

CANADIAN MENNONITE

January 4, 2016
Volume 20 Number 1

Clean or unclean?

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EDITORIAL

Isaiah for 2016

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

The year was 587 BC. Our spiritual ancestors, the Israelites, were deported to Babylon, where they felt like refugees in a foreign land. Their place of worship, the temple, had been destroyed. They sat by the rivers of Babylon. . .and wept. (Psalm 137:1). They were dispirited and tempted to think Yahweh had deserted them.

“The move from establishment to exilic displacement is the story line that concerns the book of Isaiah,” says Walter Brueggemann in his book, *Isaiah 40-60* (1998). But it was also a time when this poet of the exile (a second Isaiah) provides the most extreme claim and singularity of Yahweh as creator to lift them out of their despair and reminds them, in powerful language, that Yahweh’s work as creator is not a one-time deal.

“It is continuing work that entails Yahweh’s endless, energetic attentiveness to creation. Yahweh is not worn out, not exhausted. Yahweh, the creator God, is directly attentive to the faint and powerless, to those who have no energy on their own. In context, of course, it is precisely the exiles who are resourceless, faint and powerless. It is precisely for them that Yahweh is decisive.”

To those who heard the oratorio *Messiah* performed over the holidays, the story comes alive, once again, through the powerful text and music of Handel in the recitative: “Comfort

ye, comfort ye my people, says your God.” Though I have heard this many times, the chills still go up and down my spine when I hear the soloist, plus 200-plus voices and the many sounds of

instruments make that enduring proclamation.

“It is an act of remarkable courage to utter such a doxological claim that always includes a polemic against alternative claims,” says Brueggemann. “It is also an act of boldness, then or now or any time, to engage reimagining and reconstructing life in terms of Yahweh, the creator who brings to nought both the wonders of creation and pretenders of politics. It is easy for people of faith to conclude that the creator God is an irrelevance in a contemporary system that seems set in stone.

“In exile, Israel tended to be more self-occupied and self-absorbed with its own destiny. In this condition, however, Yahweh changes the subject and summons grieving Israel out beyond its own self-preoccupation to other work.”

Yes, we know the story well. And biblical scholars like Brueggemann have searched the depths for what this poetry meant for our ancient ancestors and for us today.

Is the story really that old? Does it resonate today? What is our Babylon? Are we weeping as if in exile? Does it feel, facing all the changes affecting us in the church in 2016 and in our changing



culture, that we are again in exile in a foreign land?

A sometimes wearisome controversy over sexuality seems to hold us captive. There is grief over our young people leaving the established church. A significant shortage of financial support is forcing Mennonite Church Canada to lay off staff and face a denominational restructuring. We are just now owning up to our complicity in the dark period of Canadian history during the residential schools era.

Internationally, we may fear a growing menace called ISIS that seems bent on building a caliphate that considers everyone who isn’t an Islamic “believer” an infidel. This apocalyptic vision has both a theocratic and political dynamic. Fear-mongers, especially in the U.S., consider this as the beginning of World War 3, with some presidential candidates whipping up a frenzy for votes that will again look to military might to conquer this enemy.

Is this the new exile? Brueggemann sees the poetry of the second Isaiah as setting forth the gospel claim *Behold, your God!* (Isa. 40:9), employing “a heightened rhetoric in order to exhibit Yahweh in the most compelling ways possible to that Babylonian definition of reality that is seen as fraudulent and unreliable.”

Can we, with the poet, sing again the new song (Isa. 42:10) to celebrate anew, in this year, the established governance of Yahweh, a rule that displaces all the Babylonian gods of our time –exploiters of human habitation and the environment? Can we cling to the words of the prophet as we face all of the foreboding changes in our faith community and in our world in 2016?

ABOUT THE COVER:

‘Peter’s vision’ as depicted at Gosberton (U.K) Methodist Church, Oct. 1, 2011.

PHOTO: CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/2.0/

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund for our publishing activities.

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du gouvernement du Canada à travers le Fonds du Canada pour les périodiques pour nos activités d'édition.

ISSN 1480-042X

Canada

CANADIAN MENNONITE

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JANUARY 4, 2016 / VOL. 20, NO. 1

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40063104 REGISTRATION NO. 09613

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE ITEMS TO CANADIAN MENNONITE,
490 DUTTON DRIVE, UNIT C5,
WATERLOO, ON, N2L 6H7

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Web site: canadianmennonite.org

Facebook.com/Canadian.Mennonite @CanMenno

Please send all material to be considered for publication to:

General submission address: submit@canadianmennonite.org

Readers Write: letters@canadianmennonite.org

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Paid obituaries: obituaries@canadianmennonite.org

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Obituaries/Calendar" by postal mail or fax to our head office.

Reprint requests: reprints@canadianmennonite.org

Mission statement: To educate, inspire, inform, and foster dialogue on issues facing Mennonites in Canada as it shares the good news of Jesus Christ from an Anabaptist perspective. We do this through an independent publication and other media, working with our church partners.

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One-Year Subscription Rates

Canada: \$46 + tax (depends on province where subscriber lives)

U.S.: \$68 **International (outside U.S.):** \$91.10

Subscriptions/address changes: (e-mail) office@canadianmennonite.org

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GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH FEATURE

Clean or unclean?

(What can we learn from Peter's vision?)

BY DOUG KLASSEN

I was driving from Calgary out to Rosemary, Alta., to attend Bill and Bob Janzen's mom's funeral. As I drove I recalled hearing of times when everyone lived in large homes in long rows in Russian villages, each on five-acre plots. The farming was done all around the village and the Mennonites became very prosperous.

Everything was so good there. Almost every young person came forward for voluntary baptism. And that was celebrated! Of course, those who didn't had to leave the community lost their special status, and some got relocated to Siberia, but no one talked about that. And there were some other problems—floggings delivered by the church elders, tax evasion, brutal treatment of the Russian peasant servants—but nobody talked about that either. Every day was like a summer day and every day was like a Sunday.

On the surface, it wasn't much different from the stories of the early church in Acts 2, where there was community and mutual care. Yes, there were some troubles, but they worked with the Roman—or Russian—government and sorted things out.

