

CANADIAN MENNONITE

March 2, 2015

Volume 19 Number 5



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EDITORIAL

Stewards of the conversation

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

“Many members are not happy with the direction and general content of the magazine,” writes a Mennonite pastor, in a solicited follow-up note after one of his members cancelled his subscription. The member was unhappy because *Canadian Mennonite* has put “homosexuality as a priority,” rather than reflecting our church life.

In a further phone conversation, this same pastor found that “particularly new attendees and new Christians find the magazine confusing and less than faith-formational, and also that it has an ‘ethnic-Mennonite’ or ‘cultural Mennonite’ feel to many of its articles, which leaves those without that background on the outside.”

On the other side of the spectrum comes a letter affirming and requesting, “May *Canadian Mennonite* continue to challenge us [with friction-causing articles] that we may mature and grow in our faith and attitude.”

These two responses are obviously at opposing poles, implying vastly different expectations. One asserts that we are perpetrating a cultural religious ethos over a faith-formational one; the other is affirming our attempts at faith formation and assuming a “growing to maturity” in the faith stance.

Other critics in the past have accused us of devoting too much space to “issues” over the “gospel,” assuming that these are mutually exclusive. In our view, the so-called “issues” are the gospel, basing

that assumption on Jesus’ first sermon in the synagogue in Nazareth when, in the social justice parlance of his time, he said his mission was to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). Nothing is more “gospel” than this poignant message with social-justice implications.



In any case, let me make our purpose as a publication clear: We are stewards of the conversation going on, at any given time, of the faith community we serve: the 235 congregations comprising Mennonite Church Canada. We do not make proclamations or consider ourselves the authoritative voice on any given issue.

Our goal is to give voice to all expressions of faith across the spiritual, ethnic, cultural and political spectrum. There are minimum guidelines for contributors (letter-writers and opinion-makers), namely the disclaimer that appears in every issue in our Readers Write section: “Letters are the opinion of the writer only—publication does not mean endorsement by the magazine or church. Address issues rather than individuals. We do not countenance rancour or animosity. Personal attacks are inappropriate and will not see the light of print.”

Or in the wise words of a fellow church-member regarding the present divide on same-sex attraction: “Respect and humility are the cornerstones of this debate.”

Let me make three observations about this present disaffection by some readers:

- **CANADIAN MENNONITE**, with its frequency of distribution and major delivery penetration into our homes, becomes an easy target for frustrations, anger and disillusionment with the local church. As a communication vehicle, it is arms-length and distant from any local congregation or conflict. It is much easier and somewhat impersonal to use written words to engage an issue, rather than to first talk to persons in your local congregation and find some common ground to move on—in faith formation.

- **LIFE IN** our particular faith community is messy. Solutions are not black and white, but grey and nuanced. If the answers were easy, our faith sojourn would be boring, the landscape barren. No bumps or ditches to overcome. Some of the controversial issues are unique to life in the church of the 21st century. Same-sex attraction and legalized physician-assisted death are just two examples of what our forbears in the faith did not face. It will take respectful conversation to work through the thorns. Again, we consider ourselves stewards of that conversation, not authoritative proclaimers.

- **A MISTAKEN** view of our standing in the denomination persists. We are not the official voice of MC Canada and its area churches. While we present official views of MC Canada and are especially supportive of the Being a Faithful Church discernment process, we are not the creators and endorsers of official statements. Structurally, we are not controlled by MC Canada, but rather consider ourselves partners in the fullest sense of the word. The choosing of members for our 12-member governing board is not done by MC Canada, but is done in consultation with them and the area churches. So for readers to assume that our word is that of the official denomination, is a misunderstanding.

ABOUT THE COVER:

Roasting bannock around a campfire is a time-honoured tradition at summer camp, including Camp Assiniboia. Our Focus on Camping section begins on page 35, and features reflections or photos from 10 different camps.

PHOTO: DARRYL NEUSTAEDTER BARG, CAMPS WITH MEANING (MC MANITOBA)

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Guiding values:

Hebrews 10:23-25 • Accuracy, fairness, balance • Editorial freedom •
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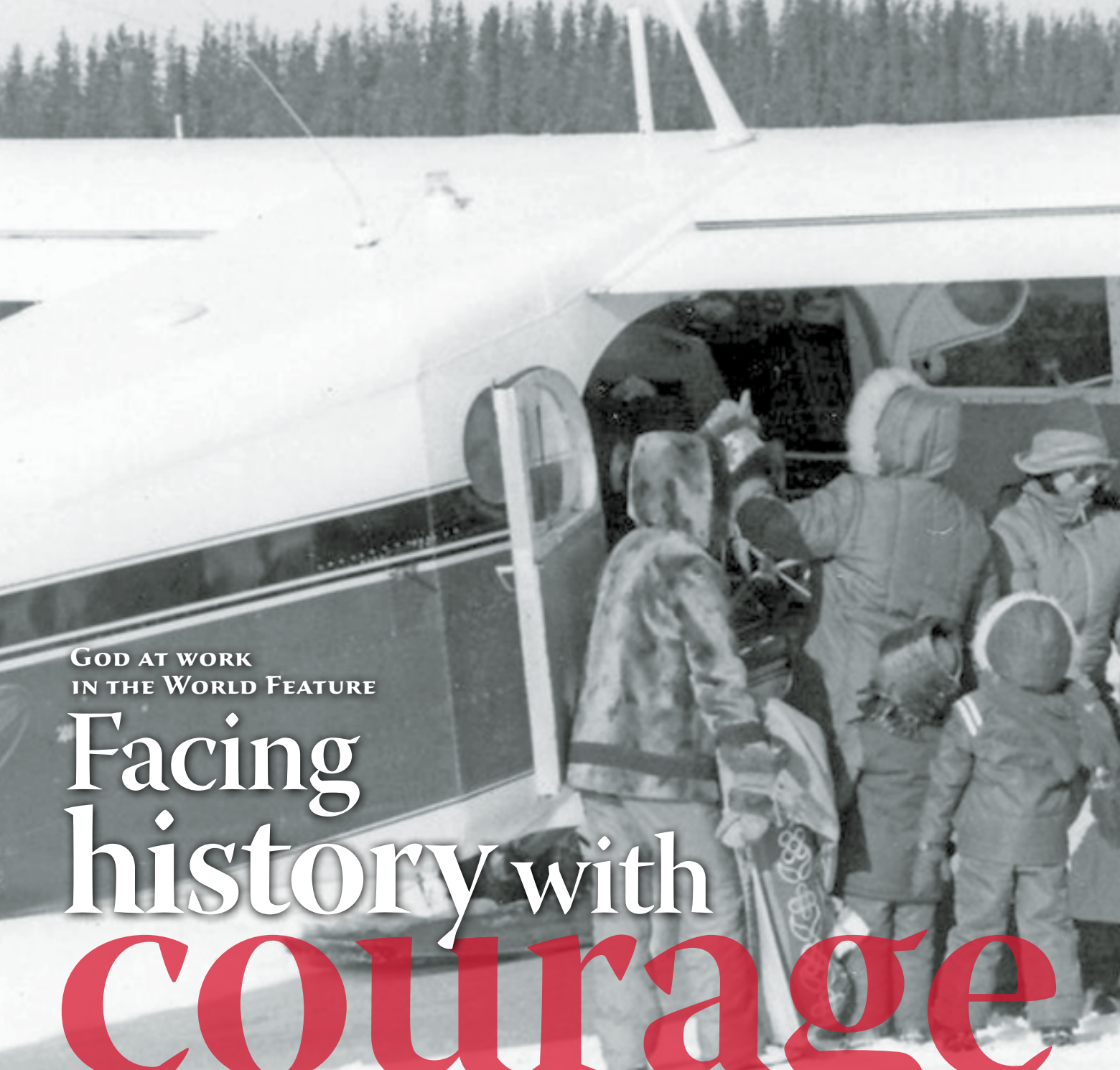
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- Grebel president promotes the three 'Cs'
- Quilt evokes memories of comfort and connection
- Seeking Anabaptist artists: A call for artwork at MWC assembly

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GOD AT WORK
IN THE WORLD FEATURE

Facing history with **Courage**

Towards 'restorative solidarity' with our indigenous neighbours

BY ELAINE ENNS

Should not the suffering of our ancestors open our hearts to the far more systematic and continuing legacy of oppression afflicting indigenous people and communities?

“**H**istory,” wrote American poet Maya Angelou more than 20 years ago, “despite its wrenching pain, cannot be un-lived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”

Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has completed four years of hearings and investigations, witnessing testimonies from some 7,000 survivors of Indian Residential



PHOTO BY MARTIN FREY

Indigenous students and their families arrive by plane for a Mennonite-run Bible school at Stormer Lake in north-western Ontario in 1981.

Schools and their legacy. As TRC chair Murray Sinclair repeatedly reminds us, “This legacy is not an Indian problem; it is a Canadian problem.”

And it is a church problem as well. Even we settler Mennonites are implicated in this tragic colonial history, but I am passionate about exploring how to build better capacity within our Mennonite community for deeper solidarity with our

indigenous neighbours.

Solidarity most often arises from genuine empathy. Empathy, according to Webster, is the ability to imagine oneself in another’s place and understand his/her feelings, desires, ideas and actions. It’s not sympathy—feeling sorry for—which usually leads to paternalism. To come alongside others in their pain requires us to do our own work: To discover how our

story is connected to theirs, such that our mutual healing and wholeness is, in fact, intertwined.

What follows are three prospects and three problems that we Mennonites bring to the task of building this kind of empathy with our indigenous neighbours, in order to embrace what I call a “restorative solidarity” that recognizes past and continuing injustices, and seeks to make things right.

B/W PHOTOS ON PAGES 6 TO 9 COURTESY OF
THE MENNONITE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

Prospects

1. MENNONITES HAVE historically endured experiences of violence and displacement, which could potentially help us empathize with the suffering of indigenous people.

During the Reformation, Mennonites were heavily persecuted by both Protestants and Catholics, and for much of the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe were essentially undocumented people, who often could not legally own property or were denied citizenship.

Violence has also afflicted Mennonites more recently, including during and after the Russian Civil War and through the Second World War. Even here in North America, our distinctive ways were often held under suspicion by the dominant culture, and our religious practices and language sometimes suppressed. From 1918-25, Old Colony Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan who refused to send their children to public schools were fined, and had their livestock seized and sold to pay the fines. Some were jailed, and other families were reduced to destitution. During both World Wars, German-speaking people in Canada were often vilified and discriminated against.

To what extent has this history of marginalization taught us empathy with the wholesale suppression of indigenous languages and cultures through residential schools over the course of a century-and-a-half? Should not the suffering of our ancestors open our hearts to the far-more



Henry Berg, third from left, and indigenous men build a chapel at Cross Lake, Man., sometime in the 1950s.

systematic and continuing legacy of oppression afflicting indigenous people and communities?

2. THE WAYS in which our Anabaptist tradition leans toward justice and the right sharing of resources is another asset.

Do Canadian settler Mennonites today, however, suffer from hypermetropia, the ability to see things more clearly at a great distance? Is it sometimes easier for us to recognize human rights violations or social disparities in distant countries than to see them in our own urban neighbourhood or on the reserve next to our farm?

To take a personal example, my parents were deeply and sincerely involved with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) refugee resettlement, and I am profoundly grateful to have grown up with people

at our dinner table from many parts of Africa and the Balkans. Yet the only indigenous people we ever hosted for a meal were my two adopted Cree cousins. Why was the distance between our home and the indigenous neighbourhoods of Saskatoon greater than between us and Congo, Malaysia or Bosnia?

It may be that the standard of our settler Mennonite tradition of justice and peacemaking will be measured by our relationship—or lack thereof—with “the inconvenient Indian,” to quote Thomas King.

3. A THIRD prospect is that most Mennonites coming to Canada were rural people, which meant they tended to settle in close proximity to indigenous communities, opening opportunities to build neighbourly relations.

But have we taken full advantage of this? Indeed, early Mennonite settlements were extremely insular, and rarely related even to other German-speaking immigrants! And more recently, as suburbanizing Mennonites have become increasingly indistinguishable from other middle-class Canadians, we, too, tend to remain aloof from first nation communities. How many of us have inherited a family farm located next to a reserve, but not inherited a tradition of relationship? There are exceptions, of course, but a significant gulf between settler Mennonite and indigenous communities persists.

Mennonites have, then, generally been well-positioned to develop genuine friendships and empathic collaborations with indigenous people. Insofar as these prospects have not led us into “restorative solidarity,” however, we must ask why.

This brings us to three equally distinctive challenges facing our community

How do we make sense of the fact that, in too many cases, the same forces that were protecting Mennonites were dispossessing indigenous people?

/// Definition: ‘Settler’

The term “settler” for Canadians of European descent was popularized by Roger Epp in his 2008 book, *We are all Treaty People*. This term acknowledges—rather than ignores—the conflicted history of the colonial project that began in Eastern Canada in the late 1500s. In the Canadian west in the late 19th century, the Canadian

government aggressively recruited Europeans, including Mennonites, for the express purpose of settling and populating land on the Prairies that was being “opened up.” The problem, of course, was that these lands were traditional native territory. Thus, “settlement” can never be separated from the legacy of colonization and its injustices.

—BY ELAINE ENNS

in its relationship with our indigenous neighbours.

Problems

1. THERE HAVE been consequential silences regarding indigenous people in settler Mennonite versions of our history.

Like many settler Mennonites, my extended clan has produced multiple family history books. These books highlight how Catherine the Great invited Mennonites to settle the steppes of Russia/Ukraine in the late 1700s, from whence all four of my grandparents came in the 1920s. Yet no mention is made of the Nogai and Cossack peoples, traditional inhabitants of the Ukrainian steppes, being forcibly removed by the Tsarina just prior to my ancestors arriving (as noted by James Urry's 1989 book, *None but the Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889*).

Similarly, a century later and half a world away, Mennonite settlers from Manitoba and the U.S. procured land in Saskatchewan that had just been taken from Cree tribes by the Canadian government—but not a whisper of the latter is in our family books. In most cases, indigenous inhabitants are simply not a part of our settler Mennonite narrative.

This silence functions to perpetuate the dangerous fantasy that the land upon which we settled was uninhabited—a destructive myth that dates back to the medieval Doctrine of Discovery, which still undergirds rationalizations of the European conquest and colonization of the Americas. Or perhaps we think that it just doesn't matter who preceded us in this place. But, as a Canadian TRC slogan puts it, it should "matter to me."

Another common, and equally problematic, myth among many Mennonites is that we came to this land and made it better and more productive, insinuating that before Europeans arrived, the



A resident of the Beardy's & Okemasis Willow Cree First Nation in Saskatchewan reads a thank you letter from MCC Canada for his donation of \$5 in 1968.

Prairies were neither tended nor cared for properly. Should we not rather appreciate and learn from traditional indigenous life ways, which, given the interlocking ecological crises brought on in part by extractive industries and agribusiness, may well prove to have been more sustainable than those we westerners have imported here?

Similarly inconvenient to our heroic pioneer narratives are those instances in which Mennonite settlers, like so many other European newcomers, survived initially only because of the aid, compassion and knowledge of their indigenous neighbours.

An example is the story of Emilia Wieler, told by her granddaughter in 1980 at the 70th anniversary of Tiefengrund Mennonite Church, Sask. Emilia and her husband Isbrand had come from Prussia and the U.S. to Rosthern, Sask., in 1894. But Isbrand died shortly after their arrival, leaving Emilia in a new country to raise a family of nine children. Soon there was nothing to eat, and in desperation Emilia sent two of her sons to a nearby Cree chief for help. The ice across the South Saskatchewan River was already breaking up, and it would soon be impossible to cross to the store in Duck Lake. Hearing of their desperate plight, the chief risked his

life by jumping across the perilous river on the ice-floes to get to the store, then re-crossing it with much-needed supplies for the widow and her children.

Marlene Epp, in her 2008 book, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, offers numerous accounts of Mennonite pioneer women engaging with indigenous communities, whom they experienced as more helpful than "dangerous." Katherina Hiebert, an émigré from Russia in 1875, was one of the first midwives to serve French, English, Metis and Mennonite communities in southern Manitoba; a well-known herbalist and healer, she received both advice and traditional treatments from local indigenous women. Yet such stories about Mennonite settlers who built robust relationships with indigenous people tend to be the exception, rather than the rule, of our historical narrative.

In sum, the perceptual problems nurtured by historical silences and Eurocentric myths can only be undone by seeking out the whole story—and an empathetic approach that seeks to listen to voices long suppressed or undervalued.

2. A SECOND challenge in our community is recognizing, and coming to terms with, the way in which our suffering as a community may have actually distorted our perspective.

Martyrs Mirror, for example, chronicles our people's persecution in order to confirm our tradition's commitment to discipleship, shape our Anabaptist identity and make sense of our losses. On the other hand, martyrologies may contribute to a phenomena that social psychologist John Mack calls "egoism of victimization," in which communities that have survived significant violence are only able to see their pain, but not that of others.

Larry Miller, previous general secretary of Mennonite World Conference, acknowledged at the Lutheran World Conference in 2010 that, "at times, we have claimed the martyr tradition as a badge of Christian superiority. We have sometimes nurtured an identity rooted in victimization that could foster a sense of self-righteousness and arrogance, blinding us to the frailties and failures that are also deeply woven into our tradition."

Mennonite leaders have historically been very astute at negotiating privileges with receptive governments on behalf of our people. But government protection and support have sometimes come at a political price.

Has a subconscious preoccupation with our own history of pain impeded our ability to relate to others who experience marginalization today?

