, Len Rempel will take over from interim executive minister Gary Peters in early June. ☸

Annual delegate sessions in Alberta marked by diversity, hope

By Margaret Kruger-Harder

Participants celebrated the diversity of the family of God, strategized ways to improve inclusivity and marked leadership transitions at Mennonite Church Alberta's 2024 delegate sessions.

Mennonites from across the province gathered March 15-16 at Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton.

On the first evening, an enthusiastic, intergenerational, intercultural music group led delegates and visitors in a lively rendition of "Hamba nathi (Come, Walk with Us)."

The joy of coming together—many people as one in Christ—resonated throughout the weekend.

Holyrood co-pastor Joon Park shared insights about becoming an intercultural church. He reflected on the churches of Ephesus and Antioch to inspire listeners to recognize and embrace the cultural, ethnic, generational and socioeconomic diversity among Christ's followers.

Park shared that being flexible about changes in cultural and ethnic norms, while focusing on the mission of God, is needed for respectful negotiations and compromises.

Openness to change allows the church, as a diverse body of people, to be reconciled and work together in community through one core identity in Christ.

Park advised that creating a "transformative, interethnic community" is possible "when allegiance to Christ supersedes all other affiliations, loyalties and convictions; and when the person and mission of Christ become the cornerstone of a congregation's collective identity."

MC Alberta congregants come from a variety of backgrounds. Of 11 member churches, three are diaspora congregations (largely composed of a people group from a different country).

Holyrood has members from European



Friday evening session held at Holyrood Mennonite. Photo by Ruth Bergen Braun.

and West African backgrounds. Also among the attendees at the sessions were people from Ethiopian (Oromo), Myanmar (Chin), South Sudanese (Nuer), Korean, Congolese (Lingala), Ghanaian (Ewe), and Liberian (mostly Kisi) backgrounds.

Welcoming the diversity of backgrounds was a topic of discussion, informally and in workshops.

Reuben Tut, pastor of Edmonton South Sudanese Mennonite Church, said, "We would like to be together but language is a problem." Lack of access to writings in one's language, especially the Bible, poses significant difficulties for people who do not speak English.

Doug Klassen, executive minister for Mennonite Church Canada, spoke of his hope to have proposals for the Gathering 2025 business sessions available months ahead of time to people in their language. Suzanne Gross, co-pastor of Holyrood, encouraged providing translations for sermons.

Scripture passages at the sessions were read in four languages.

Though the journey is long, the

movement toward being an intercultural church is active and evident. The overall mood of the sessions was hopeful.

Karl Blank of the regional church's finance committee reported that while MC Alberta is operating with a deficit budget in 2024, that deficit is smaller than in 2023. Blank reported that a balanced budget should be achievable in 2025.

Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary donated \$250,000 from the sale of its guest house to Camp Valaqua. These funds will help with the improvement of camp buildings for year-round use by the wider Mennonite community.

The delegate sessions also marked leadership transitions. Brenda Tiessen-Wiens, moderator since 2018, completed her time in that role.

Keith Ratzlaff is her successor. An engineer by profession, Ratzlaff expressed humility and cheerful anticipation of what will come in his time of service.

Tany Willms Warkentin resigned from her position as MC Alberta's treasurer. She had been a steady, reliable presence in the regional church for over 11 years. This staff position is now filled by Highside Solutions, comprised of the father/son team of Wayne Janz and Austin Janz.

Holyrood treated attendees to a delicious Liberian lunch, complete with spicy chicken, rice, cassava leaf stew, cornbread and doughnut balls.

The entire weekend was vibrant with goodwill, as many voices participated in worship, business, workshops and visiting over coffee and lunch.

"We are different cultures, different languages, different countries," observed Amanuel Abdisa of Bethel International Church Edmonton Oromo Congregation. "But through the church of Jesus Christ, we are one at this address." ❧

Footwashing in the psych ward

By Nancy Price, Anabaptist World



Photo Jonathan Borba/Pexels.

Arriving for my evening nursing shift at the inpatient psych ward in our university hospital, I was not too happy to see I had been assigned to the new patient with AIDS-associated dementia.

He had pushed his elderly mother, who was trying to care for him at home, and she had fallen and hit her head on a table, fracturing her skull. He was in an advanced stage of dementia, and his mother would not be able to care for him anymore. Psychiatric medication might get him calm enough to be manageable at a nursing home.