Gentiles were trickling in already since Pentecost, and the early church was finding a way to include them, sort of, but all of a sudden in Acts 10 the issue is thrust in Peter's face. He falls into a trance—maybe that state between being asleep and being awake, the place where God often speaks to us—and he has this vision of something like a sheet being lowered by its four corners.

On the sheet are animals of every kind, and a voice says, "*Get up, Peter; kill and eat.*" And Peter, perhaps recalling the commands in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, and the faithful witness of Daniel, who declined the king's food, responds to the voice and says, "*By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.*"

Now after this, we think we should hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." But that is not what we hear. Instead, the voice of God comes a second time and says, "*What God has made clean, you do not call profane.*"



'Peter's vision at Joppa.' Burgos Cathedral, Spain.

The vision comes a second and a third time, each time the same. But as visions often are, these are not literal commands, but parables. God wasn't contradicting what he clearly stated in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, but God was using the unclean animals to make a point.

The point is, the people who at one time you would not associate with are now to receive the embrace of God through the sharing of the gospel. When the three messengers from Caesarea arrive, Peter gets the message, and they leave immediately for Cornelius's house.

Someone's knocking at our door

Is it now time for us to answer the knock at our door? Is this story encouraging us to reach over a divide that has been in the Christian church for a long time and embrace the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer community?

There are a number of things in the Old and New Testaments that we take as information, but don't apply to our lives right now because they are culturally bound. Are we sure that the texts around same-sex attraction are completely exempt from that kind of scrutiny and we are to continue applying them just as they appear?

Have we thought that this whole matter just might fall under the category of disputable matters in Romans 14-15? Or, if we do continue to count it as sin, why pick on that one when we choose to forbear those who cannot stop with gossip, gluttony or greed, to name a few?

I don't mean to be offensive. I am just trying to find a way through this that is faithful and is gospel to everyone.

This is the third time the sheet has



'Peter's vision of a sheet with animals,' by Domenico Fetti.

come down for us. The first was in Saskatoon in 1986, when the General Conference Mennonite Church (a founding denomination of Mennonite Church Canada) passed its Resolution on Human Sexuality, which states, in part: "We understand the Bible to teach that sexual intercourse is reserved for a man and a woman united in marriage and that violation of this teaching is a sin. It is our understanding that this teaching also precludes premarital, extramarital and homosexual sexual activity." In other words, "No, God, nothing unclean. . . ."

The next was in Stratford, Ont., in 1998, when the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (another of MC Canada's founding organizations) reaffirmed the Saskatoon resolution and the 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. There again, discussion, pondering, praying, and again, "No, God, nothing unclean. . . ."

This coming summer we will be back in Saskatoon and drawing MC Canada's Being a Faithful Church process to a conclusion. It's a huge document, with input from all over the country. What will we say? What is it all going to mean? Where is it all going to leave us? What will the

future hold?

I don't think we can just keep turning our backs on this one again and again. There is something here—something that is genuine, even if we find it very troubling.

Blogger Ann Voskamp posted "The five key questions to ask to get you out of any hard time—and change your life" last April. I think we can apply them here in a very helpful way.

1. WHAT IS our greatest fear?

If it is that we might lose control of our church, it is not ours to control. Is it that maybe some of our deep dark secrets will come out? Those secrets may have to be dealt with, and the harder you protest, the more people begin to wonder. For me, my greatest fear in all of this is that I will not do what God wants me to do.

2. WHAT IS our greatest motivator?

Is it love? For some it is, and it is obvious. For others, it is fear. It is a fear that the grace of God will run out on this issue and that there won't be enough left for us to be included.

3. WHAT IS truth?

Jesus, the logos, the eternal Word of God, is truth. Without the Word, without Jesus, the world gets warped. Relationship with him shows us the answer to the next question.

4. WHO IS God?

God is love, according to I John 4:16. And because he is love, he gets to define love. Love is not always agreement with someone, but it is always sacrifice for

someone. Love is always for us. God is always good and we are always loved. That defines everything.

5. WHAT IS success?

In the Christian walk, success is faithfully showing up and being faithfully obedient. It is kneeling down to serve, going lower and decreasing ourselves, so that Christ is lifted higher and he alone increases.

'I must repent to you'

During the Russian Revolution, Mennonite communities were 27 times the victims of Makhno marauders, communists and the White Army, who all plundered and pillaged through their territory. Not a cow or horse was left, thousands were exiled and those remaining were near starvation.

There was a man named Wiens—not his real name—who had been a deacon in the church and quite a rigid man. He was legalistic and stern at home, and he beat his servants considerably when they didn't work hard enough.

When the "apocalypse" came, his estate was destroyed. Some of his buildings were burned, his wife died at the end of a bayonet, and his daughter was raped. His sons were either killed or exiled to Siberia.

Wiens was alone, hiding in the riverbank, and his hunger was driving him to desperation. Then he remembered that in the back corner of the barn he had buried a sack of toasted *zwieback* buns and some salt pork.

He made his way along the hedgerow and crawled across the yard to the barn. Inside, he began to walk across the barn floor, the hair on the back of his neck standing up. Step after step he took, thinking it might be his last.

He knelt down in the corner and began to dig in the straw, and all of a sudden the straw erupted and a man jumped up out of it. Wiens fell back in terror and cried aloud. But then he realized that it was one of his peasant servants.

Seeing Wiens, the servant cowered down in the straw in fear, bracing for a familiar beating because he was eating Wiens's food.

In a frantic voice, Wiens grabbed hold

This coming summer we will be back in Saskatoon and drawing MC Canada's Being a Faithful Church process to a conclusion. . . . What will we say? What is it all going to mean?

of the servant and said, "I have served communion a thousand times. And I have spoken the words of Jesus, who said, 'Remember me as you do this.' But it has taken until this moment, kneeling here with you, to finally understand what those words really mean."

Then Wiens wept and said, "Now, I must repent to you. We are no longer servant and master, no longer slave and free, but we are brothers."

And in the manure and mouldy straw, Wiens opened the corners of that sack, and there on the sheet were tokens of God's grace and mercy. They broke the bread, prayed and ate together the body of Christ.