Moreover, recent research—including with survivors of the Holocaust, Indian Residential Schools and the World Trade Center attacks—suggests that trauma resulting from experiences of violence can be passed down intergenerationally. To what extent might unresolved trauma be impacting our settler Mennonite capacity to feel empathy with other traumatized groups? If we, as a community, can recognize this impact and guard against the egoism of victimization, wouldn't it stand to reason that our hearts would be more open to the pain being carried by our indigenous neighbours and our hands more ready to work at "restorative solidarity"?

3. A **THIRD** challenge is that we settler Mennonites often don't acknowledge how we have enjoyed privileges, past and present.

Mennonite leaders have historically been very astute at negotiating privileges with receptive governments on behalf of our people. But government protection and support have sometimes come at a political price. Historian Ted Regehr, in "Mennonites and the New Jerusalem in Western Canada" (1983), recounts this "alarming" incident at White Horse Plains, Man.:



Children from indigenous communities in northern Manitoba are pictured with their teacher at a summer camp in Manigotagan in the 1950s.

"On July 1, 1873 . . . a Dominion immigration agent had brought out a four-member Mennonite delegation [from Russia] to look over various tracts of land in Manitoba. If suitable land could be located, an immigration of up to 10,000 new agricultural settlers was in prospect. Indians and Métis had hunted buffalo on these plains for countless generations. The French Métis had established their own semi-nomadic society at White Horse Plains—a society based on the buffalo hunt, but supplemented by freighting, carting, and marginal trading and farming operations. They were justifiably concerned that a major influx of new agricultural settlers would seriously disrupt and probably destroy their traditional way of life. The legal guarantees

recently obtained by the Métis under the Manitoba Act had already proved inadequate and disappointing, and the Indian camps and Métis settlements were restless.

"Word of the land seekers aroused the Métis to action. They intercepted and harassed the new arrivals with verbal threats, much whooping and yelling, and an ostentatious display of firearms. Much alarmed, the Mennonite land-seekers sought refuge at House's Hotel . . . while their agent stood guard at the door with a loaded shotgun. An urgent message was dispatched to the Lieutenant Governor, who promptly ordered the local military forces to the trouble spot. Fearing a repetition of the Riel-led Red River resistance of 1869-70 . . . the troops quickly dispersed the Métis, and arrested several of their leaders.

"This was the inauspicious beginnings of Mennonite agricultural settlements in western Canada. . . . The federal government, eager to attract more settlers to the West, granted the Mennonites all the political and religious concessions they asked for. . . . The first group of Mennonite settlers arrived in Fort Garry . . . on July 31, 1874."

What we can do in a post-TRC Canada

How do we make sense of the fact that, in too many cases, the same forces that were

Making 'restorative solidarity' work

In an appendix to *Ambassadors of Reconciliation, Vol. II: Diverse Christian Practices of Restorative Justice and Peacemaking* (Orbis Books), which I co-wrote, I explored the question of how principles and practices of restorative justice might be applied to historic and continuing violence, as is the case regarding indigenous justice in Canada.

In this article, I am proposing that settler Mennonites, through "restorative solidarity," embrace historical "response-ability" concerning the colonial legacy. This entails:

- **DOING OUR** own work to build empathy with indigenous communities victimized by historic and current injustices;
- **LISTENING TO** how they are "identifying harms, needs and responsibilities" (and investigating our complicity); and
- **WORKING WITH** them to "make things as right as possible, which can include covenants of accountability, restitution, reparations and [ideally] reconciliation."

—BY ELAINE ENNS

protecting Mennonites were dispossessing indigenous people? Mennonite academics such as Regehr, Frank H. Epp and Leo Driedger raised these issues decades ago, but were voices crying in the wilderness. Yet critical historical awareness is crucial if we are to practise “restorative solidarity.”

Some Mennonites protest that since “we survived horrible violence and pulled ourselves up by our boot straps, why can’t native people do the same?” On one hand, this attitude ignores the long history of systemic dispossession of indigenous communities through broken treaties, land confiscation, forced assimilation and racist law enforcement. On the other hand, it does not take into account the preferential treatment some Mennonite settlers enjoyed, including being granted land in Saskatchewan in the late 19th century that had been taken from the Young Chippewyan tribe by the government without consultation or compensation.

Today, we settler Mennonites have largely assimilated into the same white-skin privilege enjoyed by other Canadians of European ancestry. To what extent does such entitlement shape our narratives, select our memory of the past, and blind our empathy in the present?

Harley Eagle, a Dakota/ Salteaux from the Wapaha Ska Dakota First Nation, has helped me understand that when settlers attempt to build relationships with indigenous people, we often prefer to focus on what seems to us “exotic” in native culture, rather than to take a hard look at how our settler history reflects benefits we gained from colonialism. But critically apprehending our own history is a strategic part of building authentic relationship with our indigenous neighbours.

In a post-TRC Canada, we settler Mennonites can no longer presume that our historic experiences of marginalization are unique; or remain ignorant of past and present oppression of indigenous people groups; or imagine that our settlement had nothing to do with that oppression. When we are tempted to object that such issues aren’t our problem—that these treaties and residential schools were set up before our ancestors even arrived—we need to remind each



The Niagara Iroquois Dance Group performs in the chapel of Conrad Grebel College as part of ‘Tandi: Symposium on Native Peoples,’ held Jan. 20 to 22, 1976.

other that we Mennonites settled on treaty land. That makes us treaty people, which comes with responsibilities for justice and reconciliation.

The Prophet Jeremiah promised that there would be a day on which “people will no longer say, ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are

set on edge’” (Jeremiah 31:29).

May we heed Maya Angelou’s exhortation to face our common history with courage, both its prospects and problems, in order to build empathy, nurture “restorative solidarity” with our indigenous neighbours, and ensure that injustice not be lived again. ☘

*Elaine Enns grew up in Saskatoon, and is in her final year of a doctor of ministry degree at the Saskatoon Theological Union. She works with Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries in Southern California (www.bcm-net.org/node/2) and is co-author of *Ambassadors of Reconciliation (Orbis, 2009)*. This is an edited and revised version of a talk given at MCC Canada’s annual general meeting in Winnipeg on Sept. 19, 2014. A fully referenced version of this article is available online at <http://bit.ly/1BluKek>.*



It may be that the standard of our settler Mennonite tradition of justice and peacemaking will be measured by our relationship—or lack thereof—with ‘the inconvenient Indian,’ to quote Thomas King.

☘ For discussion

1. Has your family had experiences of being refugees, of being denied citizenship or discriminated against sometime in the past? Do you agree with Elaine Enns that we have lost touch with the marginalization that happened to Mennonites in the past? How have Mennonites moved from being on the margins to being mainstream in Canadian society?
2. Why do we sometimes find it easier to work at relationships with the dispossessed in far-away parts of the world than with Canada’s indigenous people? What makes it difficult for Mennonites to see and recognize the pain of indigenous people in Canada?
3. Enns quotes Larry Miller, who said, “We have sometimes nurtured an identity rooted in victimization that could foster a sense of self-righteousness and arrogance.” Do you agree? What keeps us from listening to painful stories of indigenous people? What are our obligations, given that we live on treaty land?
4. How can Mennonites build empathy and nurture “restorative solidarity” with our indigenous neighbours?

—BY BARB DRAPER

VIEWPOINTS

/// Readers write

We welcome your comments and publish most letters sent by subscribers intended for publication. This section is largely an open forum for the sharing of views. Letters are the opinion of the writer only—publication does not mean endorsement by the magazine or the church. Keep letters to 400 words or less and address issues rather than individuals. We do not countenance rancour or animosity. Personal attacks are inappropriate and will not see the light of print. Please send letters to be considered for publication to letters@canadianmennonite.org or by postal mail or fax, marked “Attn: Readers Write” (our address is on page 3). Letters should include the author’s contact information and mailing address. Letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Preference will be given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

✉ ‘A biblical and better way’ is neither

RE: “A BIBLICAL and better way,” Jan. 19, page 4.

I was saddened and disappointed with Ronald J. Sider’s feature article. I have much respect for what he has done for the church over his career, but sadly he seems to have abandoned the Anabaptist Mennonite approach to discerning God’s truth.

In my view, it is not about interpreting certain Greek words or even about the “trajectory of Scripture.” It has been, and will always be, about groups of believers struggling together to rediscover what it means to follow Christ in our time and age. And from where I sit on the pew, we are ready to embrace and fully welcome people of all walks of life, whether heterosexual, homosexual or something in between.

Loving God and neighbour as ourselves demands nothing less.

DAVID NEUFELD, WINNIPEG

FROM OUR LEADERS

Something exciting

KIRSTEN HAMM-EPP

Summer is an exciting time, and one that most of us tend to look forward to. Warm temperatures, long weekends at the lake or on the porch, summer sports, and, for many in the younger generations, a break from school.

This summer looks like it will be a particularly exciting one.

At the risk of sounding clichéd, it brings a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Mennonite youth from across Canada to attend a Mennonite World Conference (MWC) assembly on their home continent. While the assembly may come back to North America in a few decades, they will experience it differently now as youth than they will in the future as adults.

The youth I’ve spoken with are excited about the 30-plus-hour bus ride, late nights and making friends from different countries. They are excited about international soccer tournaments, experiencing alternative worship services,

and being part of something bigger than themselves and their local groups.

And their excitement makes me excited. On a few separate occasions, I’ve heard Willard Metzger, Mennonite Church Canada’s executive director, comment about how meeting with youth and young adults energizes him, and this is a sentiment I share.

While I am a young adult working in the church and often find myself bringing new and younger energy to my work, let’s be honest, there will always be days when motivation is lacking and energy is low, no matter how young you are! But in those moments, more often than not, I find motivation in my work with the Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization. There is something exciting about being around so much potential and energy all in one place. There is something exciting about being able to speak into the lives of the future generation of the church. There is something exciting about getting up in front of a



few hundred youth and leading them in games and activities.

Wait. Did I say exciting? I may have meant scary and intimidating!

This summer, on behalf of MC Canada, I am planning the late-night activities for all youth staying in the Messiah College dorms in Harrisburg, Pa., during the MWC assembly. This is an opportunity that I find exciting and intimidating all at once! With more than 300 youth from around the world expected to stay in the dorms, there are a lot of details to be considered. Things like age range, cultural norms and languages all need to be part of the planning. But from my own experience at previous assemblies, I know the time spent in Harrisburg is going to be life-giving not only for the youth, but for the church as well.

In the midst of discussions, debates and ongoing discernment, an opportunity is being presented this summer to say that something matters more, and to show our youth that we can still come together and be the church. And for me, that is something exciting!

Kirsten Hamm-Epp is MC Canada’s youth coordinator for MWC’s PA 2015 assembly and area church youth minister for MC Saskatchewan.

✉ 'Getting real' on the subject of sex

RE: "A BIBLICAL and better way," Jan. 19, page 4.

In his article advocating upholding the "biblical teaching about homosexuality," writer Ronald J. Sider states, "Surely we can ask the Holy Spirit to show us how to teach and nurture biblical sexual practice without marginalizing and driving away from Christ those

who struggle with biblical norms."

While there is very much of merit that is worthy of consideration in Sider's article, I find his portrayal of the Holy Spirit, who has apparently been withholding counsel on this important matter because of not having received sufficient requests, to be wanting.

Let's be sure we're "getting real" on this subject.

(Continued on page 12)

FAMILY TIES

Fifty shades of . . .

MELISSA MILLER

I mostly managed to ignore it the first time it came around. But now when I go to the movies, there are huge, impossible-to-miss posters blaring the news that a film has been made based on the book I tried to ignore. My entertainment dollars usually go toward activities that inspire and elevate humanity. Stories of Martin Luther King, for example, and his brave battle for equal rights, or Cheryl Strayed, who clawed her way out of a self-destructive pit. Stories of degradation have no appeal for me.

The movies about King (*Selma*) and Strayed (*Wild*) both have their tough scenes. I find it hard to watch brutal beatings and fire-hosings, as depicted in the civil rights struggles that King led. And Strayed's pre-redeemed life was marred by soulless promiscuity and drug addiction, also difficult to watch. At the same time, it was clear where the stories were heading—towards more justice or rightness or healing or wholeness.

Of course, given that I have ignored the book and the movie, perhaps the story does have redeeming qualities, of which I am unaware. Perhaps you, Gentle Reader, may have found them, and will share them with me! The critics, whom I read and count on to give me enough information so I can make appropriate choices, have panned the quality and story-line of

both book and movie.

And I keep circling back to the basic premise: Why would I invest time and energy and money on a story about sexual practices based on dominance and subjugation? How does that make me a better person? How does the promotion of such practices make the world a better place? How does that fit my Christian ethics? Isn't the Jesus-way one of non-domination and empowerment of others?

Similarly, when a radio celebrity was recently fired for what he defiantly described as consensual "rough sex," I found myself puzzled at first: "You want to hurt women when you have sex with them?" After he was arrested and charged with multiple counts of sexual assault, the puzzlement gave way to revulsion. In our confused, sex-saturated society, it is challenging to find good stories and hard to

referenced the very book I was trying to avoid! *Fifty Shades of Feminism* re-deemed the phrase "fifty shades" for me, and reset my moral compass, oriented to values of dignity, mutuality and respect.

Fifty Shades of Grace: Stories of Inspiration and Promise (Herald Press, 2013) adds another holy note to the experience. This book also has fifty authors, each one giving witness to God's grace in his or her life. Through stories of struggle, loss and redemption, the writers point us to God's saving activity today. Mercy, wonder, hope, gratitude and new life: such gifts permeate the pages. These are qualities to aim towards and to nourish.



Why would I invest time and energy and money in a story about sexual practices based on dominance and subjugation?

ignore bad ones.

Likely these factors led me to pick up a copy of *Fifty Shades of Feminism* (edited by Appignanesi, Holmes & Orbach). This book, a compilation of 50 essays, each by a different author, reflects on women's rights, equality and empowerment. Of uneven quality, it was still worth the read, even though, ironically, some essayists

"The eye is the lamp of the body," Jesus says. "If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light" (Matthew 6:22). Let's turn our eyes toward what is good and holy and full of light.

Melissa Miller has a passion for helping people develop healthy, vibrant relationships with God, self and others.

(Continued from page 11)

Can readers even begin to wrap their heads around how much suffering the sexual orientation/preference issue has engendered over two millennia? And yet, despite the sincere prayers born of so many heart-rending situations over so many years, we still find ourselves not having the clear answers and direction we've been needing. That's right, after 2,000 years of

prayer, sermons, and the seeking of truth at monasteries, seminaries and Bible colleges, here we are in 2015 without answers we can agree upon to settle our debate. And if we will agree—and hopefully we will—that there are plenty of good, sincere Christians on both sides of the related issues, does it mean the Holy Spirit has not deemed it important enough to give us answers that we can understand with sufficient clarity

GOD, MONEY AND ME

Lend a Bible camp your helping hand

HAROLD PENNER

A number of people glanced over as they passed the elderly woman working in her front lawn. She had finished planting flowers in the garden and was now struggling to plant a sapling to replace a tree felled by a wind storm the previous summer.

"Can I help you?" offered a young man stopping in front of her house.

She gratefully handed him the spade and he made short work of digging a hole. After dragging the three-metre sapling into place and replacing the soil, he began tamping it in place while ensuring the tree was properly positioned.

"I live down the street," he said as he finished the task. "I remember you helping my friend's families and babysitting some of my friends over the years. If there is anything else I can do to help you, I would be honoured."

A healthy community is one in which people choose to assist their neighbours and benefit from the generous assistance of others in return. We build community in our neighbourhoods, in our churches, and in our schools and universities. Many Christians also build community at Bible camps. Which Bible camp has been a neighbour to you over the years by giving spiritual guidance to

you, your children or grandchildren? In return, are you in a position to be a good neighbour by providing volunteer time or funding for the projects the camp is working on to improve its ministry now and into the future?

Many of us may not have a flexible time schedule that would allow us to volunteer during the busy summer camping months. However, we can still provide support with our prayers and financial assistance. Depending on the camp, financial assistance could take the form of donations to the general ministry fund, to camper sponsorship funds that allow underprivileged children to attend summer camp, or to support summer staff who would be encouraged by some additional finances to help towards their



We build community in our neighbourhoods, in our churches, and in our schools and universities. Many Christians also build community at Bible camps.

education costs over the coming winter.

Like the sapling that will provide shade for years to come, a new building at your local camp or a contribution to a camp development fund can reap long-term benefits for the ministry. These types of projects benefit from gifts that may be larger than a typical annual cash

donation. Donors might consider providing a larger gift like an in-kind gift of appreciated stocks or mutual fund shares, or a bequest from an estate.

Mennonite Foundation of Canada (MFC) has more than 40 years of experience helping individuals support their favourite local and national charitable ministries by the means that make the most sense for their particular financial situation. MFC staff can explain the financial benefits and assist with donating appreciated publicly traded shares or mutual funds. We also assist individuals with charitable estate planning. Contact an MFC office to find out more.

Harold Penner is a stewardship consultant at Mennonite Foundation of Canada, serving generous people in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. For more information on impulsive generosity, stewardship education, and estate and charitable gift planning, contact your nearest MFC office or visit MennoFoundation.ca.

for us to reach agreement?

It can all make one wonder if perhaps the sexual orientation/practice questions—in particular, how we respond to them and those affected by them—might be more important than the actual answers. Might not this situation we find ourselves in suggest that our concept of God could use a little bit of tweaking at this point in the church's history?

At the very least, we need to be sincerely seeking out and, with as much empathy as possible, listening to voices of those within the gay community. I wonder what the Holy Spirit, with a power and motivation founded in true caring and compassion, might be saying to some of them, as they would also be seeking with sincerity and integrity.