When I walked into his room, I was shocked by his appearance. He looked like a survivor from a concentration camp. As I sat and talked with him, he seemed to have some connection to reality. I said I would be back with medications and a snack he had chosen.

When I returned, I brought a tube of

foot ointment that had been ordered. I asked if I could apply the ointment to his feet, and he agreed. I took off his socks. Finding his feet exceedingly dirty, I asked if I could bring a basin of warm water to wash them. He agreed, got up from his bed and sat in a chair.

I brought in the basin of water and chatted while he soaked his feet for a few minutes. Then I knelt and held one of his feet in my latex-gloved hand.

A jolt like electricity went through me—a feeling that I was washing the feet of Jesus.

I could not understand why Jesus would honor me by having me wash his feet. But the feeling stayed with me. I did not want it to end, so I lovingly washed his feet for a long time.

I was too struck with awe to talk with the man while I washed his feet. I looked up at his face a few times. He was sitting

with his head resting against the back of the chair with his eyes closed and a slight smile on his lips.

After I dried his feet, applied the ointment and put a clean pair of socks on his feet, he opened his eyes and said, with a big smile: “Thank you. That was nice.”

I am not sure why I had this experience on that night in 1991. But I know Jesus said, whenever we minister to the least of these, we minister to him.

The experience helped me develop a gift for calming psychotic patients. I always told myself this was Jesus in

the disguise of a person in distress.

It also guided me to focus my career on working with the severely mentally ill, who have a hard time coping in the community. They are not well understood and are often alone and homeless.

I am retired now, but I still do some volunteer work with the mentally ill. When I work with them, the end of one of our sending blessings often comes to mind: “May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet, and may everyone see the face of Christ in you” (Voices Together, No. 1066). ❧

Nancy Price is a retired psychiatric nurse practitioner and a member of Rochester Mennonite Fellowship in New York. This article first appeared in Anabaptist World. Reprinted with permission.

Eastern Canada churches discuss youth engagement

By Madalene Arias
Eastern Canada Correspondent

On Thursday, March 21, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada hosted an online forum to discuss youth engagement in church. Leading up to the forum, two MC Eastern Canada pastors shared about youth work.

Ruth Boehm is pastor at Faith Mennonite Church, the smallest among three Mennonite congregations in Leamington, Ontario. Sometimes, she says, it feels like they're "out in the boondocks," so connection to the broader church community is even more important for youth there.

On an average Sunday, 30 to 45 people attend Faith Mennonite, and two to ten connect virtually.

Despite being an older congregation, they do have a handful of junior and senior youth who participate in the life of the church. One assists with worship media on Sundays. Another youth volunteers with an after-school program every Wednesday evening. One just finished clearing out the church's storage area.

However, these youth hardly ever attend church at the same time. Boehm notes that a multitude of factors can impede regular attendance, including busy schedules, work-life balance, health and even changing views on "capital 'C' churches."

"We want our kids to feel that they're part of a body of believers that's bigger than their own congregation," says Boehm.

Four times each year, Faith Mennonite hosts joint junior youth events with North Leamington United Mennonite Church and Leamington United Mennonite Church. These events bring approximately 30 kids together.

Some Mennonite Church USA youth gatherings are as close to Leamington as Mennonite Church Eastern Canada events, so Faith Mennonite has also sent youth to MC USA youth events on



Ruth Boehm is pastor of Faith Mennonite Church in Leamington, Ontario. Supplied photo.

occasion.

Boehm says that in addition to knowing and loving Jesus, it's also important that youth are invited to serve.

She describes her own youth as a time when the denomination offered more leadership training for young people

Churches can become settings where youth feel empowered to raise concerns.

during their formative years.

Currently, such leadership development opportunities appear to be focused on Mennonite camps.

She would like to see more opportunities for youth in other settings as well.

In Bloomingdale, just outside Waterloo, Ontario, Bloomingdale Mennonite Church partners with three other local churches for youth events.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm for getting together," says Bloomingdale pastor Zac Klassen.

He recognizes that as youth age up, that kind of enthusiasm wanes. Currently, this small rural congregation has one junior youth.

As a father of two teenagers, he also understands that parents lose influence over their kids' choices over time. They cannot be forced to attend church, nor should they.