'Bringing the kingdom to those who have been shut out'

I hope you haven't found this too upsetting. I know that we often want church to be a place where we can come away from tough jobs or hard life circumstances and just rest in God's love. And we do need to do that from time to time. There are

churches that offer, pretty much exclusively, sermons about personal piety.

But read the whole Book of Acts. The call of the church is not like that. It is to be in the struggle, right there along with Christ, breaking down walls and going places where angels fear to tread, bringing the kingdom to those who have been shut out.

I'm in process with all of this, too, and, like Peter, trying to be faithful. If this is all God's leading, then heaven help us if we refuse it a third time. ☺



Doug Klassen is pastor of Foothills Mennonite Church, Calgary, and chair of MC Canada's Faith and Life Committee. Abridged from a sermon he preached on May 3, 2015, using Acts 11:1-18 as his text.

/// For discussion

1. Sometimes when we think about the good old days in the nostalgic past we realize that we thought differently back then. Can you think of an opinion you held in the past that you think differently about now? What does it take to change our minds about an issue? When is it right and when is it wrong to change our minds?
2. Doug Klassen compares the Mennonite church in Russia 100 years ago with the early church. How is the early church's attitude toward gentiles similar to the Mennonite attitude toward peasant servants? What is the message for the church today?
3. How would you respond to Ann Voskamp's five questions for hard times? Do you agree with Klassen's answers to these questions? Why might these questions be helpful when things are tense?
4. How does God speak to the church today? Do you think the recommendations of the Being a Faithful Church Task Force show good discernment for the church (see page 14)?

—BY BARB DRAPER

VIEWPOINTS

/// Readers write

We welcome your comments and publish most letters from subscribers. Letters, to be kept to 300 words or less, are the opinion of the writer only and are not to be taken as endorsed by this magazine or the church. Please address issues rather than individuals; personal attacks will not appear in print or online. In light of the many recent letters on the topic of sexuality, we will edit any letter on this topic to a paragraph and post the rest online at www.canadian-mennonite.org. All letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Send them to letters@canadianmennonite.org and include the author's contact information and mailing address. Preference is given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

✉ Lolita fashion article 'marks a significant shift' in church discussions

RE: "SOLACE IN a subculture," Nov. 9, 2015, page 28.

I want to express appreciation for Katrina Brooks's article. Not only did it educate me in a cultural expression I was unaware of, but in so doing allowed me to approach the realities of gender, sexuality, cultural standards and faith in a way that puts some distance from our often-fatigued and over-rehearsed approaches to these topics as a church. This piece marks a significant shift both in what we discuss as a church body and in how we can go about discussing it.

DAVID DRIEDGER, WINNIPEG

David Driedger is associate minister of First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

FROM OUR LEADERS

Blessed interviews

DAN DYCK

Interviewing guests for more than 100 episodes of Mennonite Church Canada's radio podcast, *Church Matters* (commonword.ca/go/432), has blessed me with the opportunity to learn and grow from the stories of others.

Anostocio (a pseudonym), a Mennonite pastor, teacher and Colombian refugee, described the painful picture of life in Colombia: hungry children, victims of warfare with lost limbs, rebel threats on his own life and family because of his peacebuilding work. "I never know when I leave home, will I make it back?" he said. Anostocio has since settled in Canada permanently with his wife and family.

Anya Alipova shared how nonviolent peacebuilding attracted her to a small, local Mennonite congregation in Ukraine. She described her involvement in the 2004 Orange Revolution with civil disobedience, sit-ins and general strikes, prophetic in light of Ukraine's current troubles.



Gordon Toombs, a United Church member, was determined to follow Jesus as a nonviolent peacemaker. When the Canadian government conscripted him for the Second World War, he was promised that he could declare himself a conscientious objector (CO) and serve as a medic. When that promise was broken, Toombs was forced to take up arms. He felt he had betrayed his beliefs and kept his failed CO declaration a secret for 60 years.

Piet Meiring, a Dutch Reformed pastor and author of 30 books, served with South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Our conversation revealed the parallels between the story of indigenous South Africans and indigenous people living in Canada.

Gordon Allaby, a dual Canadian/American citizen, experienced the challenges of applying for CO status while living in the United States during the Vietnam War. He put his belief in pacifism to work here in Canada and shared many inspirational examples of proclaiming Osler Mennonite Church,

the congregation he then pastored, as a peace church. During the annual summer fair parade, members played kazoos and wore T-shirts naming themselves the For Peace Marching Band.

Conflict in the church is not uncommon. In one of my favourite episodes, "I was at church when a fight broke out . . ." David Pankratz and Lois Edmund offered sage advice on how to respond when it happens. At the time, Pankratz was director of the Institute for Community Peacebuilding at Canadian Mennonite University and Edmund served as assistant professor of conflict resolution studies at Menno Simons College and a consulting clinical psychologist.

My eyes were opened to the complexities between settler and host peoples through interviews with indigenous leaders in Canada, including Ovid Mercredi, a national spokesperson for Treaties 1 to 11, who drew parallels between the treaties God makes with humanity in the Old Testament and the treaties Canada's government made with First Nations people.

Each one of my *Church Matters* guests has made me a more faithful follower of Jesus, and for that I am deeply grateful.

Dan Dyck is Mennonite Church Canada's director of Church Engagement-Communications.

✉ A troubled reader responds

RE: "READY TO listen, learn and love," Nov. 9, 2015, page 9.

It is rare that I read an article that troubles me as deeply as this. To hear that someone raised in the church does not "want [her son] to grow up thinking he needs to tell other people about Christ" should cause some significant soul-searching.

Having personally lived in intercultural contexts for many years, I am acutely aware of the harm that has been perpetrated in the name of Christ, and yet how

can we keep the reconciling message of the cross and resurrection to ourselves?

Every day we are reminded that our world is broken, divided and filled with violence. Millions in the Middle East and Europe are crying out for peace. If ever there was a time for Anabaptist Mennonites to step forward in word and action, it is now. We have a "good news" message: Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, is also the Prince of Peace.