RON HILLER, KITCHENER, ONT.

✉ **Gay wedding, biblical exposition prove we're in 'interesting times'**

RE: "IT FELT like a big deal . . . it was so powerful," Jan. 19, page 13.

I really enjoyed the coverage of Craig Friesen and Matthew Wiens's wedding. It is encouraging to see events like this receiving positive coverage, as it clearly demonstrates the capacity of people to listen, reflect and ultimately change the way they think.

I found it interesting to read Ronald J. Sider's feature article, "A biblical and better way," in the same issue.

Interesting times, no doubt!

CHARLIE SMITH, ALLAN, SASK.

✉ **Present age has turned to 'the culture of this world'**

RE: "IT FELT like a big deal . . . it was so powerful," Jan. 19, page 13.

The 1986 Saskatoon resolution on sexuality, "to remain in loving dialogue with homosexuals," has actually happened for the whole world to see on TV that the Mennonite church is beginning to slip from its one foundation and adopting the culture of society.

While some churches are getting bigger, taking a firm stand on sin and proclaiming the good news of salvation by satellite or the Internet to the unevangelized world of the 10/40 window, other churches are doubting, debating and dividing over the interpretation of sin and God's Word.

The fact of the matter is that Jesus came into the world to change people's lives. His first message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:1). To repent means to think differently about God, self and your future destiny.

Praise God that the people of the last two millennia have accepted the provision, principles and promises of God's Word: salvation in Jesus Christ alone.

Why then should our present age turn to the culture of this world and its hopeless destiny? It is Satan's method of destroying what God has instituted: marriage, home and family.

Chuck Swindoll's advice would be: Adjust to the times without altering the Word.

C. NEIL KLASSEN, ROSEMARY, ALTA.

✉ **Our children are always worth keeping**

RE: "BEING A Faithful Church" conversations on sexuality in *Canadian Mennonite* over the past year.

As a social worker with a children's mental health agency in northwestern Ontario, the best part of my work often includes co-leading a group for lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer youth. The group recently identified that they need to talk about religion, and what to do when their own parents or churches are not able to accept them as they are. I know that this is very painful terrain for the families and youth who are in the middle of it. I am sad to say that some of these youth have already been kicked out of their home communities and churches.

My own solution was to leave the Mennonite church at a very young age, and to try to find alternative places where two or three of us were gathered together learning what it means to love our neighbour, expanding our own understanding of who our neighbour is, working towards social justice for all, caring for the environment and feeding the poor. On this journey there were times when I felt that my own small lesbian community or other survivors of violence against women were my church. There are times right now when I feel like this small group of young people who call themselves "The Other Ten Percent" are my church.

My own hope for the future is that our youth will be able to stay where they are, and not have to leave their own homes or faith communities to "be who they are." Today I am struggling to find a way to present the story of organized religion—in all of its disorganized chaos—to a small group of kids who have been adversely affected or placed at higher risk due to the decisions or indecisions of their churches.

To be honest, I am not sure how to help them "retell" this story in a good way, so please continue to fight with each other over this issue, since our children are always worth keeping.

BETSY MARTIN, KAMINISTIQUIA, ONT.

✉ Bible written without an understanding of genetics

MUCH WAS WRITTEN in *Canadian Mennonite* in January about the gay community and marriage.

It reminds me of a time 25 years ago when we left a mainline denomination because we objected to gay ministers in the pulpit. A quarter-century later, after a personal tragedy and better understanding of genetics, that decision doesn't seem so black and white anymore.

It has come to my attention that nearly everyone quotes the Bible as the authority to deal with moral issues, without acknowledging that the Bible was written in a different culture by people who lacked the understanding of genetics. Slavery was accepted as morally acceptable by Paul, but few of us would agree with Paul's assessment today.

Each time a child is born, due to a fluke of nature, it may be mentally or physically disabled or brilliant. That then leads me to theorize that those professing to be gay may have an inherited abnormality. I have observed that our physical anatomy by nature intended male and female to be together in a conjugal relationship and not those of the same sex.

But although outer appearance indicates a definite gender, the inner workings of the mind may not. An unbreakable bond can develop between people of the same sex, but it can hardly be called a marriage. Those who differ with that opinion have every right to call it marriage, providing they reciprocate to others to disagree.

In the world to come, male and female will become the bride of Christ, where gender and sex no longer matter. May it come before people leave one denomination to voice their displeasure, only to discover the same issue plagues the next denomination.

FRANK HIEMSTRA, STRATFORD, ONT.

✉ MCC provides anti-abuse network in three provinces

RE: "AN 'EXPERIMENT' in sexuality gone wrong" and "Intimacy is not an invitation to abuse," Jan. 5, pages 4 and 34, respectively.

Both articles speak about the deep, long-lasting and far-reaching impact of sexual abuse, and they speak to a survivor's need for safe places to heal from the experience of abuse.

They also highlight the important role of the church in teaching people about abuse. The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Abuse Response and Prevention Network fully agrees with Rachel Bergen that, "when there aren't spaces to seek support, the

harm persists."

In order for healing to happen, we need to acknowledge that abuse is occurring in our churches, and to heed Paul's exhortation to "take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. . . . Everything exposed by the light becomes visible" (Ephesians 5:11, 13).

It is for this reason that MCC has programs with a specific focus on abuse. These programs educate and equip, as well as provide safe spaces and support for Mennonite families and churches whose members are grappling with abuse.

For information on MCC programs and resources addressing abuse, visit <http://bit.ly/17a2WIK>, contact your local MCC office or directly contact the programs listed below.

ELSIE GOERZEN

End Abuse, MCC B.C.

EILEEN HENDERSON

Abuse Response and Prevention, MCC Manitoba

VIRGINIA FROESE

Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Resource Response Team, MCC Ontario

STEPHEN SIEMENS

Circles of Care, MCC Ontario

✉ Yoder wrongdoing can't be 'fixed from the grave'

RE: "AN 'EXPERIMENT' in sexuality gone wrong," Jan. 5, page 4.

Long-time CBC personality Jian Ghomeshi faces charges of sexual harassment and sexual assault, while 30 years ago in the Mennonite realm intellectual John Howard Yoder faced charges of skillfully convincing women to participate in various sexual experiments.

The radio and TV host was a brilliant and beloved star in promoting the CBC, while the seminary faculty member, brilliant thinker and writer was a beloved star Bible professor who promoted what is now Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

For the influential Ghomeshi, the initial CBC enquiry of sexual misconduct was glossed over. For Yoder, who had become widely known, the Anabaptist system to thoroughly investigate and stop his wrongful behaviour failed.

The judicial system will hear the Ghomeshi case and decide on the consequences, if any. In the case of Yoder, now deceased, his controversial thinking and abuse of women can never be settled. You cannot fix it from the grave.

LEETTA ERB, STE. AGATHE, MAN.

✉ Former prof sings the praises of pensions

RE: “DO NOT store up treasures in pensions,” Jan. 5, page 28, and “Holy recklessness,” Jan. 19, page 21.

I greatly appreciate Will Braun’s sensitive reflections on our society’s trend to identify life’s fulfillment with financial security in retirement, often in the form of pension fund investments. Should followers of Jesus not be risk-takers, investing in the greater treasures of the kingdom of God? But how?

His respectful treatment of the matter, however, cannot avoid casting a negative light on the Mennonite Church Canada pension plan and the “financial elders of the church” (Braun’s aptly chosen term) who devised it. As an employee of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (now MC Canada) during my long teaching career at Canadian Mennonite University and Canadian Mennonite Brethren College, I was enrolled in the conference’s pension plan in 1973, and when I retired in 1997, I became a beneficiary of it.

How grateful I was when I learned that the financial administration of the conference had worked with energy, expertise and care to provide for our family’s future while I had concentrated on other things. Although close-knit early Anabaptist, Amish and Hutterite communities may have handled their members’ needs in an “in-house fashion,” I saw in the work of our financial elders a true Christian care and provision for the poor—to which I would belong without pension—a care appropriately adapted to our time.

I was also grateful that the Canadian Government had made me contribute for decades to the Canada Pension Plan and had used some of the taxes paid by me and others to establish the Old Age Security (OAS) provision. Given these three sources of income and some very modest savings, Mary and I have been able to continue our lower-middle-class lifestyle for almost 18 years now. We were also able to be of help to our children when needed, contribute to the work of the church and support some charities.

By keeping his income, and therefore his taxes and investments, low, Braun may soothe his conscience regarding investment in undesirable causes. But has he considered that he would thereby also contribute minimally, or not at all, to the safety provisions from which all Canadians benefit in the form of OAS, medical care, social assistance, affordable education and more?

WALDEMAR JANZEN, WINNIPEG

✉ Like a little knowledge, ‘holy recklessness’ is a dangerous thing

RE: “HOLY RECKLESSNESS,” Jan. 19, page 21.

While I appreciate a good old-fashioned pillory of big business and materialism, Will Braun’s column proves that a “little knowledge is a dangerous thing.”

First, “socially responsible investment” is a hopelessly nuanced and complex concept. As an example, Blackberry, in addition to providing good jobs to thousands of Canadians, provides a portable platform for reading the very ideas espoused by Braun, thus saving thousands of trees that otherwise would have been cut down for the paper version of the very magazine he writes in.

Second, it is a noble notion for an emotionally, physically and mentally healthy employee to work only enough to provide a current hand-to-mouth existence. Eventually, however, age catches up with everyone and we all will become less and less productive. If we are super lucky, our children and our grandchildren will come to our assistance, but if we don’t have any of either, the “treasures” we have stored up here on earth will be required to prevent us from becoming a burden on the collective community.

Third, from 1987-89 I served as a full-time volunteer with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) at a youth group home in Warburg, Alta., receiving a stipend of \$50 per month. I was dimly aware then, and am more acutely aware now, that my “sacrifice” to take the pious non-materialistic high road was only possible because of thousands of generous donors to the MCC mission, donors who earned more than they maybe needed for the moment, but who could have used their excess for many things other than the idealistic journeys of me and hundreds of other MCC volunteers and employees.

This principle applies to Braun and the rest of the staff at *Canadian Mennonite* and Mennonite Church Canada. I suspect most readers highly value the ability to share with thousands of people the faith-based ideals and ideas contained within this magazine. We must never forget, however, that this expression and sharing is a luxury afforded to our collective community by the generous donations of Mennonites who work hard to provide for themselves and their community, who run ethical businesses that treat their employees and the environment fairly and responsibly, and who spread the word of Christ through faithful living at their employment at Suncor, Talisman or BMO. Please do not pillory us, because at the end of the day we all need grace and we all need each other.

RON TOEWS, BRANDON, MAN.

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Moving thinward (Pt. 1)

TROY WATSON

I've always been intrigued with "thin places" long before I ever heard the term "thin place."

Since childhood, I've been curiously drawn to old churches, temples, cathedrals, monasteries, ruins, holy sites, natural "wonders," remote wilderness, solitary night skies—anywhere that evokes a sense of sacred space. Part of the appeal has been the beauty and mystery I so often find in these environments, but occasionally I've been so overwhelmed by divine energy in these places it was as if I'd stumbled upon holy ground.

I'm not the only one.

Countless people have experienced God in places like these. Sometimes in exactly the same place.

Almost two years ago, I had the privilege of visiting the Island of Iona. Iona has long been considered a thin place by people from various religious and spiritual backgrounds. Every year hundreds of thousands of people flock to this small island off the coast of Scotland on a spiritual quest or pilgrimage. During my stay there I got to know dozens of people and I came to the conclusion that I was the only first-time visitor on the island. Everyone I talked to told me they had returned because of how special this place was for them, a place of divine healing or peace or wisdom. One middle-aged woman from Denmark told me that it was her 18th time visiting and that she'd experienced a special time with God on every trip.

One of the things that struck me most about my time on Iona was how open, vulnerable and engaging everyone was with one another. I was only there a few days and yet I sensed a deeper

connection with many of these strangers than I do with people I've known for years. It seems not only the barrier between heaven and earth is thin on Iona, but the barriers between human beings

are much thinner as well.

I left Iona pondering the possibility that there was indeed something especially thin about this island. When you experience God so powerfully in a place where thousands, perhaps millions, of other people have also experienced God, you have to wonder if there is something about that particular place that makes it holy or thin.

Of course, the suggestion that certain physical locations are inherently sacred sounds like malarkey, or even heresy, to



Of course, the suggestion that certain physical locations are inherently sacred sounds like malarkey, or even heresy, to some. Yet this is exactly what the ancient Christian Celts believed.

some. Yet this is exactly what the ancient Christian Celts believed. They were convinced that certain locations existed where the barrier between the spiritual and material realms was thinner, where the line between the holy and human collapsed. And this ancient perspective seems to be making a comeback in contemporary spirituality.

An abundance of literature has been published on thin places over the past few decades, including a few articles in *Canadian Mennonite*. In 2012, Eric Weiner wrote a piece entitled "Where heaven and earth come closer" in the *New York Times*. I certainly don't agree

with everything Weiner says about thin places, but he makes some interesting observations that are worth repeating:

"So what exactly makes a place thin? It's easier to say what a thin place is not. A thin place is not necessarily a tranquil place, or a fun one, or even a beautiful one, though it may be all of those things too. . . . Thin places relax us, yes, but they also transform us—or, more accurately, unmask us. In thin places, we become our more essential selves."

This certainly reflects my experience on Iona. People seemed to be unmasked, empowered to be vulnerable, "naked and unashamed," free to be their true selves.

Weiner also writes about our act of journeying to thin places as significant to their transformative power: "Travel to thin places does not necessarily lead to anything as grandiose as a 'spiritual breakthrough,' whatever that means, but it does disorient. It confuses. We lose our bearings. . . we are jolted out of old ways of seeing the world."

Again this rings true for me. Places become thin when they shake us out of our autopilot modes, opening us up to the vast expanse of the eternal moment in which we live and move and have our being.

But all of this raises a few questions for me:

- **ARE PLACES** inherently thin or do they become thin when one is experiencing God's presence?
- **DO THIN** places instigate spiritual experiences or do our spiritual experiences cause a sense of thin place?
- **AND WHAT** does the Bible say about thin places?

To be continued . . . ❧

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

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Bradnam—Leyton Scott (b. Jan. 20, 2015), to Jonathan and Michelle Bradnam, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Brasil—Adrianna Dawn (b. Jan. 8, 2015) to Michelle and Mike Brasil, Poole Mennonite, Milverton, Ont.

Dulac—Jocelyn Claire (b. Jan. 15, 2015), to Dan and Laurie Dulac, Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Fehr—Koi William (b. Jan. 25, 2015), to Ryley and Faylin Fehr, Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Guenther—Lincoln Neil (b. Jan. 7, 2015), to Thea and Josh Guenther, Poole Mennonite, Milverton, Ont.

Koop—Harper Anna Lynn (b. Jan. 2, 2015), to Randy and Jackie Koop, Grace Mennonite, Steinbach, Man.

Shantz—Emma Lynn (b. Jan. 25, 2015), to Dan and Laura Shantz, Breslau Mennonite, Ont.

Schellenberg—Felix David (b. Feb. 5, 2015), to Terry Schellenberg and Lenore Friesen, Sterling Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Marriages

Cerquiera/Penner—Elizabeth Cerquiera and Peter T. Penner, Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man., Nov. 2, 2014.

Kotschorek/Peters—Erica Kotschorek and Terry Peters, Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man., Nov. 8, 2014.

Penner/Rauwerda—Ellery Penner (Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.) and Mark Rauwerda, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Jan. 31, 2015.

Deaths

Bueckert—Ron, 61 (b. April 28, 1953; d. Dec. 17, 2014), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Epp—Evelyn (nee Funk), 77 (b. Sept. 8, 1937; d. Jan. 15, 2015), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Fehr—Abe, 88 (b. Aug. 5, 1926; d. Jan. 6, 2015), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Fehr—Tina, 83 (b. Aug. 4, 1931; d. Jan. 23, 2015), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Giesbrecht—Mary (nee Mireau), 88 (b. Nov. 25, 1926; d. Jan. 16, 2015), Vineland United Mennonite, Ont.

Heidebrecht—Henry, 95 (b. July 28, 1919; d. Dec. 24, 2014), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Hiebert—Henry F., 94 (b. May 1, 1920; d. Jan. 7, 2015), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Kinsie—Alexander (Alex), 88 (b. March 16, 1926; d. Jan. 24, 2015), Breslau Mennonite, Ont.

Klippenstein—Elsie, 67 (b. July 12, 1947; d. Nov. 20, 2014), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Mathies—Robert David, 59 (b. April 13, 1955; d. Jan. 25, 2015), North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Neuhof—Julianna (nee Stobbe), 90 (b. May 3, 1924; d. Jan. 15, 2015), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Peters Sr.—William (Bill), 82 (b. Jan. 28, 1932; d. Jan. 24, 2015), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Plett—Mary, 92 (b. Jan. 9, 1923; d. Jan. 24, 2015), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Retzlaff—Peter, 88 (b. Nov. 14, 1926; d. Jan. 16, 2015), Lethbridge Mennonite, Alta.