He believes congregations can adjust their cultures so that youth feel church is a place where their voices count. Churches can become settings where youth feel empowered to raise concerns. With discernment, congregations can walk alongside youth on their journeys.

But in order to foster this sense of belonging and community, churches need to learn more about the worlds of their young people. He asks about the extent to which the church is "actually talking to these young people, and getting a sense of what their concerns are and what they are passionate about."

Klassen took over as pastor more than two years ago. By this time, many of the church youths had grown and moved on from Bloomingdale due to various life circumstances.

The church does often lose youth and young people, says Klassen, and it's not an occurrence specific to any one church context.

He feels congregations should be cognizant of how much their vision for youth stems from a desperate attempt to keep them. What if, instead, they envisioned youth who felt empowered to go out into the world and live in ways that demonstrate and embody the gospel? ✎

Church communities find solace amid tragic deaths

By Leona Dueck Penner

After our January 28 Sunday morning worship service at Aberdeen Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, our congregation, together with St. Kateri Tekakwitha Catholic Indigenous Church, from whom we rent worship space, held a joint vigil for two young men who died tragic deaths in the area.

On December 30, 2023, the body of Brooklyn Elijah Hiebert (20) was found next to our church building. He had been murdered.

The sorrow was raw, deep and intense.

Then on January 25, just a few days prior to an already planned vigil for Brooklyn, Dakota Tre Raven (21), beloved foster son of our pastor, Teresa Enns Zehr, and her husband, Jeremy, died of a drug overdose. He left behind his partner and their 18-month-old child.

The sorrow was raw, deep and intense as we gathered for the vigil. Yet it turned out to be a healing event for all of us as we gathered outdoors, haloed by bright sunlight shining on freshly fallen snow at the spot near the fence where Brooklyn's body was found.

We listened to welcoming words by Brother Thomas Novak, and we shared scripture texts, songs and prayers from both church traditions. This was followed by Indigenous cleansing rituals, including smudging and a water ceremony.

Then, our pastor laid flowers in the snowy sacred space. We sang Ojibwe farewell songs, accompanied by the slow low beat of elders drumming as they blessed the two young men on their journey to the next world.

As we proceeded back to the fellowship



Photo by Tina Nord/Pexels.

hall for lunch, led by a group of women singing and drumming, I looked upwards and was stunned to see what looked like an eagle circling overhead, its wide-spanned wings silhouetted against the bright blue sky as though embracing all of us.

My heart somersaulted as I remembered the rich Indigenous traditions associated with eagles. I tried to alert others next to me to the graceful bird's presence, but it disappeared quickly, only to reappear briefly across the parking lot, looking a little less eagle-like than raven-like.

Still, no matter which species it was, to me it felt like a special blessing from on high as we left that hallowed space.

That feeling was reinforced the following Sunday when the Old Testament lectionary text was Isaiah 40: 50-51:

*Even youth will faint and grow weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord
shall renew their strength,
they shall rise up with wings as eagles,
they shall run and not faint.*

That seemed like more than a

coincidence. It seemed like a doubling of blessing, and a sacred promise which grew during the breaking of the bread and drinking of the wine later in the service. It was further reinforced during the deep sharing time which followed, and later with the informal conversations during coffee time.

Once again, we left our worship place feeling renewed and strengthened.

But those blessings were not over yet. A week later, I phoned Beatrice, the secretary at St. Kateri and a member of the drumming group that was part of the vigil. In talking to her about the songs their group had sung, I mentioned that I thought I'd seen an eagle at the vigil, though my husband reminded me I tend to have an active imagination. She responded thoughtfully: "Don't write that eagle off too soon. This [kind of sighting] quite often happens to us when we hold these ceremonies."

Once again, my heart gave a little skip of joy as I gave thanks for the blessing of eagles. ✎

Leona Dueck Penner attends Aberdeen Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

Camps with Meaning aims to raise \$8.6 million

By Aaron Epp
Associate Editor

Things are heating up as Mennonite Church Manitoba's camping ministry gets set to launch its "Light the Fire" capital campaign.

Camps with Meaning aims to raise \$8.6 million for projects at its two camps: Camp Assiniboia, located 40 km outside of Winnipeg, and Camp Koinonia, located 285 km southwest of the city.