I am not advocating evangelism that is devoid of the material, social and political demonstrations of love and care so necessary for those fleeing the violence of

FAMILY TIES

It takes a village

MELISSA MILLER

"It takes a village to raise a child," we've often heard. Does it also take a village to grow old? I wondered after a phone call with a friend who is a generation older than me. We talked of her move from independent living into a small seniors' apartment, and the pleasures and challenges she is experiencing there. Then she inquired about my mother and how her aging is going; she knows that I've been struggling with my mother's struggles. I was grateful both to hear how my friend is doing in her new home, and her concern for my family. "We're not alone in this," I thought, and now affirm: it does take a village to help one grow old.

They've made different decisions, my friend and my mother, one choosing to move into a smaller, supportive living environment, one choosing to remain in her three-bedroom country home. I am learning from them about adaptation, letting go and grace, and independence, determination and spirit. Through them and others, I am learning how hard it is to age, for the senior and their families, and the kinds of things that make it better or worse.

The village—our community—helps us as we move through the changes that accompany aging. In my case, the

village includes professionals in medicine and social work, friends at church and elsewhere, and family members. What follows are a few examples.

In a conference with a frail senior and worried family members, a doctor counselled, "Seniors are often focused on independence and their family members are focused on safety; we look for a plan that takes all that into consideration." Or the chaplain at a seniors' facility who offered a lecture subtitled "The Bitter and the Sweet." She laid out the good and bad news about walking with aging loved ones. From her, I gained encouragement to be honest about the losses and the need to

Knowing they are walking the same path adds poignancy to their words and gestures



lament, as well as openness to seeing the grace and potential in each stage. She also emphasized the importance of listening, as did the stranger seated beside me at the lecture. "I wouldn't have believed how much listening was needed; it took a lot," she said. "And, in the end, it was the listening that got us through."

The church has been a significant place of support. The seniors, in particular, pick up on my concerns and offer back their nibs of wisdom. I appreciate their advice and am sometimes bemused at

the contradictory messages. "Ah ... that's hard when people fight changes," one will say. Then another exhorts, "Don't take away her independence any more than you have to!" Or sometimes, what is given is a wordless hug or squeeze of my hand. Knowing they are walking the same path adds poignancy to their words and gestures.

Finally, there's family members. My three sisters and three brothers all have their perspectives and their parts to play as adult children who want what's best for our beloved Mother, even if we can't all agree on what that might be, or be on the same page as Mother herself. We are blessed by abundant love and good will, and for most of the time, open and

respectful communication skills.

In the village, I'm pretty sure that love is the primary rule. I see love threaded through all these people and their wisdom. The ocean of God's love surrounds and holds us, creating a community to walk with us, as we and our loved ones age. The village—and love—will see us through.

Melissa Miller (familyties@mymts.net) has a passion for helping people develop healthy, vibrant relationships with God, self and others.

the Middle East. But if we love people, and desire they experience true peace in every aspect of life, then we are compelled to share the gospel of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

Mission is birthed in hearts filled with compassion. Jesus' life bears this out: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few'" (Matthew 9:36-37).

We are called to engage the world as Jesus' disciples,

servants and witnesses. May his Spirit empower us to do so filled with his love.

BRYAN BORN, ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

✉ Couple prays for peace for Vernon Leis's family and his accuser

WE ARE VERY disappointed to read of the Vernon Leis story that was released by Mennonite Church Eastern Canada to the *Waterloo Region Record* and *Canadian*

GOD, MONEY AND ME

God loves a cheerful receiver

ARNIE FRIESEN

Most of us are not very good at receiving compliments. A friend had just delivered a fine sermon, so I gave him a heartfelt compliment. His deflective, "humble" response was to give all credit to God. I replied, "I could swear I saw your lips moving!"

Perhaps even more striking is our inability to be gracious recipients of other people's generosity. It is deeply ingrained in us that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Albert Einstein reinforces this notion: "The value of a man resides in what he gives and not in what he is capable of receiving."

Clearly the deck is stacked in favour of the generous giver.

E. G. Link identifies three causes of "this graceless receiving malady" in his blog post "The Grace of Receiving:"

1. OUR SUBTLE form of pride. When we have more than enough, we may find it very difficult to receive a gift. The more we own, the more we may feel it beneath us to accept a gift from others.

For example, I often pick up the tab when enjoying an outing with a person who I assume is much wealthier than me; the reaction of unequivocal surprise

is worth the gesture. However, don't be shocked if your generosity is met with sheer indignation, as if to say, "How dare you? I am not a charity case?"

2. OUR SUBTLE form of legalism. How many times have you offered to repay generosity? Insisting, "I'll buy you lunch next time," is not really generosity, but

is simply reciprocating payments, or taking turns to pay. At other times, your gift may be refused with a severe scolding, such as, "You shouldn't have," "I can't accept that," or, after sharing a ride, you offer to pay for gas and the dollar bills come flying back at you. In such cases, both the giver and intended receiver experience no blessing at all.

3. A SUBTLE form of ingratitude. This includes such thoughts as, "I don't deserve this gift," or, "Others need this more than I do." Perhaps we should focus less on the gift and more on the generous attitude of the giver.

In my work with Mennonite Foundation of Canada, I frequently

hear about the gift that went completely unacknowledged by the recipient. A true gift is given unconditionally and with no strings attached. But every gift deserves at least the courtesy of a simple thank you.

An additional cause that could be added is a subtle form of entitlement. People who have enjoyed the gifts of others as a way of life may eventually live with a sense of prerogative. Volunteers who work in food banks will attest that on occasion they deal with very ungrateful recipients, as if it is their perceived right to demand very specific products.

How do we become gracious receivers, enhancing the blessing for the giver? Once again, we can learn from Jesus and his overwhelming appreciation and

Perhaps we should focus less on the gift and more on the generous attitude of the giver.



endorsement when given an outrageous gift of perfume by a woman (Mark 14). People around him resisted the gift on his behalf, but Jesus defended her actions. Receiving graciously blesses the giver.

Yes, there is joy and much reward in giving, but let's also exercise the grace of receiving so that the grace of giving will flourish. After all, one helps the other to thrive.

Arnie Friesen is a Mennonite Foundation of Canada (MFC) consultant in the Abbotsford, B.C., office. MFC facilitates the gifting process. Generous clients are able to give anonymously to charities of their choice so they have no need to worry about responses.

Mennonite about his alleged sexual misconduct. We are not sure what the reason was for doing this, since he has been deceased for 21 years.