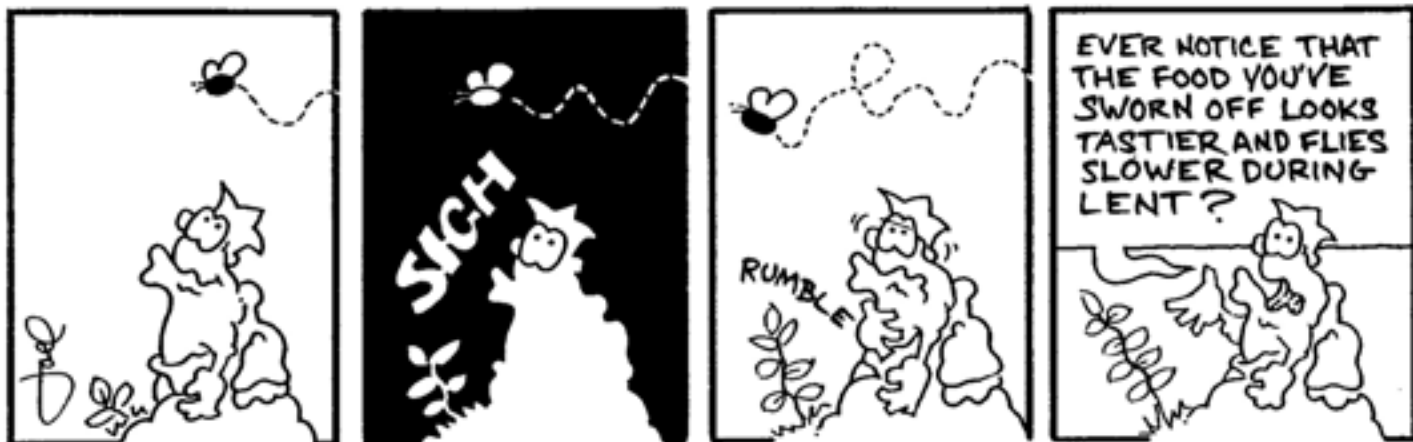
Siemens—Elly, 89 (b. Oct. 31, 1925; d. Nov. 24, 2014), Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

Suckau—Eleonore (nee Bartel), 88 (b. April 1, 1926; d. Jan. 8, 2015), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Wiebe—Jan, 51 (b. May 22, 1963; d. Oct. 17, 2014), Lethbridge Mennonite, Alta.

Woelke—Anne (nee Bartel), 76 (b. Feb. 28, 1938; d. Dec. 31, 2014), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Pontius' Puddle



GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

'Competent adults' to get right-to-die

Supreme Court weighs personal autonomy vs. sanctity of life

BY WILL BRAUN

Senior Writer

The Supreme Court of Canada's February decision to legalize physician-assisted dying shifted the moral landscape in Canada.

Three-quarters of Canadians welcome that shift, but some people of faith don't. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), which includes Mennonite Church Canada, intervened in the case and was "deeply disappointed" by the outcome.

In a unanimous decision, the court said it was forced to "balance competing values of great importance." On one hand stood the "autonomy and dignity of a competent adult who seeks death as a response to a grievous and irremediable medical condition," and on the other, "the sanctity of life and the

need to protect the vulnerable."

Writing about the decision in a column in *The Globe and Mail*, renowned ethicist Margaret Somerville said some people believe that quality of life can diminish to the point where assisted death is justified.

Others see "all humans as having dignity just because they are human," and they believe "respect for life requires that we do not intentionally kill another human being or help them kill themselves."

The matter raises intricate questions:

- **ARE SOME** lives so unbearable that their end is justified?
- **IF SUCH** an allowance were formalized in law and practice, would it necessarily undermine a general societal value one might call respect for life?
- **DOES SOCIETY** have the right to force people to continue suffering?
- **DOES SOCIETY** have the right to sanction the willful ending of a life?

The Feb. 6 ruling struck down a 21-year-old decision that made it an indictable offence under the Criminal Code to aid or abet a person in committing suicide. The current ruling affirms the essential intent of that earlier decision—"to protect vulnerable persons from being induced to

The Feb. 6 ruling struck down a 21-year-old decision that made it an indictable offence under the Criminal Code to aid or abet a person in committing suicide.

commit suicide at a time of weakness"—but says such protection can be ensured without a blanket prohibition.

The blanket prohibition, it ruled, unjustifiably infringed on the Charter rights of other people—specifically, people who have a "grievous and irremediable medical condition [including an illness, disease or disability] that causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition."

The new ruling says that such a person has a right to a physician-assisted death if she or he is a "competent adult person," and "clearly consents to the termination of life." This applies both to a doctor helping a person end his or her own life—for example, by providing medication, but not actually administering it—and also to cases in which the doctor directly administers the drugs that ends a life. The latter practice is generally referred to as euthanasia.

The court gave the federal government a year to come up with legislation to match the decision, including protections for vulnerable persons and provisions to accommodate physicians who do not wish to be involved in an assisted suicide. The Court

(Continued on page 20)

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VIEWPOINT

Court turns medicine into 'death dealing'

RUTH ENNS

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled on Feb. 6 that our current ban on physician-assisted death (PAD) is not in keeping with Section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The ruling fails to mention terminal illness, but does specify disability, making this an issue on which disability advocates should have been consulted all along. Except for those who agree with physician-assisted death (PAD), such as MP Steven Fletcher, disabled people have been sidelined both in the media and elsewhere. Terminal illness and the right to refuse medical treatment—a right established in the courts years ago—dominated discussions.

The court ruling stipulates only that PAD be restricted to “a competent adult person who (1) clearly consents to the termination of life, and (2) has a grievous and irremediable medical condition [including an illness, disease or disability] that causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition.”

Even phrases possibly referring to terminal illness could also apply to anyone with a permanent disability, depression or other long-term non-life-threatening conditions. Those requesting PAD do not have to be in physical pain. The ruling's use of undefined terms such as “competent,” “grievous” and “suffering” leaves people living with depression or disability vulnerable to offers of PAD, instead of treatment and care.

And consent can be coerced. Many older people already fall prey to scam artists. If dependent on unscrupulous caregivers, they could easily be coerced into “choosing” PAD. If the topic has been disability all along, and yet people

with those disabilities have been excluded from the debate, how could anyone believe that individuals will be making their own decisions?

The ruling considered only the court's peculiar interpretation of the Charter's Section 7: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person, and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.” The court argued that Canadians seeking PAD might choose to live longer if they could access it at home, eliminating the need to travel abroad while they were still able.

Surely the originators of Section 7 did not have assisted death in mind when they wrote it. Since when did the “principles of fundamental justice” include perverting the practice of medicine into “death dealing”?

The ruling ignored Section 15 (1), which says, “Every individual is equal before and under the law, and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law . . . without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability.” In ignoring this section, the Supreme Court has given us “choice” at the expense of equality.

In a Feb. 6 joint news release, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and the Canadian Association for Community Living said: “The judgment creates the potential for the most permissive and least restrictive criteria for assisted suicide in the world, putting persons with disabilities at serious risk.”

That would be more serious risk than in Belgium, which has openly euthanized children, depressed people, people who are nowhere near death and vulnerable

people incapable of giving consent.

The ruling is clearly based on the assumption that, because nobody wants to become disabled, that if we do, we will—or should—want to die. The temptation to end our lives is supported by the strong cultural bias that sees our lives as burdensome, meaningless, worthless. In other words, “quality of life.”

Indeed, many newly disabled people do want to commit suicide, as the late Christopher Reeve did. Reeve's wife begged him to wait two years before making a final decision. In that time, he found purpose in his changed life and decided to go on, as do most of us who live with “irremediable medical conditions” and disabilities. Do we really want to offer “dying with dignity,” rather than “living with dignity?”

Proponents of PAD like to cite data from jurisdictions where it has been legal for years. Such sources rely on scientifically invalid self-reporting by the very people abusing the guidelines. Why would anyone flouting safeguards report their actions in writing when they may not even admit their misdeeds to themselves?

In his Feb. 9 *National Post* column, “Crossing the Rubicon, Supreme Court seems eerily complacent about ramifications of assisted suicide,” Andrew Coyne wrote: “Once we have embraced the idea of suicide, not as a tragedy we should seek to prevent, but a right we are obliged to uphold; once the taking of life has been converted from a crime into a service . . . to be performed at public expense . . . how is it to be imagined that we could stop there?”

Parliament now has one year to either write a new law, invoke the notwithstanding clause to override the ruling, or make this into an election issue. Doing nothing makes the ruling law. ❧

Ruth Enns, who suffers from polio and glaucoma, is a member of First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. She is the author of A Voice Unheard: The Latimer Case and People with Disabilities, published in 2000.

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(Continued from page 18)

said “nothing” in its ruling “would compel physicians to provide assistance in dying.”

Somerville said the court’s ruling puts an individual’s right to autonomy and self-determination ahead of the notion of sanctity of life.

Outspoken proponents of the decision—some with debilitating chronic illness—say they simply want to be able to decide when their lives are too unbearable to continue and they want to have a controlled, painless way to make the transition when the time comes. In some cases it will mean people will live longer, because previously they would have chosen to end their life while they were still physically capable of doing so on their own, while now they can have a doctor assist at a later stage.



Bruce Clemenger

Bruce Clemenger, president of the EFC, said, “Life is a gift from God which should be respected and protected through all its stages.” In a statement following the Supreme Court ruling, Clemenger said, “Care for the sick and elderly is part of God’s call for Christians,” and, we “must not deliberately bring about their death.”

In a *100 Huntley Street* interview, Clemenger said the ruling contradicts the biblical commandment not to kill. He urges Parliament to act quickly to bring in legislation that will make physician-assisted dying and euthanasia as rare as possible. He also believes that it is important to make palliative care as available as possible to Canadians, something he said is lacking now.

A Forum Research poll found that 78 percent of Canadians support the Supreme Court decision. Fifteen percent disapprove, while 7 percent expressed no opinion. The poll found that younger people, wealthier people, Quebecers, New Democrats and non-religious Canadians were most likely to support the decision, although even among Conservatives and Albertans approval stands at 71 percent.

The government has not said whether it will introduce legislation before the federal election, which is expected in October, well before the court’s 12-month deadline. ▮

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Local Gleaners shipping to North Korea

By BRYAN JESSOP

Leamington Southpoint Sun
LEAMINGTON, ONT.

The Southwestern Ontario Gleaners, based in Leamington, will be making its first international aid shipment, a commitment that has captured attention and admiration from Ottawa.

For the first time ever, a federal minister stopped by the 40 Industrial Drive location for a tour of the organization's equipment and facilities. Diane Finley, Haldimand-Norfolk MP and minister of public works and government affairs, paid a visit, along with Chatham-Kent-Essex MP Dave Van Kesteren, on Feb. 10. Other guests who toured the building and commemorated the ground-breaking announcement included Rick Cober Bauman, executive director of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario.

MCC will take on the duties of shipping the 200,000 meals of dehydrated vegetable soup mix prepared by the Gleaners. Again using donations offered by local farmers and other agricultural operations, the Gleaners' team of volunteers went back and forth between processing and packaging for about three weeks prior to Finley's visit. The bulk of the work was done over the past week-and-a-half, utilizing 3.5 shifts of 15 volunteers per shift to take care of the packaging.

The only purchase necessary for the not-for-profit group was the addition of beans for protein. The four main ingredients of the 1.36-kilogram bags are potatoes, carrots, squash and brussel sprouts. Other dry ingredients include asparagus, barley, beets, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, corn, kale, lentils, onions, peas, peppers, spinach, tomatoes, yams, zucchini and salt.

The shipment to the national MCC headquarters in Plum Coulee, Man., included a load of five skids containing 2,100 bags. Once the storage unit in Manitoba contains enough material designated for North Korean destinations, the

Leamington-made soup mix will be flown to awaiting orphanages in the small Asian nation.

Cober Bauman explained that North Korea first opened its borders to the UN and international charity in 1995. Although the country's government will not allow foreign aid representatives to set up permanent or long-term residency there, it does permit aid workers with repeat entry visas to conduct follow-up visits to recipient destinations.

"Anything that's going to help people being oppressed by their own countries is a good thing," Finley said. "Canadians have always been very compassionate, very supportive of others. We have a long agricultural tradition. You put those two things together and it can only be a good combination."

Finley was also impressed by the Gleaners' facility and projects as a combined whole.

"This is a very impressive operation, to

be able to grow it from nothing in such a short period of time," said Finley of the Gleaners' facility, which began operating in August 2014. "It's truly impressive. What's even more impressive is their ambitious goals for the future."

Until now, all dehydrated food items processed at the Leamington Gleaners' location have been sent to local aid organizations and programs throughout Windsor-Essex and Chatham-Kent. The 2,100 bags being sent to North Korea won't likely be the last overseas shipment. Plans are in the works to make contributions to Haiti and Bosnia, while another project is being planned to provide sustenance to Syrian refugees who have fled to Lebanon and Jordan.

At the same time, the Gleaners will continue to focus on local citizens in need. Discussions are currently ongoing between the group and Plentiful Harvest and the Jump Start School Nutrition Program, with the ultimate goal of bolstering the support of area food banks and underprivileged students.

"We're just getting started," said Vern Toews, the Gleaners' chair. ❧

Adapted from an article that appeared in the Leamington Southpoint Sun. Story and photo reprinted by permission.



Pictured at the announcement that the Southwestern Ontario Gleaners will be shipping its first international consignment to North Korea are, from left to right: Dave Van Kesteren, Chatham-Kent-Essex MP; Diane Finley, Haldimand-Norfolk MP and minister of public works and government affairs; Vern Toews, Gleaners' chair; Rick Cober Bauman, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario's executive director; and Barry Bergen, MCC Leamington representative.

Grace Mennonite meets with local MP

Steinbach delegation raises concerns over murdered and missing indigenous women

BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

Manitoba Correspondent

There are about 1,200 missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada, according to a 2014 report from the RCMP.

A group from Grace Mennonite Church in Steinbach, Man., needed to make its deeply felt concerns about this troubling statistic known, so on Jan. 6 it met with Ted Falk, Conservative Member of Parliament for Provencher, to air these concerns.

"I felt he was very receptive to us and certainly listened," said Pearl Barg, one of the five members who formed the delegation. "We knew this was not part of his portfolio, but we at least wanted him

to hear our concerns and to know that we know about this glaring and startling report."

"The meeting was kind and cordial," said Kyle Penner, associate pastor. "Ted more or less stuck to his talking points. He did his best to answer our questions. We talked about . . . the RCMP report, education on reserves, how one protects the wealth of a citizen when they don't have wealth in the first place, a national inquiry and a few other things. He answered what he could and, when he didn't have an answer, he admitted that he didn't know."

PHOTO BY HILDA ANDERSON-PYRZ



On the National Day of Remembrance, Oct. 4, 2014, a group from Grace Mennonite Church attended the annual Sister in Spirit vigil that was held on the Manitoba Legislative grounds to remember missing and murdered indigenous women. Grace Mennonite, in its partnership with Pauingassi First Nation, is discovering ways to walk with and support indigenous voices.

"We understand," he continued, "that this issue is larger and hard to grasp, and that a small little church group spending 30 minutes with their MP probably isn't going to have a drastic change on national policy, or on racism, sexism, misogyny in general, but we do feel that this meeting was part of our work towards ensuring the safety of indigenous women, of supporting the first nations' voices that are speaking up, and also working towards right relationships between settler and indigenous people in Canada."

"Our riding has only two registered first nations reserves, and in Steinbach our aboriginal population is relatively small, at 1.5 percent, so it may seem more like a Winnipeg problem or northern problem, but we at Grace Mennonite have a significant connection to this issue," said Penner.

Grace Mennonite has been in a long-standing partnership with Pauingassi First Nation through the Partnership Circle program of Mennonite Church Manitoba and MC Canada. Through this partnership, significant friendships between individuals and congregations have developed, as well as a growing awareness of the issues that daunt indigenous people.

"We've tried to frame the partnership as seeking to build each other up, where we both bring gifts to the table to share," said Penner. "From the beginning of our partnership, we've known that many of us from Grace wouldn't get the chance to go to Pauingassi [because of the prohibitive costs of air-travel to the fly-in community], so working toward right relations with our neighbours will have to occur on multiple fronts. We heard from Wendy Peterson, a Métis woman, that one of the ways we can do this is to be 'settler faces behind first nations' voices.' So rather than us being the primary faces and voices of advocacy, our job is to walk with and support the indigenous voices that are already speaking."

"Our church is looking at indigenous issues throughout this year," said Barg. "In addition to learning more about the issues, we are attending different events and occasions to lend our support and to keep our ears open to ways we can respond."

One of those opportunities arose last October during a National Day of Remembrance event, when members

from Grace Mennonite attended the annual Sisters in Spirit vigil in Winnipeg that remembers murdered and missing indigenous women.

“At the end of the vigil, postcards were passed around and we were asked to send them to someone in our world who could make a difference. The postcards simply asked the receiver to do their part to ensure the safety of indigenous women,” said Penner.

The group brought back to the church a stack of postcards, which read, “Please do your part to help stop the violence, murder and disappearance of indigenous women

in Canada,” and encouraged people to take one and sign it. All of the postcards were signed and the church delegation presented them to Falk in person.

After the meeting, Falk told *Canadian Mennonite*: “I could see that they were very passionate about the issue. I’m pleased that they decided to share their opinions with me. I’d like to congratulate Grace Mennonite on their very good work with Pauingassi First Nation. I wish them all the best as they continue to work closely together with communities through their outreach.” ☞

☞ Briefly noted

Pioneer Park Christian Fellowship supports Israeli activist

WATERLOO, ONT.—“We’re not building houses for humanitarian reasons,” said Jeff Halper, the founder and director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. Halper was in Canada in January, speaking in many locations and gathering funds to rebuild more homes. A small, invitation-only gathering was hosted by Kathy Bergen and Pioneer Park Christian Fellowship in Waterloo on Jan. 18, with about 30 people in attendance. The 187 homes the committee has rebuilt, some of them multiple times, is a drop in the bucket compared to the 48,000-plus houses the Israeli military has demolished since occupying the West Bank, said Halper, who insisted that its joint Israeli/Palestinian work is political, showing that only through learning to live together will peace come to the land. Halper suggested that one nation, with one citizenship comprised of two peoples—Jews and Palestinians—is the only way to a just and peaceful life for all in the land. The house rebuilding by Israelis and Palestinians together is a prophetic action to bring attention to the Jewish population, in particular, that the land must be shared justly. He said that most Israelis are ignorant, sometimes willfully, of the situation in the West Bank, having been fed a line by politicians and media about their “enemies,” with the extent of the military and settlers’ actions being downplayed.

—STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY



Ed and Kathy Janzen of New Hamburg, left, listen to a presentation by Jeff Halper, right, the founder and director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, at a Jan. 18 fundraiser for the organization.

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GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

What is the purpose of the church?

Rainham Mennonite Church negotiates with Canada Revenue Agency

BY DAVE ROGALSKY
Eastern Canada Correspondent

When Rainham Mennonite Church, near Selkirk, Ont., was audited by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) in the summer of 2014, the auditor wanted to see the congregation's constitution. When it couldn't find one, the church quickly developed a new one with four statements in the Purpose section of the document, two of which caught the CRA's attention:

2. TO RECEIVE and maintain a fund or funds, and to apply all or part of the principal and income therefrom, from time to time, to charitable organizations that are also registered charities under the Income Tax Act (Canada).

4. TO MINISTER to the needs of a hurting world. The example and teachings of Jesus Christ make it abundantly clear that Christians are to work for all that is just

and merciful. This purpose is fulfilled as the followers of Christ act justly and exercise love in all that they do, and as they minister to hurts and injustices existing everywhere in the world, including aiding with material needs to any extent possible.

The CRA rejected these statements, finding the organizations Rainham would support painted too broadly. While Purpose No. 2 does state that the congregation would give money to organizations "registered under the Income Tax Act (Canada)," Purpose No. 4 seemed to broaden that to give beyond—into the "hurting world" and "everywhere in the world."

The auditor was clear that Rainham's charitable status under Canadian law meant that only other organizations also under Canadian law were appropriate

destinations for monies for which Rainham issued tax-deductible receipts. Rainham could give monies elsewhere, but not receipt those monies at tax time.

Working with Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and the Canadian Council of Christian Charities, Charlie Roth, the congregational chair, developed a Purpose statement that was acceptable to the CRA. The new Purpose section includes the following:

2. TO RECEIVE and maintain a fund or funds, and to apply all or part of the principal and income therefrom, from time to time, to charitable organizations that are also registered charities under the Income Tax Act (Canada).

3. TO ENGAGE in the relief of poverty by following the example and teachings of Jesus to work for all that is just and merciful and, to the extent possible, love one's neighbour by providing ministry and aid to those experiencing poverty.

David Martin, executive minister of MC Eastern Canada, says, "The intent is to mirror the wording of the tax law and to not use the Purposes as statements of faith, which are better framed in other church documents."

Roth says that when he brought the revised Purpose list to the congregation, there was a fair amount of discussion, with some of the mostly elderly members willing to do what they thought was right, regardless of the CRA. With 16 active elderly members, Roth says that he and the congregation ultimately did not think that fighting the wording was "a sword to fall on," and that they would instead practise their faith as a congregation and deal with problems if and when they arose.

But Roth also believes, and is supported in this by Martin, that Rainham was not targeted. Instead, he says the auditors at CRA are given very specific and narrow guidelines on what is acceptable in these areas. With the addition of Purpose No. 3 in the latest constitution, the congregation can make decisions to use its monies to directly fund local projects, like a family that lost its home to a fire recently. ☸

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN KENNEL HARRISON



Pictured from left to right: members of Rainham Mennonite Church—Dave Dick, congregational chair Charlie Roth, Mary Makey and Mary Roth.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE DRUDGE



Despite the serious nature of their discussions, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada missional leaders Ruth Boehm, left, Don Penner, Brian Quan, Pieter Niemeyer, Kara Carter and Steve Drudge find time to ham it up for the camera.

‘The big picture of church and culture’

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
BADEN, ONT.

As he read through the Bible, Don Penner was amazed at the level of powerlessness Ezekiel exhibited by laying on his side for 390 days—one for each year after the fall of David and Solomon’s kingdom.

Penner, pastor of Shantz Mennonite Church in Baden, invited the men in his congregation to join him in lying on their sides for five minutes if they sometimes felt helpless in this changing world. To his surprise, two-thirds of the men came forward on a Sunday morning to join him.

The experiment was how Penner felt God was leading him as he tries to see where God is moving, rather than inviting God to bless his plans and work. Watching for God’s movement in the church and the community around the church is part of joining God’s mission in the world, a central tenet of missional thinking.

Penner was part of a group of pastors being led by Steve Drudge, pastor of Steinmann Mennonite Church, also in Baden, who has been conducting a project on the changing leadership paradigm in congregations.

“Soon after the word ‘missional’ appeared, it became a buzzword pasted onto anything and everything, and we quickly grew tired of it without really understanding it,” according to Drudge. “Most Mennonite Church Eastern Canada leaders, and to a lesser degree congregations, had been introduced to the missional church concept. I wanted a deeper understanding and to experiment with actually living and leading out of this framework.”

In order to do this, he formed a group of pastors with the help of MC Eastern Canada. Penner was joined by Kara Carter of Wellesley Mennonite; Pieter Niemeyer of Rouge Valley Mennonite, Markham; Ruth Boehm of Faith Mennonite, Leamington; and Brian Quan, pastor of the English congregation at Toronto Chinese Mennonite.

They met monthly for a year, ending last September, to explore together what “missional” meant to them. Drudge says the central question was, “How do we think and act if the mission of God is at the heart of what we’re about?” Drudge says that part of the powerlessness Penner felt is

not having a specific program or outcome in mind for his congregation.

Penner says that, after almost 30 years as a pastor and watching the decline of the church for at least 20 years, he felt exhausted trying to find a fix. He tried some, some he couldn’t afford, some were “not us,” he says. But after all these years, he was sceptical and tired, ready to have a different question. “If you have the wrong question, even a good answer is the wrong answer,” he says.

He has started to think that for the last 25 years churches and pastors have been asking the wrong question. Decreasing attendance at church has led to the question, “How do we get people to come to church?” he asks, adding, “So all the marketed solutions by . . . church growth experts were trying to get people to get back to the church.”

But he wonders if the real question is, “What’s going on in the big picture of the church and culture?” His answer to this question is the massive modern/postmodern shift in society. Scripture give examples like the Exodus from Egypt (from the known to the unknown), exile to Babylon and return, and Christ’s call for Christians to lose their lives in order to find them.

“We’ve been here before,” Penner says with confidence, suggesting that God has been here before, too. His older, rural congregation is starting to see that, instead of fear, this is an opportunity. “At Shantz, we’re approaching it from ‘changing our lens, our glasses,’ after 175 years of history.”

Others in the group have their own stories.

Quan says that the Mandarin congregation at Toronto Chinese Mennonite is still in a Christendom model that works, as church is everything for these recent immigrants to Canada. On the other hand, the Cantonese congregation is already missional, looking out into the community to see needs among Cantonese speakers and provide for those needs.

Carter comes to her pastoral ministry in a more contemplative mode. As she leads leaders in the congregation to do the same, they have identified a need for food security in Wellesley and have partnered with other congregations, as well as social and government services, to begin a food bank in the village. ☸

'To be fully alive is to be patient'

Surprising insights into church growth and evangelism from early Christianity

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent
WARMAN, SASK.

"It's an odd title," admitted Alan Kreider, referring to the name of the short course he and his wife Eleanor taught at Warman Mennonite Church recently.

In four sessions over two days in mid-February, the Kreiders presented their thoughts on "Patient ferment: Peaceful mission in the early church." The course was sponsored by the Academy of Discipleship, an ecumenical group offering Christian education in the Saskatoon area.

The Kreiders became interested in the early church while serving as missionaries in England. Alan, who is professor emeritus of church history and mission at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind., undertook a study of the early church to look for evidence of pacifism. As retired adjunct faculty member in worship at AMBS, Eleanor brought her interest in worship and missions to her research.

Through their reading, the Kreiders discovered that early church leaders valued patience above all other virtues. The early church grew even though they wrote no treatises on church growth or evangelism. However, they did write treatises on patience.

"They believed that to be fully alive is to be patient, because God is patient," said Alan.

In fact, the theologian Tertullian wrote, "Patience is the very nature of God," and by his patience, Tertullian held, God hopes to draw people to himself.

But patience wasn't seen as a passive thing. "It wasn't like sitting and waiting for Amtrak," said Eleanor. Rather, it meant nurturing an expectant, hopeful, trusting attitude, a kind of active waiting. Having patience meant allowing God to be in charge, and was a non-controlling, non-manipulative, non-consequentialist

approach to life.

Patience wasn't an end in and of itself for early believers. Instead, it was the means of early Christian mission, said the Kreiders. By living lives of patience, Christians would attract non-believers to the faith.

Perhaps surprisingly, their method of spreading the gospel proved highly effective. The church began as a tiny movement, but grew rapidly in the first four centuries of its existence. And it grew, according to the Kreiders, through a kind of "patient ferment."

Fermentation is an invisible process familiar to most through bread- or wine-making. The results aren't instantaneous, but "at a crucial moment the product becomes visible," said Alan. It was this kind of process that was at work in the early church. As believers imitated Christ by feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, and visiting the sick and those in prison, they attracted people to themselves.

Tertullian wrote that "such work of love . . . puts a mark upon us, in the eyes of some. 'Look,' they say, 'how much they love one another.'"

Slow fermentation was also at work in the discipling of new believers. Conversion to Christianity was a training process in which converts were expected to un-learn old behaviours and take on the habits of



Eleanor and Alan Kreider, share conversation and laughter with Garth Ewert Fisher, pastor of Mount Royal Mennonite Church, right, between sessions of the short course the Kreiders taught at Warman Mennonite Church recently.

believers, signifying a change of allegiance and lifestyle. In conversion, "a person [was] re-formed," said Alan. "Some dropped out. It was a rigorous process. Certain reflexes had to be built up."

And patience played a role. New believers, known as catechumens, were not baptized until they had been through this training period, which could take several years.

Until they were baptized, catechumens could participate in Scripture readings and sermons, but they were excluded from the prayers of the faithful, the kiss of peace and the eucharist. Earliest worship took the form of an evening banquet, which included dinner and a symposium, consisting of reading or reciting Scripture, singing hymns and praying.

Later, the Sunday morning service more familiar to today's believers emerged. Alan would like to see a return to the less formal evening banquet style of worship. "There is something special about meeting around an ordinary table that is graced by the presence of God," he said.

Eleanor concurred, saying, "There is always room for new sacraments, for new ways of doing things."

Participants came to the course from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and, as a result, were impressed by different aspects of the Kreiders' presentation.

Leonard Doell, who coordinates Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan's Aboriginal Neighbours Program, noted that indigenous people "have a cyclical understanding of life," and, "most believe that justice will eventually prevail." This viewpoint is not unlike the patient worldview of early Christians.

Garth Ewert Fisher, pastor of Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, appreciated the early Christians' view of conversion as a slow, re-learning process: "For a long time, we've thinned out [our understanding of conversion]. I think we've restored some of its thickness."

Josh Wallace, pastor of Warman Mennonite Church, was struck by the idea of patience as "un-anxious expectancy," an idea that Alan said "speaks to our time." ❧

Alan Kreider's book Patient Ferment: The Growth of the Church in the Roman Empire will be published in 2016 by Baker Academic.

PHOTO BY TIM WIEBE-NEUFELD



Nick Spaling, No. 13 for the Pittsburgh Penguins, struggles for the puck along the boards at Edmonton's Rexall Place during a Feb. 4 game against the Oilers.

Nick Spaling on how to combine faith and hockey

BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alberta Correspondent
EDMONTON

If Mennonite children grow up dreaming of becoming a nurse, teacher or businessperson, chances are they can talk to someone from their church who does those kinds of work. They can ask questions about how faith and work mesh, and they can observe helpful role models for life.

If, however, their dream is of lacing up skates in the NHL, they are mostly listening to TV screens and there is no connection to faith.

But on Feb. 3 at Edmonton's First Mennonite Church, hockey fans of all ages got a chance to put a Mennonite face on their dreams in the person of Nick Spaling, a centre for the Pittsburgh Penguins and a member of Community Mennonite Church in Drayton, Ont.

Willard Metzger, executive director of Mennonite Church Canada, accompanied Spaling to Edmonton and interviewed him on stage. Metzger used to be pastor at Community Mennonite and has known the Spaling family for many years.

Metzger began with a number of questions to help the crowd get to know Spaling as a person. He asked about his family: two sisters and a brother; favourite ice cream: vanilla; what he eats before games: chicken

and pasta; and childhood hockey hero: Doug Gilmour of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Spaling quickly relaxed as he got into the interview and openly offered his thoughts and experiences about his six years in the NHL, the hockey life and faith.

"What is it like being a Christian in the NHL? Is it tough to keep your faith alive and active?" Metzger asked.

"It can be tough," Spaling replied. "It's a sport that requires a lot of attention to it, there's a lot of focus put on the sport

itself. My parents are pretty good; my mom sends daily e-mails and devotionals."

Spaling went on to describe how each team has a pastor who comes in once a month to lead a devotional time for whoever wants to attend. "That's something that's really helped me meet other guys . . . that are Christian guys."

He credits his faith and the faith of people around him for helping him to stay grounded, and to get through the ups and downs of injuries, disappointments and the stresses of his career. One of the biggest disappointments he had to deal with was not being drafted at age 15. Another was missing the World Junior tryouts in 2008 due to being diagnosed with mononucleosis. The greatest highlight of his career so far was Dec. 15, 2009, the day he played his first NHL game with the Nashville Predators.

"Who are some of the players you admire now?" Metzger asked.

Spaling replied that it has been a neat experience to play with and watch players like Jonathan Taves and Evgeni Malkin. "A player I really admire in the league is Mike Fisher [of the Nashville Predators]," Spaling said. "He's really strong in his faith and Christian lifestyle, and is someone who taught me a lot. I was pretty lucky to be able to play with him and learn."

During a later question period, Spaling was asked if he had any advice for churches, parents and their children who are growing up wanting to play sports at high levels. How can they stay connected with church and still do their sport?

(Continued on page 28)

PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD



Pittsburgh Penguin centre Nick Spaling signs an autograph for Jenna Blank at First Mennonite Church, Edmonton.

(Continued from page 27)

“That’s a tough one,” Spaling acknowledged. “When you do sports, you are playing all the time. . . . It’s tough to find that balance as a kid and a parent. . . . Sports are becoming a little bit too big of a thing, I think. At the same time, I don’t know if there is a different way. That’s a tough question for me. I don’t know.”

Although the question was difficult to


answer with specifics, it became clear throughout the evening that Spaling has a high regard for the faith influence of his family and his home church community. He continues to seek out opportunities, like the monthly worship times offered by the team, and fellowship with other Christian players. While it is intimidating for young players to try to seek out church experiences while on the road,

Spaling greatly looks forward to times when he can be at home and reconnect with Community Mennonite.

After the program, Spaling spent a good hour in the foyer of the church, signing autographs and engaging informally with the crowd. While there were no Penguins fans in the Oilers hometown, there are now Spaling fans in Edmonton! ☺

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ARTBEAT

THEATRICAL REVIEW

A father's struggle with his gay son

Listening for Grace.

Written by and starring Ted Swartz. A Ted & Company TheatreWorks production at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Waterloo, Ont., on Feb. 8.

REVIEWED BY DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

“It’s a good thing you in the church are discussing homosexuality, because otherwise I don’t think you would be discussing sex at all,” was one of many funny lines Ted Swartz threw to an overflow crowd, acting as a widowed father in his 50s named Daryl in dealing with his son, Jared, “coming out” as a gay man.

At a time when the Mennonite church is struggling with persons of same-sex attraction, the hour-long monologue by one of its own brought comic relief to this often-intense subject, albeit with serious undertones. *Listening for Grace* bills itself as “a play about fathers and sons. It’s a play about faith, about the church, about sexuality, and a play about finding commonality and listening to the stories of others.”

And so it was. I came away from the event emotionally exhausted. While the subtext was very much about sexuality, the complex dynamics of a family and church together experiencing life and death, joy and pain, disappointment and triumph, pulls spectators through a labyrinth of feelings that drains you of emotional energy.

Daryl, the father, first loses his wife Grace. Not fully recovered from that loss, he then thinks, at mid-life, he is losing his son, too, especially when he learns from him, very casually, that he is gay. “Dad, I

need to tell you,” Jared tells his father over coffee, “I’m gay.”

Dumbstruck, the shocked father doesn’t know what to say. “It wasn’t what I expected to hear,” says the surprised father. “And I wish Grace was here. I felt pain. I felt confusion. It was hard for him to tell me that, his own father. And I didn’t want him to tell anyone else.”

Daryl struggles with what to do with the new information. “Why does it feel like I’m being asked to choose between my son and my church, between my son and my God?” he asks himself. He reaches out to

Mel, appealing to Daryl’s faith, acknowledges a God of grace and mercy, but insists God is also a judge—supposedly of this ‘sin’—using the well-worn cliché of ‘God loves the sinner, but hates the sin.’

his extended family, first his own mother, Jared’s grandmother for whom he holds special affection. Daryl is told “she always knew.” She asks him to visit his cousin, Aaron, with whom he shared many a playful moment growing up.

Oh, the wisdom of grandmothers!