The projects include a cabin and place of rest for families of murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people; a retreat program for churches; a small gap-year program for young adults; and expanded land-based education programs.

The organization's development plans will also improve Camp Assiniboia's existing infrastructure, expand the number of year-round staff, and strengthen its marketing and communications capabilities.

"Camps with Meaning is a vibrant ministry and I really want it to continue to be even better for my grandkids and [future] generations," campaign chair Krista Neustaedter Barg said in a video promoting "Light the Fire."

Camps With Meaning will celebrate the campaign launch with a party on Sunday, April 14, at the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg. The event will include food, drinks and music by Steve Bell, Bucky Driedger, Alisa Wiebe and Mike Wiebe. ✎

Visit lightthefire.ca for details.



Architectural rendering of a proposed new retreat centre for Camp Assiniboia. Supplied image.



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Anabaptist Mennonite
Biblical Seminary

Gaza update from MCC

According to Seth Malone, the constraints on humanitarian aid getting into Gaza are all political, not logistical. Malone and his partner Sarah Funkhouser, are Mennonite Central Committee representatives in Jordan, with responsibility for Gaza. They spoke on a February 29 video call, alongside MCC partners Nader Anton Abu Amsha and Reverend Canon Donald D. Binder.

They said there is very little food to be bought at any price in Gaza.

On March 19, as part of a convoy of humanitarian relief, one truckload of emergency food from MCC made it into Gaza. After delays at the Rafah crossing, MCC partners were able to use the Kerem Abu Salem crossing. It was the first of six planned truckloads of aid from MCC. Source: MCC

AMBS receives \$1.2-million grant

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) has received a grant of US\$1.2 million from the Lilly Endowment Inc. Funds will be used to establish a program to help congregations deepen their study of the Bible with the goal of connecting more authentically with their communities. Called "Anabaptist Thriving Congregations," the five-year project is designed to equip Mennonite congregations in the U.S. and Canada to read and interpret both the Bible and their sociocultural context for the purpose of being witnesses to the gospel in their local community. A pilot cohort will begin in the fall of 2024. Source: AMBS

CommonWord turns 50

Located on the Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) campus, CommonWord has been a resource centre, library and bookstore for Mennonite Church Canada for 50 years. In the early 1970s, the bookstore at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, now CMU, wanted to become a resource to the greater community. MC Canada's predecessor saw a growing need to resource laypeople. Combining bookstore, library and program coordination, CommonWord was established in 1974. Source: MC Canada

Upcoming MDS opportunities

Mennonite Disaster Service's volunteer season has begun, with service opportunities from March into the fall. Youth groups are welcome and encouraged over the summer months. Additional projects this year include building at Fraser Lake Camp in Ontario, where families are encouraged to sign up for a week. See mds.org.

Kindred 'makes peace with money' for 60 years

In 1964, twenty-two Waterloo County Mennonites deposited \$22 in a cash box to create a Kindred Credit Union. "Their radical vision was to see mutual aid put into faithful practice—individuals or groups bearing one another's burdens, helping each other out in times of need and in times of plenty," reads a March release from Kindred. Six decades later, "Kindred still encourages and fosters mutual aid among our members."

"It's our privilege and pleasure to serve you and help you make peace with your money."

Kindred has eight locations, over 27,000 members and \$2.1 billion in assets.

Hymns for peace in Ottawa

A hymn-sing was held on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on March 20. About 30 Mennonites from Waterloo Region bused to Ottawa for the day to sing and lament the 30,000-plus lives lost in Gaza since Oct. 7, and to celebrate the agreement to call for a ceasefire that passed in Parliament recently. Attendees met with their MPs and called on Global Affairs to end arms trade to Israel and increase humanitarian aid to Gaza. Source: Mennonite Action



Mark von Kampen.

Chaplain fêted at coffee house

By Gladys Terichow

For 20 years, Mark von Kampen has walked alongside students at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. As chaplain of Menno Office, he's supported them as they grow in their faith and find a sense of belonging among friends and mentors.

His first two decades of service were celebrated at the ministry's second annual Valentine-themed coffee house and charcuterie event in mid-February at Morrow Gospel Church.

The performances by past and present students spanned a wide range that included a capella hymns, worship songs, jazz standards, classic rock, singalong staples and thoughtful original poetry.