Our prayers go out to Arvilla and her family for the pain they have had to endure these last couple months.

We are also praying that the person who brought this accusation would be able to experience the peace and healing of Jesus Christ.

LUCILLE AND BILL JANTZI, PETERSBURG, ONT.

✉ A wonderful discovery for whom?

RE: "THESE RECORDS are unique," Nov. 23, 2015, page 14.

What a wonderful discovery for Mennonites to find an old letter of invitation somewhere in a basement in Steinbach, Man., my hometown. But I invite all Mennonites to pause and reflect on what happened when the Dominion of Canada "cleared" that Manitoba land of "indigenous inhabitants." We might discover some unclear things in the basements of our hearts.

I invite us all to come up with some creative ways to continue learning our history, to understand and face up to its complexities, and to renew our hope and faith in a God of peace.

TIM REIMER, TORONTO

Tim Reimer is pastor of Danforth Mennonite Church, Toronto.

✉ Editorial misrepresents Remembrance Day and the poppy

RE: "PEACE MORE than pacifism," Nov. 23, page 2.

Remembrance Day is a memorial day observed in Commonwealth countries since the end of the First World War, to remember the members of their armed forces who died in the line of duty. It is not a "ritual that celebrates violence," as Dick Benner states. And the poppy has been used since 1921 to commemorate fallen military personnel, not as a symbol of "celebrating war," as he suggests.

Remarks such as "celebrating war, rather than witnessing to peace as the better alternative," and "patriotic rituals," are inaccurate and insulting to those who wear a poppy and observe Remembrance Day.

I do not agree with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) peace button campaign. I wear a poppy, not a peace button. The peace button is seen as a competitor to the poppy; for this reason, peace buttons have become offensive and tend to disparage people who wear poppies.

Right or wrong, MCC's peace button campaign is perceived as being sanctimonious; it is divisive and

hurtful to others. I urge MCC to end its campaign of promoting the peace button.

Mennonites should be thankful for the special treatment afforded them during the Second World War, as non-Mennonite conscientious objectors weren't so lucky.

I am thankful that Canada has a 100 percent volunteer armed forces now and that conscription is a thing of the past. I am thankful for the sacrifices made by men and women who have served in Canada's armed forces. I am thankful to live in a country where we are free to practise the religion of our choice.

BRIAN JUTZI, TAVISTOCK, ONT.

✉ Foster family feels 'disgraced and shamed' by article

RE: "MENNONITES HAVE yet to reckon with their role in 'sixties scoop,'" Sept. 14, page 20.

The comments in your paper are disturbing. We grew up in this same home. These children quoted were the same age as our own and we got to know them well.

We find it interesting that there is pride in being "fluent in Low German," but the writer then says, "the circumstances that brought it about are anything but humorous." Our parents made certain their needs were met and that they were not at a disadvantage to others. No mention is made of the heartaches and sacrifices made and the advantages some of them took of our parents even after leaving the home.

The article mentions being "a family in Altona with as many as 26 children in their foster care at a time." It was physically impossible to have 26 kids there at one time. Simply not true. Most of the time there were four to six.

Claims of "hoeing beets in the hot sun," "belt or yardstick," and "starlight tour" are not realistic. Our parents' desire would have been for these children to become responsible contributors to society. Work and responsibility never hurt anyone.

The system may have failed them. Coming from homes that could not care for them, these new homes provided security and opportunities they otherwise would not have had. Valuable life lessons were taught and learned. Some gratefulness could still be acknowledged in this unfortunate experience. Our parents made many sacrifices, often at the expense of their own families.

The writer of the article could have done more research to verify the comments before publishing. Our family, including our parents who have long passed on, have been unjustly disgraced and shamed by it.

LAWRENCE KLASSEN, MORDEN, MAN.

RUTH FROESE, ALTONA, MAN.

ALVINA REMPEL, ELM CREEK, MAN.

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

New Year's resolutions

TROY WATSON

About a week after New Year's Day 2014, my friend Keith asked me what resolutions I'd made. Keith is an insightful, non-conformist "Red Letter Christian" in his mid twenties. I looked at him suspiciously, assuming he'd look down on this mainstream practice. Most non-conformists I know roll their eyes at the passé ritual of setting New Year's resolutions. He couldn't be serious.



shed negative habits and adopt healthy ones is better than making no attempt at all, and using Jan. 1 as the date (even if it is a cliché) to evaluate one's life and make commitments is better than never doing it. Choosing possibility, hope and optimism is healthier than apathy, fatalism or elitism. (By elitism I mean the attitude that "I'm above the mainstream nonsense the herd of mindless masses participates in.")

I was surprised when he said, "I think everyone should make New Year's resolutions. We should make resolutions every month, every week, every morning! The only way to live with purpose is to regularly examine the direction of our lives. How can I live an examined and meaningful life if I don't routinely evaluate who I'm becoming and commit to practices that will move me towards the life I'm called to live? I'm not saying January 1 should be the only date we do this, but it should at least be one of the days we do it each year!"

Keith, as usual, made a good point.

Approximately 45 percent of Americans make resolutions every year, 17 percent make resolutions sometimes and around 8 percent are successful at fulfilling their resolutions. Now 8 percent seems like a low number on the surface, but imagine if our mortgage rates increased by that much overnight? In those circumstances 8 percent would seem anything but small and insignificant.

According to the *Toronto Star*, 68 percent of Canadians made New Year's resolutions in 2012. Nineteen percent failed the first day, but another 19 percent kept their resolutions for the whole year. That means (depending on the age range used for these statistics) between 3 and 4.4 million Canadians made a positive life change in 2012. Perhaps Keith is right, resolutions aren't so silly after all.

Here's how I see it. Attempting to

One reason people often give for not making resolutions is because they've failed to fulfill their commitments in the past. They've given up and stopped believing not only in the ritual but in themselves.

I would encourage those individuals to try again and think of success in terms of baseball. The highest batting averages in Major League Baseball today are in the low to mid .300's. This means the greatest hitters in baseball succeed roughly 33 percent of the time and fail nearly 70 percent of the time. This has wonderful applications for personal and spiritual growth.