Aaron, now living with Michael, the latter of whom has been thrown out by his family, turns out to be gay, too, but has managed with his partner to find his way outside of family and church. Here, the description of life as gay partners, dripping with satire, are some of the best lines in the play. Aaron, playing with his cousin’s emotions, tells him how totally

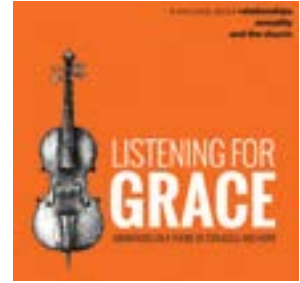
gay his life is.

“Well, after a night of gay sleeping,” Aaron tells him, “Michael and I have a gay cup of coffee. Then we have a gay breakfast [granola] and then off we go to our gay workplace. We come home and make a gay supper. After our gay dining, we play some gay games. Then the cycle begins all over again.”

Like Job, Daryl is also visited by three church friends, all representing various attitudes toward gays presently in the church. First, Mel, appealing to Daryl’s faith, acknowledges a God of grace and mercy, but insists God is also a judge—supposedly of this “sin”—using the well-worn cliché of “God loves the sinner, but hates the sin.” Steve, too, wants Daryl to get on with his life and act like this didn’t happen, while another unnamed friend tells him the most important thing for Daryl is to love his son, just like God loves him.

“This play has no agenda,” says Swartz, “and doesn’t claim to have answers. Instead, it’s a play that takes seriously the idea that the church is a community of people on a journey. It is about journeying with Daryl as he wrestles with questions of life and faith, and, most importantly, we hope this play will encourage audiences to engage in conversation, to tell a great story and to help us think beyond what we first imagined . . . as we listen for grace.”

Swartz, along with his musical accompanists, Patrick Ressler and Justin Yoder, toured southern Ontario for five days in early February. ❧



Ted Swartz



Weaving together strips of fabric representing their homes, women prepare a wall hanging for an International Women's Day art exhibit in Abbotsford, B.C.

Weaving pieces of home together

Women's art showcases social inclusion

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

A cooperative art project exploring the theme of “home and safety” is bringing together women from all walks of life in Abbotsford.

Clients from the Warm Zone, a drop-in centre for street-entrenched women, have been working together with members of the University Women's Club and other local women to create an exhibit on home and what it means to them. Linda Klippenstein, a Warm Zone volunteer and Emmanuel Mennonite Church member, says she spearheaded the project to bring

together “groups that are so far removed from each other that wouldn't otherwise ever get to know each other.”

Participants contributed pieces of fabric representing their individual homes or heritage, then cut them into strips and wove them together into a wall hanging. The variety of materials included upholstery, plastic tarp, flannel, knitted yarn, a quilt, a sari, deerskin and cedar bark.

The group created the wall hanging to display at The Reach Gallery in Abbotsford on March 8 for International Women's

Day. Other elements of the exhibit include a photo wall featuring hands and keys, and a chandelier with bangles and keys. Keys can represent locking in or out, safety and security, and sometimes secrets, Klippenstein explains. All are part of the broader theme of social inclusion for women who do not always have a voice in society.

While there have been other cooperative ventures with community women and the Warm Zone, this is the first that has been as broad-reaching and involving so many individuals.

“It's been a really good experience,” Klippenstein says, noting that she felt it was important to do a project that was “not ‘for’ the community, but ‘with’ the community.”

Warm Zone volunteer Heather Beckett adds that she has enjoyed working on the art project with so many different women. “Where else would you get such a variety of people together?” she asks. ☘

'A place in the kingdom'

Paintings and heritage stories celebrate farm animals

BY EVELYN REMPEL PETKAU

Manitoba Correspondent

With brilliant and detailed clarity, Manitoba artist Lynda Toews has painted a series of farm animal portraits that will be on display at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg from March 13 to June 20.

"I want to inspire the feeling of holiness in nature because the lack of that feeling can account for how easily we destroy it," says Toews, a member of Grace Mennonite Church in Steinbach.

With her exhibit, "A place in the kingdom: Paintings and stories celebrating farm animals," Toews hopes to instill in visitors a sense of wonder and an attitude that honours and celebrates the created world of farm animals.

Since moving from Winnipeg to a farm in southeastern Manitoba five years ago, she has been inspired to paint farm animals. "I find myself drawn to the individual personalities and beauty of the local farm animals, especially when the sun is low in the sky and warm light delineates their forms," she says.

"Working with this subject matter led her to explore the relationship between the contribution of farm animals and the Mennonite journey of survival," says gallery curator Ray Dirks.

As she worked on these paintings she collected stories of 22 older Mennonites who related interesting and significant relationships and experiences they have had with their farm animals. Toews hopes the paintings and personal stories will forge stronger connections between the generations and between urban and rural people.

"The stories and paintings are intended to evoke contemplation of the divinely designed beauty, intelligence, individuality and loyalty of farm animals, as well as the love that can exist in the human/animal relationship," Dirks says.

"Our culture tends to discard people when they reach a certain age," Toews says. "I believe older people are very

interesting and have much to teach us. . . . And with our 21st-century urban lifestyle surrounded by hard, cold metal, glass and concrete, or exhaust, noise, cyberspace, we can easily forget the beauty in natural things: soft fur and warm breath and the smell of hay"

Toews, who has degrees in fine arts and education, hopes to instill in spectators

and readers empathy for all of life, a sense of wonder and a connection with the past. "It needs to start with a change in attitude and I think art is a good avenue for how we can influence attitude in ways other than through practical, scientific solutions," she says.

Although Toews is well aware of a Canadian culture that sees animals as primarily objects for exploitation and consumption, she says, "I don't want to focus on that. I want to focus on the beauty and wonder to get at the heart of our attitudes." ❧

Visit www.canadianmennonite.org/place-in-the-kingdom for more pictures of Lynda Toews's artwork.



PHOTO BY GARY BROWN



Artist Lynda Toews is pictured in her studio with some of her works from 'A place in the kingdom: Paintings and heritage stories celebrating farm animals,' on display at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg until June 20.

SCREEN STILL COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES PICTURES

Bradley Cooper as Chris Kyle in a scene from *American Sniper*.

FILM REVIEW

The winter's most dangerous film

American Sniper.

Directed by Clint Eastwood. Written by Jason Hall and Chris Kyle. Starring Bradley Cooper and Sienna Miller. A Warner Bros. Pictures release, 2014. Rated 14A.

REVIEWED BY VIC THIESSEN

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

Set to become one of the highest-grossing films of all time, *American Sniper* is this winter's surprise blockbuster. It is also one of the most dangerous films ever made, not least because of its popularity.

American Sniper tells the "true" story of Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper), an American soldier sent to Iraq after the American invasion and subsequent occupation in 2003. Kyle becomes a hero because he is able to shoot and kill at least 160 people from his rooftop perch, including a woman and young boy who attempt to throw a bomb at the American invaders.

The film does an excellent job of showing the toll that such work exacts on Kyle's psychological health and on his family relationships back in Texas, even indicating that Kyle lost some of his humanity in Iraq. Unfortunately, the family drama in *American Sniper* takes backstage to Kyle's horrific experiences as a soldier in Iraq. And it is in Iraq that *American Sniper* fails.

By seeing Iraq through the eyes of Kyle and his fellow soldiers, the film dehumanizes the Iraqi people, whom Kyle repeatedly refers to as "evil savages." We are led to believe that the people he is killing are terrorists working for Al-Qaeda, and a link is made between 9/11 and Kyle going to Iraq to "do his job." But 9/11 had nothing to do with Iraq and the reason the so-called terrorists were there for Kyle to shoot is the same reason that Islamic State is there today, namely because the U.S. chose to invade Iraq for its own oil interests.

The failure to draw attention to the true context of Kyle's presence in Iraq puts a lie to Eastwood's claim that *American Sniper* is an apolitical film. A film that, due to this lack of context, depicts the Iraqi people—who have suffered so much for so long—as terrorists, and justifies the repeated invasions of their homes, is not apolitical; it approaches propaganda.

Indeed, Dan Fellman, the domestic distribution chief at Warner Bros., admits

that *American Sniper* is so popular in the U.S. because it "deals with family, with patriotism and it recognizes a hero."

Many American viewers see *American Sniper* as justifying all the years of unpopular American military activity in Iraq, and some of those viewers have already signed up to protect the world by killing the "evil savages" in the Middle East.

Eastwood has made a number of films, like *Letters from Iwo Jima*, that humanize the enemy. So it is a shocking disappointment to see no attempt at humanization in *American Sniper*.

One of the film's few glowing moments comes when a soldier starts to question why the Americans are in Iraq at all. Kyle responds to this evident weakness by pointing out that they are not there just to protect "this piece of dirt," but to protect the people in San Diego and New York, because that's where these "terrorists" would be going if it were not for them. It's understandable that one would want to protect one's family back home from foreign invaders who might bang down their doors and shove a rifle in their children's faces, but how can one miss the irony here? The fact is that in 2003 Iraq presented no danger whatsoever to the people of North America. But the U.S. military invaded anyway.

What really concerns me, however, is that the six Academy Award nominations it has received, lend credibility to an undeservingly popular film that can only make the world a more dangerous place. By appearing to justify the American invasion and occupation of Iraq as the only way to keep the world safe from terrorism, and by making people feel good about killing "savages" who wear cloth head-coverings, *American Sniper* will inspire thousands of American young people to enlist.

At the same time, by showing how American soldiers treat Iraqi people like criminals and invade their homes with impunity, *American Sniper* will only fuel hatred towards the American military machine in many parts of the world. Thus the cycle of violence continues.

American Sniper is a soul-draining film that should be avoided by all. ❧

Does God speak to Christians through secular films?

2015 Sawatsky Lecturer probes general and special revelation in film

BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

“How many of you watch a movie every week?” asked Robert Johnston. Many gathered for the annual Rodney and Lorna Sawatsky Visiting Scholar Lecture on Feb. 5 at Conrad Grebel University College stood in response. Johnston then upped the ante, eventually stopping at eight movies a week, which garnered a single response.

Under the title “If you have eyes to see: God’s ‘presence’ at the movies,” Johnston explored the growing tendency for churchgoers to believe that they have heard God in some way, even in a secular movie. While the Bible falls under the rubric of “special revelation”—words directly from God—nature, films, books, theatre, art and other human constructs are seen as “general revelation.”

Johnston suggested that, over the past 40 years, society and much of the church-going public have moved from Scripture to culture for their primary guidance. Johnston said that he switched from engineering to theology in university under the influence of the 1964 film, *Becket*, which tells the story of Henry VIII’s “drinking buddy” who refused to be the king’s puppet as the Archbishop of Canterbury. Becket’s willingness to go against his sovereign to follow God moved him.

While there was truth there, it came through a human creation trying to make a historical statement. God’s call in Johnston’s life was not the key part of the film director’s purpose, but rather God breaking through in a cultural medium.

In his classes at Fuller Seminary in California, Johnston finds that some students never encounter God in the secular films they watch, some have their lives deeply impacted, and others feel they have experienced God speaking to them.

The list of such films extends from *Easy Rider*, a 1960’s countercultural film about “a man [who] went looking for America and couldn’t find it anywhere,” starring Peter Fonda, Jack Nicholson and the late Dennis Hopper, to *Toy Story 3*.

With more and more people watching films, instead of reading books, film is rapidly becoming the new literature, according to Johnston, who suggested that, with such a shift, movie nights in the neighbourhood may well be the best way forward to introduce people to God

at work in the world, especially since most people are not likely to respond to an invitation to come to a home Bible study anymore. Quoting C. S. Lewis, Johnston called on Christians to “look, listen and receive” from the culture around them. “Let it work its charm,” he said.

The comment about outreach in the community through movie nights led Scott Brubaker-Zehr, pastor of Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont., to wonder aloud afterward if Johnston had misread his audience. He suggested that most of those present at his lecture watch films for the same reasons they would read a piece of literature, and would only obliquely find God’s Word for them in the movies.

And Derek Suderman, associate professor of religious studies and theological studies at Grebel, challenged Johnston, saying that he is finding a well-led Bible study results in similar excitement about hearing God as the Fuller professor suggested came only in discussions of secular films. ❧



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The Canadian Mennonite team



BOOK REVIEW

Why young adults leave the church

You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith.
By David Kinnaman. Baker Books, 2011, 255 pages.

REVIEWED BY DAVID ALTON
SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

To celebrate its 50th anniversary, Hillcrest Mennonite Church examined the book *You Lost Me* by David Kinnaman, to discuss the engagement of young adults and the future. The book summarizes research done by the Barna Group on why Christian youth drop out when they reach their 20s, a generation Kinnaman calls “mosaics.”

As a mosaic, I was surprised at the accuracy of his observations of my generation and our grievances with the church. That said, the accompanying analysis felt incomplete and failed to fully grasp the reality of the situation. He calls mosaics discontinuously different from other generations, which, if true, means that the church must undergo much more fundamental change than his book ultimately recommends.

Although the author is writing from an American context, there is plenty in it for Mennonite Church Canada congrega-



As a pastor's kid who grew up immersed in Mennonite school, choirs, clubs and camps, I know scores of mosaics who grew up in the Mennonite fold and yet I can count on one hand how many remain meaningfully engaged.

tions to take to heart. As a pastor's kid who grew up immersed in Mennonite school, choirs, clubs and camps, I know scores of mosaics who grew up in the Mennonite fold and yet I can count on one hand how many remain meaningfully engaged. According to Kinnaman, 59 percent of mosaics who come from Christian backgrounds admit to dropping out in some capacity.

The book is divided into three sections, including analyses of the mosaic context and its grievances, plus a list of recommendations.

The first section is the most insightful, giving a fairly accurate description of the modern context and useful terms to frame the discussion. Kinnaman divides dropouts into three categories:

- **NOMADS, WHO** identify with Christianity but struggle to find church meaningful.
- **PRODIGALS, WHO NO** longer identify with Christianity.
- **EXILES, WHO IDENTIFY** with Christianity but, like the prophets, are critical of the church as it is.

These distinctions are key, as dropouts have diverse needs that the church needs to address.

From his studies, Kinnaman then describes how dropouts accuse the church of being overprotective, shallow, anti-science, repressive, exclusive and lacking doubt. While MC Canada exists in a different context, these concerns still ring largely true and there should be ample discussion in each of these areas. Kinnaman accurately describes how mosaics' desire for inclusivity and fairness is at direct odds with the church's stance on same-sex marriage and people of other faiths.

The final section is comparatively hollow and the 50 recommendations presented seem to miss the gravity of the issue. Recommendations like “Don't condescend” and “Re-centre on Jesus” hardly address issues like exclusivity and shallowness. One reason for the incongruence of the observations and the recommendations is that the author never fully embraces the analysis he is presenting. There is often a condescending tone toward mosaics and, more importantly, Kinnaman seems unwilling, or even unable, to question the church's established beliefs.

If the church wants to engage a discontinuously different generation like mine, then, like the parable of the wineskin, it should stop trying to put new wine into an old wineskin. A new wineskin is needed. Unfortunately, Kinnaman is unable to reach this conclusion, but the first two sections of *You Lost Me* provide a good place to get the conversation started. ☺

FOCUS ON CAMPING

CAMP REFLECTION

Fertile environment for God's good news

TIM LARSON

CAMP SQUEAH

At Camp Squeah, we care a great deal about our young adult staff. We believe that a community of staff that cares for one another and treats each other as Christ-like as possible creates a fertile environment for campers to be affected by God's great love and good news.

To allow for this great change, we need the staff! What other greater and more common need arises for camps across Canada? It's the same for us. One of the great initiatives that Squeah has implemented in the past number of years is the provision of a bursary for student staff

attending post-secondary education. The fundraiser for this bursary is an annual event called the paddle-a-thon.

It's a two-day adventure down the Fraser River from Hope to Fort Langley. Canoes, voyageurs and kayaks make the trek with a ground crew following and providing food along the way. Paddlers raise a minimum amount and go for thousands of dollars to support these young people whose lives are changing while God is changing lives through them. It's fun, adventurous and of great value!

Elizabeth Hoock and Daniel Driedger

CAMP SQUEAH PHOTOS



Counsellor Eizabeth Hoock gives a camper a piggy-back ride at Camp Squeah.



Counsellor Daniel Driedger escorts a young camper around Camp Squeah.

are two staff who received bursaries last year and are thankful for this great event and initiative.

"The bursary I received allowed me to be part of the Quest program at Columbia Bible College, which has a huge focus on community and discipleship," Hoock says. "I have had incredible opportunities to grow in my faith and have discovered how to put it into action. God is good, and I am so thankful for the bursary, which allowed me to have this incredible experience."

"God has been absolutely changing my life, and I've grown so much!" Driedger says. "It's been the most important time in my life and the fact that the bursary program had a major role in getting me there, that's something special."

There's nothing I love more than watching God change the lives of people. And to be privileged to watch God do this through this great initiative and in our summer ministry is a joy beyond measure! ☺

Tim Larson is summer program director and outdoor education coordinator at Camp Squeah in Hope, B.C.

PHOTO BY RYAN DUNHAM



Grace Eagle, left, Meghan Murray and Mikaela Tang learn to make crafts out of recycled materials at Conrad Grebel University College's Peace Camp.

CAMP REFLECTION

Peace is possible

KATIE GINGERICH

CONRAD GREBEL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

I love camp. I love the silliness, the excitement and the community. Most importantly, I love the learning opportunities and teachable moments that camp can offer. Camp provides an atmosphere for growth: budding friendships, self-discovery and confidence-building experiences that young people carry with them throughout their lives.

At Peace Camp, based at Conrad Grebel University College and the Mennonite Savings and Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement in Waterloo, Ont., we infuse a week of fun with a social justice twist, to inspire a group of confident and equipped young people to facilitate change in their communities.