A ministry of the Inter-Mennonite Chaplaincy Association, Menno Office provides students with a place to eat their lunch, study, connect with friends, play instruments, chat with the chaplain and participate in Menno Talk, a time for discussion, reflection and worship.

Von Kampen said he loves seeing how God leads new students from all over to Menno Office's warm and welcoming space.

"Highlights for me ... are watching friendships develop and deepen among students, and having meaningful conversations with students about faith and life," he said.

The ministry is supported by the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference and Mennonite Church Manitoba, along with prayer support and financial gifts from congregations and individuals who care deeply about providing spiritual and tangible support to students. ❧

CM CALENDAR

British Columbia

April 19-21: Youth Impact Retreat at Camp Squeah.

June 7-9: Young Adult (18-35) Anabaptist Conference, "Faith, Activism, and Church: Building an Active Future" at Camp Squeah.

Alberta

May 11: Spring work day, Camp Valaqua

June 8: Camp Valaqua Hike-a-thon.

June 9: Garden Party, Camp Valaqua

June 7-9: Young Adult Anabaptist Conference hosted by MCBC

June 15: MCC Alberta Relief Sale, 9 a.m. Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury. Join us for food, fellowship and the opportunity to donate to MCC projects around the world.

Saskatchewan

May 17-19: MC Sask Youth Retreat at Shekinah Retreat Centre. Youth gr. 6-12 welcome, visit mcsask.ca for details.

Manitoba

May 4-5: Faith and Life Choirs Spring Concerts, First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg (4);

Morden Mennonite Church, Morden (5).

May 10-11: Voices Together in Worship, a gathering to resource worship planners, pastors and musicians. Information at www.mennochurch.mb.ca/events.

June 21-23: 75...Already?! Save the date for Camp Assiniboia's 75th Anniversary. More details to come.

Ontario

April 14: The Soli Deo Gloria Singers present "Letters from the Past" by Elaine Penner, Leamington United Mennonite Church at 3 p.m. Donations to Friends of the Mennonite Centre, Ukraine

April 16: John Dear on his book *The Gospel of Peace: A Commentary on Matthew, Mark and Luke from the Perspective of Non-Violence*, in Guelph 3 p.m., All Saints Lutheran Anglican Church, Guelph.

April 24: Training Active Bystanders, 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m., 50 Kent Ave, Kitchener.

Apr. 26-27: MCEC Annual Church Gathering, "Transformed, Inspired, Called," at UMEI Christian High School, Leamington.

April 29: New Hamburg Relief Sale Promotional dinner, 6-9 p.m. at Calvary United Church, St. Jacobs.

May 4: "Together for Good" marriage workshop, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church, information at familylifecanada.com/event/tfg-scarborough/

June 21: Aging and Spirituality seminar at Conrad Grebel, 9:30 a. m. More information at uwaterloo/grebel/events.

Aug. 11-23: Ontario Mennonite Music Camp at Conrad Grebel. A two-week overnight camp for students who have finished grades 6-12 to enrich faith, musicality and leadership. Register at uwaterloo.ca/grebel/ontario-mennonite-music-camp.

Oct 21-25: MCC Learning Tour: Travelling Together Through Truth, engaging with First Nations communities and partners of MCC Ontario's Indigenous Neighbours program in Timmins.

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 visit, canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.



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Johanna Dyck Steinmann, Rockway Class of 2023
Gap Year followed Queen's University – Concurrent Education, Science

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Creating community and connection through chapel

By Mira Baergen, Grade 12

ROCKWAY MENNONITE COLLEGIATE



Mira Baergen (right), standing with faculty member Jo Scott, during a student-led France/Germany Exchange chapel earlier this fall. They were sharing about their visit to L'opéra Garnier, in Paris, France, with the rest of the school community. Photo by Rockway Mennonite Collegiate.

Rockway's chapel program has meant a lot to me during my time at Rockway. While I may not have enjoyed chapel at the beginning, I have definitely grown to appreciate all that it does for me personally, and us as a school.

There's something about sitting in a room with the entire school community that makes you feel very connected. Some of my favourite chapels have been when faculty or staff shared reflections on the chapel theme or something more personal. It's nice to have someone who you look up to tell their story, either about their walk with God or their life in general.