None of us "bat 1000" and God doesn't expect us to. We are called to growth not perfection. Setting measurable goals is one of the best ways to grow, and this becomes less intimidating when we view failure to achieve our goals as research, helping us figure out what works and what does not. As the saying goes, "There's no such thing as failure, only feedback." I say learn from your strikeouts, celebrate your hits and never be afraid to step back up to the plate.

I don't always make resolutions but I reflect on my life at the end of each year and refine my Rhythm of Life (the principles, priorities and practices I live by). In fact my Rhythm of Life includes engaging in major self-examination every September and December. This works well as my birthday is Dec. 28. The three days between my birthday and Jan. 1 take

on a death and rebirth motif culminating with the beginning of a new year. And any resolutions I make are about pursuing a higher standard of life, not solely focused on self-improvement, but increasing my willingness and capacity to contribute to the greater good.

Last year retired Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield asked Canadians to make a New Year's resolution in 2015 to change the world. He said, "There are problems with everything and nothing's yet perfect. But that shouldn't be cause to bemoan, it should be cause to achieve...It all starts with a resolution. What's yours?"

It doesn't matter if it's New Year's Day, Groundhog Day or every day, what's important is to routinely take time to prayerfully ask what this season of your life is about and commit to something.

Troy Watson (troydw@gmail.com) has made a few resolutions for 2016.

Briefly noted

Ernie Regehr named Inaugural Research Fellow

WATERLOO, ONT.—Seventy people gathered in the Mennonite Savings and Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement (CPA) on Oct. 29 to join Project Ploughshares, a CPA affiliate, in celebrating the launch of Ernie Regehr's book, *Disarming Conflict: Why Peace Cannot Be Won on the Battlefield*. Following the launch, it was announced that Regehr, the co-founder of Project Ploughshares and recipient of numerous honours, including the Order of Canada and Pearson Peace Medal, has been appointed the inaugural CPA Research Fellow. The appointment recognizes Regehr's many past contributions to advancing peace, and, more importantly, signals a shared commitment to pursuing new opportunities for collaboration through research.

—MSCU Centre for Peace Advancement



Ernie Regehr

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Enciso—Twins Valentina and Camila (b. Oct. 14, 2015), to Diego Enciso and Vilma Baqulboc, Foothills Mennonite, Calgary.

Kabungulu—Twins Nathan Songa and Ethan Muganza (b. Nov. 4, 2015), to Heri Kabungulu and Mary Kahindo, Ottawa Mennonite.

Luksic—Sophie Mila (b. Nov. 14, 2015), to Jon Dyck and Anna Luksic, Ottawa Mennonite.

Lupton—Vanna Justine (b. Oct. 28, 2015), to Leanne and Daryl Lupton, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Miller—Luke Malachi Toews (b. Nov. 25, 2015), to Emily Toews and Bryce Miller, North Star Mennonite, Drake, Sask.

Neufeldt—Davis Andrew (b. Nov. 1, 2015), to Andrew Neufeldt and Lisa Doepker, Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Pauls—Michaela June (b. Nov. 26, 2015), to Laura and Matt Pauls, Hope Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Reesor-Keller—Isaac Jay (b. Nov. 20, 2015), to Leah and Luke Reesor-Keller, Erb Street Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Stephenson—Pace Beckett (b. Oct. 31, 2015), to Kristin and Landon Stephenson, Arnaud Mennonite, Man.

Witzel—Bryson James (b. Nov. 17, 2015), to Laura and Brad Witzel, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Baptisms

Paige Elliott, Jordan Drocholl, Joshua Drocholl, Pat Armstrong, Chandra Swan—Cedar Valley Mennonite, Mission, B.C., July 19, 2015.

Ian Osmond—Osler Mennonite, Sask., Nov. 15, 2015.

Marriages

Bean/Leis—Adam Bean and Candace Leis, East Zorra

Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont., Oct. 24, 2015.

Guenther/Woelke—George Guenther and Tina Woelke, at Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Nov. 14, 2015.

Pankratz/Peters—Michael Pankratz and Amanda Peters, at Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg, Oct. 3, 2015.

Deaths

Brubacher—Olive, 99 (b. March 31, 1916; d. Oct. 31, 2015), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

Dyck—Margaret, 70 (b. Dec. 14, 1944; d. Nov. 23, 2015), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Dyck—Hank, 85 (d. Nov. 14, 2015), Zion Mennonite, Swift Current, Sask.

Enns—Susan (nee Penner), 92 (b. May 10, 1923; d. Nov. 22, 2015), Arnaud Mennonite, Man.

Friesen—Justina, 95 (b. July 31, 1920; d. Nov. 30, 2015), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

Froese—Mary Viola (nee Reinke), 89 (b. Feb. 6, 1926; d. Nov. 5, 2015), Emmanuel Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.

Isaac—Herbert, 87 (b. Aug. 2, 1928; d. Oct. 19, 2015), St. Catharines United Mennonite, Ont.

Janzen—Theodore Louis, 89 (b. Oct. 24, 1926; d. Nov. 26, 2015), Bergthal Mennonite, Didsbury, Alta.

Klassen—Paul, 90 (b. Oct. 14, 1925; d. Nov. 17, 2015), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Lang—Tracey (nee Dyck), 26 (b. March 21, 1989; d. Sept. 12, 2015), Hanley Mennonite, Sask.

Reimer—Gerhard, 85 (b. July 2, 1930; d. Oct. 27, 2015), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Rempel—Katharina, 102 (b. Dec. 19, 1912; d. Dec. 4, 2015), St. Catharines United Mennonite, Ont.

Wiebe—Helen (nee Ens), 84 (b. Jan. 29, 1931; d. Oct. 4, 2015), formerly of Olivet Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.

A moment from yesterday



Second World War conscientious objectors (COs) were often sent to provincial parks for manual labour, as part of their alternative service assignments. This photo, taken between 1941-45, depicts Mennonite men getting dressed in their winter clothes around the warmth of a wood stove. Smoke from the stove, with laundry hanging from the rafters, can be seen in the background. Typical work assignments at CO camps included tree planting, cutting firewood and clearing brush near highways. This bunkhouse photo is from Montreal River, Ont.