We share stories and learn from people in our community; meet people from various cultural backgrounds, faiths and orientations; and, ultimately, learn that peace is possible! In addition to the week-long day camp, which is now in its

fifth year, Peace Camp staff reach out to community groups and to classrooms in the Waterloo area.

Throughout my time with Peace Camp,

I have witnessed young people learning about the importance of social justice and conflict transformation. Last summer, I prepared to teach campers how to handle disputes with parents, siblings and friends, but quickly found that the youth wanted to respond to bigger and more complex issues. I was astounded by the depth of their queries and passions. Their personal experiences brought a richness and wisdom into the group that allowed them to learn and share with each other. I want them to know that their experiences, wisdom and ideas are valuable and can fuel change.

I have learned how to make peace education real for young people by encouraging them to engage in communication, team-building and problem-solving activities with a peace and justice focus. I want to give them the opportunity to meet new friends of different faiths, backgrounds and traditions, fully recognizing that, if we want future generations to learn from our mistakes, and learn to coexist and live peacefully together, then we need to give them the tools to do so. ☘

Katie Gingerich is a fourth-year peace and conflict studies student at the University of Waterloo, who carries her passions for social justice and peace education into her second year as Peace Camp's coordinator. To register, visit grebel.ca/peacecamp.



CAMP REFLECTION

Making ripples

CHRIS POT

HIDDEN ACRES MENNONITE CAMP

Like ripples flowing from the point where a stone hits the water, the choices we make everyday spread out from us and impact others.

John shares a story in his gospel that exemplifies this. A boy committed a simple act by giving his five loaves and two fish, which gave an opportunity for Jesus to minister to a crowd both physically

and spiritually. If this boy didn't choose to give what he had, the people may not have heard the message that Jesus needed to share. This is the kind of example that we hope will inspire both campers and staff.

The actions that we make each day don't need to be large acts; they can be simple choices that positively impact

those around us: Smiling at our neighbour, listening to someone who is struggling, buying a cup of coffee for someone in need.

A couple of summers ago we had a camper come for the first time. Let's call him Sam. He came with very intense anger that was rooted in his upbringing. This led to many challenges for the staff. During the course of his week at camp, a simple act of asking about his likes led to an opportunity to sit and play guitar with him and to show him that we cared not only about him participating in the activities, but we also genuinely cared about him as a person.

As Sam returned again this past summer, I noticed a change in him. He was not as angry, he was more open to conversation and he got along much better with others. I think that his time at camp played a part in this change. I look forward to seeing Sam again this summer and am excited to see the growth that will have hopefully continued in his life. Perhaps one day he will be a part of our leaders-in-training program and even become a member of our staff team.

When we extend the love of Jesus to others, people are encouraged and challenged to then continue sharing what they have received. Camp provides great opportunities to teach and model this, but it is not limited to camp. Consider how the ripples you create can play a part in extending that love. ☺

Chris Pot is program director at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg, Ont.

HIDDEN ACRES MENNONITE CAMP PHOTO



Whimsy is something that campers seem to take to naturally.

CAMP REFLECTION

Looking back and looking up

KATIE WIEBE

SHEKINAH RETREAT CENTRE

This coming summer is a milestone in my camp career, being 10 years since I started spending my summers in leadership at Shekinah Retreat Centre's summer camp. There are a lot of memories here, and a lot of these revolve around a circle of loving women who have guided and supported me over the past 10 years. The transition of Shekinah's executive director over the past few months has been one that has sparked thoughts of emotional strength over my time at Shekinah.

A memory from one particular afternoon has stayed with me. It was my first summer as a counsellor-in-training, and after leading an activity I wasn't very confident in, I was feeling particularly defeated. Standing in the washroom trying to wash all the stress, sweat and tears off my face, our director came in singing joyfully. She took one look at me and said, "Katie, I just love how positive you are all the time. It's so wonderful to have you here." It took me a long time to understand how she could have possibly seen a positive person in that moment.

Over the past few years, Kristy Letkeman has been one woman that I've looked up to. She was my camp director for two years when I was counselling, then my executive director as I transitioned into camp directing. While it was sad to say goodbye on her last day of work, I never doubted that this friendship, like others I've made at Shekinah, will continue to extend beyond camp.

While Kristy and I shared a cup of tea recently, I began to feel connected again. Not just to her, but to all the memories and support that camp has given me in this way over the years. It is truly a remarkable place to stand and see: to

SHEKINAH RETREAT CENTRE PHOTO



Some female counsellors at Shekinah Retreat Centre's 2014 summer camp put 'pressure' on the others.

look back at the memories and be present with the love and strength that is here now. ☺

Katie Wiebe is summer camp program director at the Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim, Sask.

CAMP REFLECTION

'Raise the peace'

BY CHARIS MILLER
AND RACHEL BUECKERT

As summer staff, part of our job was planning and implementing a peace camp titled "Raise the peace" in the Meadowgreen area of Saskatoon last August. This area is home to many newcomer families from about 20 different nations. The focus of the camp was peacebuilding and restorative justice, with a specific emphasis on using spoken word—expressive poetry—as a tool for opening discussions on issues of conflict. This allowed youth to give voice to their own experiences of conflict, as well as finding healthy ways to deal with it.

Our facilitator for the camp, Lishai Peel, came to us from Toronto and had a way of helping the youth take off their "cool masks" and open up with one another. Stories of struggle surfaced, ranging from leaving their home countries in conflict to personal issues such as bullying.

A particularly memorable moment was when one young man, who typically had a hard time focussing on the sessions, suddenly became serious and began asking deep questions about how to deal with the conflict he was experiencing in his own life. As the whole group intently listened to the discussion, we were encouraged to see that they saw this as a safe place to share and learn from one another.

A second memorable experience was when a 10-year-old girl from Jordan shared with us her poem that she wrote about deepening her understanding of her country of origin and her roots:

"I am from reading time with my grandmother.
I always felt warm and safe like a turtle in a shell.

"I am from cooking lessons with my mother.

I can still smell the kitchen—fresh spices, and something cooking on the stove. Her hands looked like they were dancing around the kitchen.

"I am from a country that is still at war. I feel sadness in my heart when I think about it.
I hope in my heart of hearts that one day it will be over." ❧

Adapted from a Peacebuilding on the Prairies blog (<http://bit.ly/1F2QRg0>) posted Sept. 2, 2014. Summer staff Rachel Bueckert and Charis Miller, a Columbia Bible College student on an intercultural studies internship, assisted Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan community engagement coordinators put on the four-day camp last summer.

MCC SASKATCHEWAN PHOTO



'Raise the peace' camp facilitator Lishai Peel came from Toronto and had a way of helping the youth take off their 'cool masks' and open up with one another.

CAMP REFLECTION

The sound of the soul shifting

CAMPS WITH MEANING
MANITOBA

To feed our mind we go to school, to fix our body we go to the doctor, to feel our hearts we go home, and for our soul to flourish—that is when we go to camp!

Camps with Meaning is a space where we leave the ordinary routine of life and take a week or a summer to be intentional about our soul—being in complete awe of creation; feeling the freedom to

worship at the top of our lungs; and smiling and laughing with friends as we eat, sleep, fellowship, live, and love each other together. This is the sound of the soul shifting, this is what camp does best!

Two short stories from last summer
"Possibly the most meaningful part of my summer was a conversation I had with a camper after fireside one evening. I'll

CAMPS WITH MEANING PHOTO



Archery practice is popular with Camps with Meaning campers in Manitoba.

call him Steve. Like many of our campers, Steve did not grow up in a Christian household. Quite unexpectedly, Steve told me that he would like to become a Mennonite. This was, of course, really exciting. I asked Steve what it was about the Mennonites that really appealed to him. He said that we seem to place such a big emphasis on relationships with others and being like a family, and that he thought that was really important. . . . He reminded me of why we do what we do. We spend so much effort teaching campers, but I find every year that I have learned more than I have taught. Thanks be to God.”

—BY SHAWN KOOP, *Camp Assiniboia's summer program director*

“One specific moment that I felt God's presence was during the last fireside when we walk out to Eagle's Nest, a

special fire pit in the woods, for some songs, sharing and conversation. For our last evening I invited the Grade 2 to 5 campers and staff to share moments where they felt close to God during the week and then to throw a stick in the fire. After a pause, a steady stream of at least half the campers came up to share their highlights. I was impressed by how deeply the campers were experiencing God in their week with us. It was a reminder to me that something extraordinary and memorable happens when all of our efforts come together in a week at camp.”

—BY SARAH JANZEN, *Camp Moose Lake's Bible instructor*

Camps with Meaning operates three camping sites: Camp Assiniboia, Camp Koinonia and Camp Moose Lake. It is the camping ministry of Mennonite Church Manitoba.

PHOTO BY REBECCA SEILING



By spending nearly all day, every day outdoors, campers unconsciously relinquish their fears and open themselves to the wonder of God.

themselves.

More important than these active interventions is the passive engagement that campers get simply by living in an environment that is out of their element. By spending nearly all day, every day outdoors, campers unconsciously relinquish their fears and open themselves to the wonder of God.

This past summer I was responsible for training the next generation of Fraser Lake staff. In preparing this program I kept coming back to the self-expanding power of camp. Everything the camp staff do is set up to help push the horizons of a camper's experience, whether it be through music, activity or nature. However, camp does not demand or force this personal growth onto our campers, but rather it gives them a safe space and the opportunity to develop. The will of the Spirit does the rest and it is through the Spirit that camp becomes a place of fun and wonder. When campers load the bus to go home, they have been visibly transformed by this Spirit and their newfound connection to nature, to each other and to themselves. ☘

CAMP REFLECTION

Transformed in the wilderness

DAVID ALTON
FRASER LAKE CAMP

This year marks 60 years since Fraser Lake Camp began in a farmer's field northeast of Bancroft, Ont. Since then, the camp has evolved and now covers 105 hectares of forest, field and lakefront.

As a staff member at Fraser Lake, nature has always been my primary conduit to God, although for many campers this branch of spiritual literacy is unfamiliar to them upon their arrival at camp.

The immense wilderness that surrounds Fraser Lake often comes as shock to our campers, many of whom rarely leave the city. Some will literally scream as they exit the bus at the mere sight of a bug, but by the end of the week they won't bat an eye.

Helping campers make this transition from technology to wilderness is one of the biggest joys of working at Fraser Lake, especially with such a gorgeous property.

Creativity is my main tool, whether it be building secret clubhouses in the forest, stargazing and storytelling in the hayfields, or epic canoeing adventures across the lake. Anything to spark campers' imaginations and get them to see beyond

Peace Camp

August 10-14, 2015

Conrad Grebel University College
140 Westmount Road North,
Waterloo, ON N2L 3G6

Day Camp for youth finished grades 6-8.
Full day including lunch: \$190

» grebel.ca/peacecamp
peacecamp@uwaterloo.ca
519-885-0220 x24291



Counsellor Shelby Goertzen helps a camper with her archery skills.

CAMP REFLECTION

Moments like these

HOLLY EPP
YOUTH FARM BIBLE CAMP

Youth Farm Bible Camp is just that: Bible camp in a farm atmosphere.

Located outside of Rosthern, Sask., we have wide open spaces holding pastures for horses, goats and sheep, and the many paths of our corn maze. Although some things around the yard have changed over the past 74 years, we still hold the same mission: to share Jesus and provide a place to serve.

We have also kept a main focus on serving adults with special needs. These

weeks are a definite highlight of the summer.

Because they have been fearfully and wonderfully made, campers have their own story to tell and bring with them their own personality, gifts, talents and quirks. Getting to know the campers is priceless. They open the eyes of our staff over and over as we learn lessons by watching their obedience, their unbounded worship, their care and grace for others, their servant hearts and their

grateful praise.

One camper in particular captured my heart last summer. She was not easy to communicate with, saying very few words. She was stubborn and clearly an introvert, but gracious enough to let me spend time just sitting with her and asking her questions. As the week went along, she let me into her world a little more each day. I found out that she loves her nails painted and so we painted nails.

I found out that she loves to sing, so we sang and sang and sang, mostly campfire songs. We sang about the joy down in our hearts, about wanting to be a sheep, and about being happy and knowing it so we clap our hands.

Later in the week, I came into our large recreation space to find this beautiful camper sitting alone on the floor, legs crossed and with a focussed face. She was singing to her Saviour, "How Great Thou Art."

In the hustle and bustle of a summer full of excited, loud and energized campers, moments like these remind us why we do what we do, and, even more so, of the One whom we are doing it for and with. ☘

YOUTH FARM BIBLE CAMP PHOTOS



Counsellor Mike Unger plays a game with campers during the second week of children's camp last summer.

Ontario
Mennonite
Music Camp



Sunday, August 16 to Friday, August 28, 2015

OMMC is an amazing place for 12 to 16 year olds to get together to sing and play at Conrad Grebel University College



Register online: grebel.ca/ommc

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Waterloo, ON N2L 3G6

CAMP ELIM PHOTO

Kids love Camp Elim, located on the north shore of Lac Pelletier, Sask. Established in 1945, it provides opportunities for youth to develop and strengthen their relationship with God in the surroundings of his natural creation. Water sports are a major focus, including wakeboarding, waterskiing, tubing, kneeboarding, canoeing, kayaking, windsurfing, swimming, sailing and the newest activity: human hamster balls. For more information and registration for this summer, visit www.campelim.ca.



Focus on Camping Snapshots

PHOTO BY JENNIFER KONKLE



At Ontario Mennonite Music Camp, held at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., 12- to 16-year-olds get together to sing and play violins, pianos, trombones, trumpets, violas, tubas, slide whistles, capture the flag, cellos, flutes, percussion, toss the chicken and much, much more! Pictured, in 2014, campers put on the musical Fiddler on the Roof at their end-of-camp concert.

Saskatchewan youth speak out

SMYO statement affirms same-sex inclusivity and more youth involvement in the church of the future

BY RACHEL BERGEN

Young Voices Co-editor
SASKATOON

Mennonite youth in Saskatchewan are raising their voices and offering a perspective on some of the controversial issues facing the denomination.

The Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization (SMYO) is made up of all the youth in the province that are part of, or connected to, a Mennonite Church Saskatchewan congregation. That comes to roughly 120 youth. SMYO wrote a report at its 2014 retreat, discussed it as a group, and all signed it.

According to Kirsten Hamm-Epp, the area church youth minister, this could be the first time the youth have weighed in on church discussions using their annual report, which will be read at MC Saskatchewan's annual delegate sessions this month.

"This year we have decided to change things up . . . and add our voices to the discussions taking place in the Mennonite church," the report states.

"The report shows the interest they have for the church, and the desire they have to help it flourish, which—for me, at least—offers a lot of hope moving forward," Hamm-Epp says.

Same-sex relationships

The report starts by addressing same-sex relationships, something that's causing a great deal of conflict in the area and national churches.

The youth acknowledge there are differences in the interpretation of the Bible, but

believe the church should be unified in its love and acceptance of all people.

"Treating everyone like we would treat our best friends, kind of like kids do," the report states.

Seventeen-year-old Anna Epp serves as co-chair of SMYO and attends Wildwood Mennonite Church in Saskatoon. "Growing up in Wildwood, I knew you always have to accept people, and listen to other people's opinions," she says.

Jesse Neufeld, 16, is the other co-chair. He attends Zoar Mennonite Church in Langham. "Growing up in the church we didn't really talk about [same-sex relationships] a lot," he says. "But I know a lot of people from the [lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer] community, and I never really wanted to discriminate."

The youth resolved to lead by example and made a pledge in the report: "We want a church that is for everyone, and we want to be part of making that happen. Moving forward, SMYO plans to actively accept, include and support people from all backgrounds and ways of life."

"Whoever you are, you can always come into the church as a youth and as an adult, in our minds," Neufeld says, adding, "I think it was a good statement to make."

An uncertain future

The future of the Mennonite church seems uncertain at this point, but SMYO believes it has a role to play in understanding what comes next. It thinks the church should

PHOTO COURTESY OF KIRSTEN HAMM-EPP



Members of the Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization, from left to right, front row: Marcus Kruger, Kirsten Hamm-Epp and Jesse Neufeld; middle row: Dannica Funk, Gabby Martin, Brandon Jantzen and Robyn Martens; and back row: Zachary Stefaniuk, Anna Epp and Hailey Funk.

focus on including people and accepting the changes the future holds.

It's important to make decisions for the future of the church, not just to make people happy for the time being, Neufeld says.

Epp adds that youth are sometimes overlooked when it comes to decision-making in the church, adding that youth are often asked to read Scripture or say an announcement, but they are not often asked their opinions.

The report addresses that, too. "We're often called to be the future of the church,

but we're already part of the church," it states. "It is important for youth to feel accepted, that people aren't listening to us or involving us because they have to, or just because we're young, but because they want to and genuinely care about what we can contribute. When we feel that we are being heard and valued, we are more likely to listen as well and get involved in what is going on in the church."

Hamm-Epp hopes that youth commitment to the church will be evident and that the church, in turn, will work at discovering new ways to engage them. ❧

'God was there'

Journey with cancer leads to unique experience abroad, lessons about faith

BY AARON EPP

Young Voices Co-editor
WINNIPEG

Making plans for university and picking out a graduation dress are typical activities for teenage girls in Grade 12, but Allegra Friesen Epp had something extra to contend with as she did those things last year: battling cancer.

In September 2013, just as her final year in high school began, the Winnipeg teenager was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, a form of cancer that originates by attacking cells in the body's immune system. While her peers at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate were studying math and trying out for the volleyball team, Friesen Epp was receiving chemotherapy treatments to battle the disease.

"It certainly was not the Grade 12 year I had envisioned," Friesen Epp says. "I'd always thought of cancer as something seniors get. It's one of those things where you never think it's going to be you until it is you."