However, chapel is not just about listening to the adults talk. We often have student-led chapels that are very valuable because hearing from peers strengthens

the bond between us and gives us students an opportunity to learn more about the people sitting around us. Chapels where teachers, staff or students share stories help to foster a sense of community and feeling of "we're all equals here."

I can't talk about chapel without mentioning the singing. There is something very special about gathering together as an entire school to sing hymns! The energy in the room when the hymnals come out is unmatched, especially when we sing our favourites, "Rain Down" or "My Soul Cries Out".

Rockway is a place that values community and connection. I believe the connection we make during chapel is a very core part of what makes Rockway such a special place. ✎

A poster for an Information Night event. At the top is the Rockway Mennonite Collegiate logo. Below it, the text reads "GRADE 7-12 INFORMATION NIGHT". The event is scheduled for "Tuesday, April 16, 2024 7 pm". A red "register at" link is followed by the website "www.rockway.ca". The background features a torn paper effect.



A logo for "THE COLLABORATIVE MBA" featuring a circular emblem with green, blue, and purple segments. Below the logo, the text reads "Leadership for the common good" and "Apply now for fall 2024". At the bottom, it includes the Canadian Mennonite University logo and the website "cmu.ca/mba".

An advertisement for Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). It features a photograph of two smiling students. The text reads "Where faith and relationships matter". Below this, it says "Small university Big opportunities" and provides the website "cmu.ca/admissions" next to a small icon of a building.



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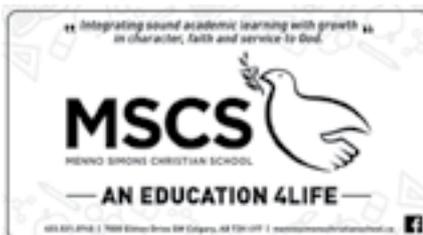
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Employment Opportunities

Pastor, Elim Mennonite Church

Elim Mennonite Church is seeking a full-time pastor to be a spiritual leader and provide care ministry for our congregation as we strive to be passionate disciples of Jesus Christ.

Located south of Winnipeg in Grunthal, Manitoba, our rural church has an attendance on Sunday mornings of about 65 worshippers. We view ourselves as a church of "second-chances" by welcoming those who have not found a place to call home in other faith families. Our church is deeply rooted in the Anabaptist understanding that puts Jesus at the center of our faith, community at the center of our lives, and reconciliation at the center of our work.

The lead pastor will work closely with our existing leadership team to provide pastoral care, set the direction of worship services, and to help lead the congregation to a greater understanding of scripture and living in 'Christlikeness'. Learn about our congregation at elimennonite.org. For more information and a full job description, visit mennochurch.mb.ca or email Karen Schellenberg at kschellenberg@mennochurch.mb.ca

John Dear to Speak in Guelph

Peace activist, priest and author John Dear speaks at All Saints Lutheran Anglican Church, 210 Silvercreek Parkway N, Guelph, on Tuesday April 16 at 3 pm on his new book, The Gospel of Peace: A Commentary on Matthew, Mark and Luke from the Perspective of Non-Violence. Dear links the teachings of Jesus with the message of non-violence of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Free admission.

Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
April 26	Apr 10
May 24	May 10



Seattle Mennonite Church

Employment Opportunity

Pastor, Seattle Mennonite Church

Seattle Mennonite Church seeks a full-time Pastor of Faith Formation to join our pastoral team. Full job description and supporting documents can be found at seattlemennonite.org/contact/pastor-faith-formation Contact Eric Massanari, Executive Conference Minister of Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference, if you are interested: eric@pnmc.org.

Principal, Mennonite Collegiate Institute

Mennonite Collegiate Institute invites applications for a full-time Principal with a strong record of leadership in educational administration. Located in Gretna, Manitoba, MCI is a provincially accredited independent Anabaptist Christian high school (Gr. 9-12). The successful applicant will demonstrate a passion for renewing and strengthening the mission of MCI. For further information, contact Board Chair, Jonathan Regehr at jonathanregehr@mciblues.net or visit mciblues.net.

Pastor, First Mennonite Church

A welcoming congregation, First Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, is seeking two pastors to fill a pastoral team. Applicants should be seminary-trained, with some pastoral experience preferred. If interested, contact Sharon Witmer Yoder, Indiana-Michigan Conference Minister at sharon@im.mennonite.net.

Advertising Information

Contact Ben Thiessen
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