Text: Korey Dyck / Mennonite Heritage Centre

Photo: John P. Dyck / Mennonite Heritage Centre



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PERSONAL REFLECTION

On seeing eye to ear

GEORGE EPP

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

Grandma sees her granddaughter sunning herself in her backyard wearing only a scanty bikini.

“You let your girl go outside like that?” she challenges her daughter-in-law.

“Why not?”

“It’s just not right, letting the whole world see you practically naked!”

To Granny, the argument is simple, obvious and grounded in the wisdom of the ages, the Bible and the traditions of her Mennonite upbringing. Modesty is next to cleanliness, cleanliness is next to godliness.

“Oh, Mom,” scolds the daughter-in-law. “Get with the times. Nobody thinks anything of it anymore!”

“I think it’s wrong, no matter what everybody else thinks.”

Grandma has what we call “values”; we all have them. They guide us when we’re faced with choices. The granddaughter values a great tan, her mother values liberality in dress and child-rearing, and Grandma values modesty. Of course, the mother also values modesty and appearance, but her values are in a different order of urgency than Grandma’s.

This family impasse is mirrored in our country and its churches regarding the status of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) people. Simply put, inclusive people assume that the promotion of fairness and equality as a right rank higher than the other values like respect for authority-honouring traditions. On the flip side, where respect for authority and the honouring of tradition are seen as preeminent values, fairness and equality must bow to this higher authority, the loftier tradition.

What is vital if we’re to get past the “I’m right and I can prove it, and you’re wrong and what are you thinking?” stage, is that we determine to understand that values become engrained in our subconscious through a variety of influences and that

when we evaluate the right and wrong of a given situation, our response is predictably going to reflect our value system.

So how do you assess and make judgments on new situations, and where did your values come from? Each of us has parents, extended families, siblings, school and playground peers, teachers, books, television, movies, churches with preachers and Sunday schools in our backgrounds. This collection of influences has shaped our value systems and the order in which our values appear.

Over time, some changes have occurred—conservatives have gradually come to think more liberally and the reverse—but in general we are more like

So how do you assess and make judgments on new situations, and where did your values come from?

riders on elephants that go where they will while we ride on their heads and seek ways to justify our elephant’s choices. I’m sure that’s oversimplified, but the principle seems to have merit. The person with whom we disagree has an excellent reason for his position: He can do no other at present because his elephant won’t allow it.

The suggestion coming from this paradigm is simple: Only the passage of time and the march of new experiences can alter our subconscious worldview, and that only very gradually. In the case of LGBTQ inclusion in the church as equals, I think we’ve already established that the forced rearranging of values on the individual level is a project not worth pursuing; it hasn’t happened despite our best efforts or our most persuasive debating.

Let’s go back to the simple example with which I started. Three women—who love each other dearly—disagree. Grandma wishes the granddaughter

would come in and get properly dressed. Mother is okay with sunning in a bikini in the backyard. The granddaughter is highly influenced by values of her peers; her appearance is an urgent matter, as it generally is to adolescents.

Their disagreement is not, however, likely to break up the family, although if turned into a “wedge issue” it could introduce that iciness into their relationships that does a great deal of unnecessary harm.

In one of the Mennonite heartlands in America, where I’m living temporarily, breaking up of families of Christ’s church seems to be the flavour of the century. In a congregation or an area church, if we’re not inclined to recognize that people who favour full, unconditional inclusion are convinced that this is the will of God in our age, wedging fellowships apart is the predictable result. On the other hand, the inclusive—but with conditions—church must be recognized for the legitimacy of their stance: the orderliness and obedience to authority that is central to their worldview is not negotiable, not now.

I see only one viable alternative. We need Mennonite churches that welcome LGBTQ people to remain in good standing in their area churches, while those with conditions on inclusion also find a way to remain inside them. This scenario is a compromise for everyone, but LGBTQ Christians who are led to remain church-active need places to be fully at home, and those for whom such inclusion is troubling also need a place where they can feel loved and at home.

As long as we remain focussed on our primary values as followers of Christ—to be the hands and feet of the kingdom he is seeking to establish on earth—no troubling distractions will bring us down. . . . Unless we let them.

Please don’t go. ❧

George Epp is a former moderator of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan and a member of Eigenheim Mennonite Church, Rosthern.

GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

Being a Faithful Church (BFC) Task Force:

Final draft recommendation for July, 2016 Assembly

The final document of the BFC Task Force, including its four-part recommendation to the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly 2016, is now available for review and response. It has been sent to all MC Canada congregations and is available on the MC Canada website.

The document is called “Being a Faithful Church 7: Summary and Recommendation on Sexuality 2009-2015.” The BFC Task Force believes that the following four-part recommendation accurately reflects the feedback from congregations over the seven-year process:

First, we affirm that one of our foundations of unity has been the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. We recommend that it continue to serve the church in the ways suggested on page 8 in the Introduction of the *Confession* itself. (The *Confession* in that paragraph states that it serves the church as a guideline for the interpretation of Scripture, in providing guidance for belief and practice, in building a foundation for unity, as an outline for instruction and teaching, in updating interpretations of belief and practice, and in helping in the discussion of Mennonite belief and practice in the wider circle of faith.)

Second, we call upon our family of Christ to respectfully acknowledge that there are those among us (congregations and individuals) whose careful study of Scripture and prayerful journey of discernment led them to a different understanding on committed same-sex relationships than is commonly assumed by the reading of Article 19 in our *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.

Third, we recommend that we create space/leave room within our Body to test alternative understandings from those of the larger Body to see if they are a prophetic nudging of the Spirit of God.

Fourth, since continued discernment



will be required after Assembly 2016, we recommend that Mennonite Church Canada and Area Churches develop a mechanism to monitor the implementation of this recommendation.

The BFC Task Force is not requiring further responses to this recommendation before the Assembly in July, 2016. However, if there are further responses that you would like the BFC Task Force to hear before Assembly 2016, these are very welcome. Such feedback—received before February 15, 2016—will be seriously considered in determining whether or not another draft of the Final Recommendation is required before Assembly 2016.

The BFC Task Force understands that its mandate and work will end at Assembly 2016. Further processes needed beyond Assembly 2016 will be defined by the MC Canada General Board.