But in the past year-and-a-half, Friesen Epp's diagnosis has led to the trip of a lifetime and, perhaps more importantly, it taught her something about her faith.

Friesen Epp had been experiencing various symptoms for six months before receiving her diagnosis after a round of

blood tests. The cancer was in Stage IV—the most severe stage—when doctors diagnosed her.

Doctors quickly advised her and her parents, Arlyn and Judith, on a treatment plan and gave them a hopeful prognosis. She began six months of chemotherapy immediately, followed by two weeks of radiation treatment.

Friesen Epp's chemotherapy was in the mornings and she would go to school afterward. She had always been strong academically, earning straight As, so there was never any doubt that she would graduate on time. Anti-nausea medication also meant that she seldom felt physically ill as a result of her treatments.

"Chemo was more an emotional and mental challenge for me," she says. "My way of coping was to stress more about schoolwork and deadlines. The worries about my illness manifested themselves in anxieties about essay-writing and things like that."

It was a difficult time for her family, including her younger brothers, Bryn and Caleb. The disease led her to question God. "I was just feeling like my time's not nearly

(Continued on page 44)

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALLEGRA FRIESEN EPP



Although she was diagnosed with cancer at the start of her Grade 12 year, Allegra Friesen Epp graduated on time last June.



Allegra Friesen Epp, centre, stands with her brothers Bryn and Caleb in the Indian Ocean last summer.



While in Tanzania, Allegra Friesen Epp and her family shared a meal with a local family. It was one of the biggest highlights of the trip.

(Continued from page 43)

up yet,” she says. “It felt kind of cruel.”

Early on in Friesen Epp’s treatment, a nurse told her about the Dream Factory, a Winnipeg-based organization that grants the wishes of young people battling life-threatening illnesses. Friesen Epp asked for a trip to Tanzania so that she and her family could go on a safari.

Last June, just after she graduated from high school and shortly before her 18th birthday, Friesen Epp and her family flew to the East African country.

She had connected with Darryl and Shirley Peters, a Mennonite couple from Winnipeg who now operate a lodge in Arusha, a city in northern Tanzania close to the Serengeti. They helped Friesen Epp and her family organize the trip, which included a safari that took them through three different national parks, spending a few days on the coast of the Indian Ocean and touring local villages where the family got to interact with Tanzanians.

Along with seeing a variety of exotic animals during the safari, Friesen Epp says sharing a meal with a local family in its modest hut stands out as a highlight from the trip.

The two families made the meal together, ate together and then prayed together. “That was a remarkable, extraordinary experience,” she says.

Today, doctors are pleased with how Friesen Epp is progressing with her health. She is currently working and making plans to attend university in the fall.

She says she appreciated the trip to Tanzania because it allowed her family to grow even closer, as well as celebrate the completion of her treatment “It was wonderful to be able to do it together and create these memories that we’re going to have for a long time,” she says.

She adds that she is still processing how her experience with cancer has shaped her. “I have no doubt that God was present in my journey,” she says, adding that she felt God’s presence through the support she received from family, friends and members of her church community.

She also felt God’s presence through the care she received from doctors and nurses. “I think I’ve experienced first-hand how suffering is an opportunity for human beings to ultimately show that they love and care for each other,” she says, reflecting on her time in the hospital. “God was there.” ☞

Five reasons young adults may leave the church

Panel discussion at CMU explores millennial perspectives on congregational life

STORY AND PHOTOS BY EMILY LOEWEN

Special to Young Voices

WINNIPEG



Harrison Davey, left, and Danielle Morton participate in a panel discussion at CMU exploring why young adults choose not to attend church.

For years, congregations have searched for a secret that will keep young people in the pews. Debates are had around worship style, young adult groups and the role parents play.

At “You lost me,” a recent Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) event, four young adults—Kirsten Hamm-Epp, Harrison Davey, Danielle Morton and Lukas Thiessen—thought out loud about why their generation might be leaving the church.

Hosted by Irma Fast Dueck, assistant professor of practical theology, and Peter Epp, a student in CMU’s Graduate School of Theology and Ministry, the panel did not uncover any one secret, but the discussion raised themes around why young adults might be leaving.

1. Nobody involves them in shaping the church

Morton said many of her peers feel like the

church doesn't need them. It seems that "all that the congregation needs from them is to come sit in the pew," which isn't enough for a generation that wants to take action.

Youth and young adults in Saskatchewan have told Hamm-Epp, who is area church youth minister for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, that they want to be involved in worship by doing more than reading pre-assigned Scripture. "Ask us in person and ask us to be involved in shaping it," she said.

With that involvement comes letting young adults have control over the product. Davey said that, regardless of worship or music style, "I really think it has more to do with creating a spot to release creativity or release ownership to different people in your congregation."

2. There's no practical outlet for social justice

Although church communities may talk about social justice, Hamm-Epp said that sometimes young adults don't find concrete actions to take part in. They find congregations preoccupied with task forces and processes. And while she said that most young people know that is important, "you can only handle so many of those [meetings] about buildings and budgets, and then you want to get involved in being the hands and feet of Jesus."

Audience member Vinh Huynh challenged churches to take action on social issues such as resettling refugees. There are many important issues facing society, he said. "If the church takes the lead on addressing it, we will be 'attractual!'"

3. You're trying too hard (with worship, that is)

Adjusting music and worship styles seems like an easy place to start attracting young adults. While Morton appreciates the effort, she thinks it is more important for churches to be true to their congregants: Don't disregard current members in hopes of attracting new ones. "Nothing is going to attract people more than to truly be who you are," she said.

4. They might not want church the way you imagine it

"Is Sunday morning worship the legacy of

the church?" asked audience member Lisa Richard, when Dueck wondered whether young adults felt responsible for carrying on the church. "Do I feel responsible for Sunday morning services happening in a building every week? No. But as a Christ follower, do I feel responsible to maintain the legacy of the kingdom of God? Very much so."

Samantha Klassen, another audience member, suggested that to keep young adults it is important to remember the difference between meaningful tradition and traditionalism for the sake of keeping things the same. "I think it's important for us to hold loosely the way that things have always been," she said. While young adults appreciate the grounding traditions provide, she said they also want space to ask questions.

5. They're too individualistic (or there's no space for debate)

It's an open question whether millennials are the most individualistic and entitled generation in history, but Hamm-Epp said that it is possible that highly educated young people raised to believe they are special might not see the value in churches and community decision-making.

"We're not raised in a way anymore to think that a larger collective can prove me wrong, or that a larger collective should give me the core set of values," she said.

As a response to that individualism, Davey suggested that young adults may be interested in being part of a congregation that allows them to ask questions about its practices and beliefs.

Ultimately, there was no single answer for how churches can keep young adults. What to do with that uncertainty?

Morton had a simple suggestion that could lead to many new places: "I think it needs to start with prayer. And it needs to start with our hearts truly being in the right place, and not getting all caught up in technicalities and political issues within the church, but with Jesus Christ." ❧

Emily Loewen is a writer and editor living in Winnipeg. She is a member of Langley Mennonite Fellowship, B.C., and attends St. Benedict's Table in Winnipeg.



Kirsten Hamm-Epp, left, area church youth minister for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, says that young adults want to be involved in worship by doing more than just reading Scripture.



Danielle Morton, left, pictured with Lukas Thiessen, says many of her peers feel like the church doesn't need them.

Calendar

British Columbia

April 2,3: Good Friday blues service, at House of James, Abbotsford, at 7:30 p.m. each evening. All proceeds to support the Cyrus Centre.

April 11: Columbia Bible College Bearcat Prowl, a glow-in-the-dark fun run in support of the college's athletic department. Register by March 31. For more information, visit columbiabc.edu.

April 24-26: Junior Youth Impact Retreat, at Camp Squeah, Hope.

May 2: MC B.C. Women's Inspirational Day, at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford.

Oct. 16-18: MC B.C. ladies retreat at Camp Squeah, Hope.

Nov. 13-15: Senior Youth Impact Retreat, at Camp Squeah, Hope.

Alberta

March 20-21: MC Alberta annual general meeting, hosted by Edmonton Vietnamese Mennonite Church.

Saskatchewan

March 22: RJC Guys and Pies concert fundraiser, at 7 p.m.

April 25: Saskatchewan Women in Mission annual meeting and Enrichment Day, at Zoar Mennonite Church, Waldheim, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

May 8: RJC spring choir concert, at 7 p.m.

May 30: RJC fundraising golf tournament, at Valley Regional Park.

May 31: 70th-anniversary celebrations at Superb Mennonite Church, Kerrobert; from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, visit www.superbmennonite.com; to RSVP, e-mail superb70anniversary@gmail.com

June 26,27: RJC year-end musical performances.

Manitoba

March 13: CMU dessert fundraiser, at Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite.

March 15-June 20: "A place in the kingdom: Paintings and heritage stories celebrating farm animals" exhibition

by Lynda Toews, at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg. Opening reception on March 15, at 2:30 p.m.

March 28: Jazz at CMU, in the Great Hall, at 7:30 p.m.

March 29: "Bells and Whistles with Strings Attached" concert, at CMU's Laudamus Auditorium.

April 3: Winnipeg's First Mennonite Church Choir, with orchestra, presents Schubert's *Deutsche Messe* and Rutter's *Requiem*, at the church, at 7 p.m.

April 3: The 45-voice adult choir of Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, is performing Bach's Kantate No. 4, "Christ lag in Todesbanden," and other music on Good Friday, at 11 a.m., at the church.

April 8: CMU celebration fundraising dinner, at the Victoria Inn, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m.

April 11: MDS spring fundraising banquet at North Kildonan MB Church, Winnipeg, at 6 p.m. Speakers include Harold and Sandra Friesen and Janet Plener. Topic: "MDS: Rebuilding homes and restoring hope." For reservations, call toll-free 1-888-261-1274.

April 12: Mennonite Community Orchestra presents its spring concert at CMU's South Campus chapel, at 3 p.m. Program includes Stravinsky's "Pulcinella Suite," Mozart's "Exultate Jubilate," and Dvorak's "Symphony No. 6."

April 18: Rescheduled MCC Manitoba 50th-anniversary benefit concert, at Knox United Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m. Keynote speaker: former prime minister Joe Clark. Music by Faith and Life Men's and Women's choirs, the University of Manitoba Women's Chorus and the Buffalo Gals Drum Group. Ticketholders for the previously scheduled event can obtain tickets for the new event by calling 204-261-6381 or online at mccmanitoba.ca/50. Any remaining tickets were made available on Feb. 9.

April 25: CMU's spring concert, at the Loewen Athletic Centre, at 7:30 p.m.

April 30-May 2: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate senior-high students perform their annual musical. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

May 2,3: Faith and Life Male Choir and Women's Chorus spring concerts; (2) at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg,

at 7 p.m.; (3) at Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, at 3 p.m.

May 5: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate bursary banquet. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

May 13: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate work day. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

May 27: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Grade 7 to 9 spring concert at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

May 28: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Grade 10 to 12 spring concert at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

Aug. 25: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate 11th-annual golf tournament at Bridges Golf Club, Winnipeg. For more information, call 204-775-7111.

Ontario

March 14: Conrad Grebel University college open house, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

March 16 or 17: Grandparent and Grandchild Days at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. Theme: Helping Others Participate through Education (HOPE). Leaders: Leigh and Lois Steckley. Each day's events are the same, and include drama, crafts, and making school kits or knotting quilts for MCC. For more information, call 519-625-8602 or e-mail info@hiddenacres.ca.

March 16-20: March Break camp at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp, Sauble Beach, with bus transportation available to and from the camp. For more information, call 519-422-3200 or visit www.slmc.ca/retreats.

March 21: Elmira meat canning fundraiser breakfast, at Calvary United Church, St. Jacobs, at 8 a.m. Speaker: Keith Martin. Topic: "A history of meat canning in Ontario." Call 519-745-8458 to reserve tickets.

March 21: Menno Singers present Poulenc's *Stabat Mater*, at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m.

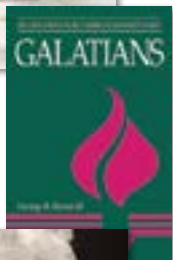
March 28: Conrad Grebel University College's Institute for Anabaptist Mennonite Studies and the Mennonite Historical Society celebrate the release

Spring Titles from Herald Press



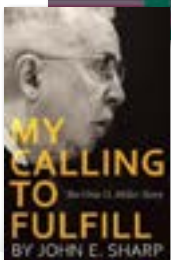
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of Sam Steiner's new book, *In Search of Promised Lands*; in the Great Hall, at 2 p.m.

March 28,29: Conrad Grebel Student Council presents *Fiddler on the Roof*, with an all-student cast and orchestra; at the Conrad Centre, Kitchener.

April 3: Grand Philharmonic Choir presents Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the Kitchener Waterloo Symphony, at Centre in the Square, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m. For more information or tickets, call 519-578-1570.

April 10-11: The Engaged Workshop, a marriage preparation course focussing on communication, is being held at Maple View Mennonite Church in Wellesley for engaged or newly married couples. For more information, e-mail denise_bender@yahoo.com.

April 10-11: Oct. 24-25: "Reading the Bible with Jesus" retreat at Willowgrove, Stouffville, with Bryan Moyer Suderman: sponsored by MC Eastern Canada, the Markham-Stouffville Mennonite Ministerial and Willowgrove. Pt. 4: "Luke: All that the prophets have declared." For more information, e-mail miriam@willowgrove.ca.

April 10-12: Mentor and mentee retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp, Sauble Beach. For more information, call 519-422-3200 or visit www.slmc.ca/retreats.

April 18: Toronto Mennonite Festival/MCC Relief Sale at Black Creek volunteer appreciation breakfast and annual general meeting, at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Markham, at 9:30 a.m.

April 20: New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale annual promotion dinner, at Bingemans in Kitchener, at 6:30 p.m. Guest Speaker: Issa Sadi Embombolo, founder of MCC's Peace Clubs in Zambia. Tickets available from the MCC Ontario office by phone at 519-745-8458.

April 27,28: Spring seniors retreat at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. Speaker and song leader: Mark Diller Harder. Theme: "Singing our faith: Heart songs and hymnals." Same program each day. For more information and registration forms, e-mail info@hiddenacres.ca or visit www.hiddenacres.ca.

May 3: Pax Christi Chorale presents Sir Hubert Parry's oratorio *Judith* with orchestra and soloists, at Koerner Hall, Toronto, at 3 p.m. Pre-concert chat with Parry scholar Jeremy Dibble of Durham University, England. For more information or tickets, visit www.paxchristichorale.org/judith.

May 7,20: 18th annual Low German Networking Conference; (7) at Bradley Street Church of God, Aylmer; (20) at Meadow Brook Church, Leamington. For more information, e-mail Lily Hiebert Rempel at lilyhr@mennonitecc.on.ca.

May 9: Menno Singers present "Songs for spring," at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m.

U.S.

Aug. 20-23: 14th annual Bridgefolk (Mennonite-Catholic) conference, "Ecumenical healing and the mystery of the communion saints," at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind. Keynote speakers: Nozomu Yamada and Father Alfonso Fausone, both from the Nanzan University, Japan. For more information, visit www.bridgefolk.net.

To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send Calendar announcements eight weeks in advance of the event date by e-mail to calendar@canadianmennonite.org.

Classifieds

Travel

Visit Europe the Mennonite Way! Multiple Hotel Tours focussing on Mennonite-Anabaptist history in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Poland and Ukraine. Organized by Mennonite Heritage Tours, www.mennoniteheritagetours.eu

PHOENIX (Arizona) MENNO Guest House Bed and Breakfast welcomes guests coming to the Phoenix area. (Web site www.hscserves.org). Email phxmennoguest@gmail.com or call 623-847-0314.

Employment Opportunities

Employment Opportunity

Bergthol Mennonite Church is seeking a full-time pastor to lead our small congregation of people in various stages of life.



We are a rural church, located an hour north of Calgary, Alberta. We are looking for someone to help us live out our mission to be an "Anabaptist Church, welcoming all who seek to know the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

For more information about our church, please check out our website at www.bergtholmennonitechurch.com. If interested please contact Brian Hildebrandt at bdhilde@xplornet.com.

GERMAN MINISTRIES CO-PASTOR OPPORTUNITY

Steinbach Mennonite Church (SMC) Located in Steinbach, Manitoba. Steinbach is one of the fastest growing, most culturally diverse cities in western Canada. SMC is seeking a Co-Pastor German Ministries with strong Anabaptist theology to lead us as we strive to continue to develop our relationships with Christ, each other, and the community.

Candidates should have the following:

- strong interpersonal relationship skills
- willingness and vision to help SMC meet challenges
- energy and willingness to work as part of multi-staff team
- fluent in German language
- understanding of Paraguayan and South American culture
- at least 5 years' experience in a Church leadership position is desirable

We have an average Sunday morning attendance of 400 in two services (German & English).

Please send your resumes to 4siemens@mymts.net or contact Jac Siemens at 1.204.326.2697 for more information. Learn about our congregation at www.steinbachmennonite.ca.

The First Mennonite Church

Employment opportunity

The First Mennonite Church (Vineland, Ontario) seeks a full-time pastor to lead our semi-rural congregation of 75-100 people in various stages of life. We are looking for someone with a strong commitment to Anabaptist values, a keen understanding of peace and social justice, and a love of music. We are the original Mennonite Church in Canada and have a rich history of leadership.

Application deadline Mar 31st. Employment to commence in 2015. If interested contact Henry Paetkau, MCEC Conference Minister. hpaetkau@mcec.ca



- Seeking God's face in creation
- Receiving God's love in Christ
- Radiating God's Spirit in the world



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