Discernment and testing of divergent voices is the ongoing vocation of the church. As a Body, we have discerned that intentional space is needed over a longer period of time to “test” the differing voices that are among us. This path recognizes that at any given time there will likely be majority and minority understandings of key matters of Christian faith and practice. By recommending the need for “testing space,” our Body has expressed its confidence that God’s Spirit will be with us and will guide us. This confidence in the Spirit affirms that being like-minded and the exclusion of difference are not the only two alternatives for the Church. We can be united in our common quest for faithfulness even when different understandings arise. This does not mean that the whole Body approves every alternate

understanding. It does mean that we are committed to provide more space within our national Church, our Area Churches, and congregations to test alternative understandings to see if they are a nudging of the Spirit of God. This work of creating space/leaving room within our Body to test alternative understanding will be done in the interface between the congregations and other levels of the church as suggested in the monitoring mechanism of this recommendation.

The recommendation does not indicate exactly how such space would be created, nor how it would be monitored. These are determinations that take us beyond the mandate of the present Task Force. Neither does the recommendation suggest that all parts of the church would be obliged to do the same thing. The recommendation does assume, however, that differences will not easily divide us. We will continue to walk these paths of discernment together.

The Task Force invites all MC Canada congregations and Area Churches to continue in fervent prayer, serious study, and respectful dialogue as we consider the recommendation before us. The Task Force also invites further responses if concerns or questions arise that require further consideration. These responses can be emailed to wmetzger@mennonitechurch.ca before February 15, 2016. ☞

/// Briefly noted

Lancaster Conference votes to leave MC U.S.A.

With a vote of 82 percent, credentialed leaders in Lancaster Mennonite Conference (LMC) voted to leave Mennonite Church U.S.A. The conference will now enter a two-year implementation period of withdrawal. Back in July, Keith Weaver, LMC’s conference minister, sent a letter to LMC leaders informing them of the proposal suggesting withdrawal from MC U.S.A. Since then, more than 1,800 people attended LMC listening meetings to offer information and gather feedback. More than 700 attendees filled out response sheets afterward. On Oct. 23, the Bishop Board affirmed the proposal.

—*The Mennonite*

Winkler church leaves as conference continues balancing act

STORY AND PHOTO BY WILL BRAUN

Senior writer

WINKLER, MAN.

The Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church notified Mennonite Church Manitoba and Mennonite Church Canada in late November that it would withdraw from the conferences as of the end of 2015.

The church's interim pastor, Jake Doell, declined to comment for the record, but the congregation had indicated earlier that it was not pleased with how the conference was dealing with same-sex issues. It had been critical that conference leaders did not clearly state personal positions in favour of the traditional view.

Ken Warkentin, executive director of MC Manitoba, again declined to state his personal opinion, saying the church is in a time of discernment "and we have chosen to do this congregationally according to our polity and historical practice." This is

Area churches and congregations are left to determine how they "create space for testing alternative understandings which might be a prophetic nudging of the Spirit of God."

part of an ambitious balancing act that conference leaders have undertaken.

The official position of MC Canada is twofold. First, "God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life." Second, MC Canada "acknowledges" that some churches "have been led to a different understanding" after "careful study of Scripture and a prayerful journey of discernment." Area churches and congregations are left to determine how they "create space for testing alternative understandings which might be a prophetic nudging of the Spirit of God."

This position—an outcome of the Being

a Faithful Church (BFC) process—will be put before delegates at the July assembly in Saskatoon.

Last fall, MC Manitoba presented its delegates with a document designed to clarify its approach to same-sex matters and the differing views among congregations. The criteria for congregational membership with MC Manitoba is "substantial agreement with the *Confession of Faith* [in a Mennonite Perspective] and each tenet therein." That confession includes the one man, one woman position quoted above.

While recognizing that agreement will never be absolute among all members, the question remains: what constitutes "substantial agreement?" The conference is mandated to "address cases" that "raise the question of 'substantial agreement.'"

The nine recommendations presented in the document include urging congregations to seek unity, to hold off on finalizing decisions until the nearly seven-year-old BFC process is complete, to be welcoming of people who are same-sex attracted, and to remain in substantial agreement with the Confession.

The document summarizes some of the BFC findings, stating that a "significant majority" of responses from MC Canada members reflect the traditional view as expressed in the Confession, but that does not mean people see it as a deal-breaker. "Responses express a desire to be more compassionate and welcoming of those



individuals who are same-sex attracted," the document states and says that differences should not lead to division.

It continues to say that significantly smaller sets of BFC respondents occupy either end of the spectrum, one opposing any visiting of the traditional view and the other wishing for full inclusion of same-sex members.

None of this was sufficient for the Winkler Bergthaler church, the largest and oldest MC Canada church in Winkler, dating back to 1895. Warkentin is deeply saddened by the departure, saying that not only he, but also other MC Manitoba congregations, have valued the relationship with the Winkler Bergthaler church. "I love this church," he said.

While declining to share the letter the church sent to him, or the amount the church has donated to the conference in the past, he said they have been "very generous."

The Plum Coulee Bergthaler Mennonite Church, several miles down the road from Winkler, withdrew from the conferences earlier in 2015 for similar reasons.

With these two departures, contrasted by a same-sex wedding at an MC Manitoba church on Dec. 31, 2015, conference leaders and delegates will face an important challenge at the assembly next summer. ☸

Historical society adds stories to the peace narrative

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent

SASKATOON

Most Canadian Mennonites have not experienced war first-hand or had their pacifist beliefs tested, but the stories of those who have are an important part of the peace narrative. To address this, the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan hosted an afternoon of storytelling at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon on Nov. 15, to which 140 people came.

Mae Poppoff, a member of the Doukhobor Society of Saskatchewan, told how her ancestors lived in Crimea, where land was fertile and they enjoyed peaceable relations with their neighbours. When the Russian government introduced conscription, the Doukhobors felt their faith was being challenged. They could not take up arms against fellow human beings, whom they viewed as brothers and sisters.

On June 29, 1895, they built bonfires and burned their government-issued firearms. This act of defiance led to severe persecution. Poppoff's grandfather was sent to a prison camp. But those sympathetic to the Doukhobor cause, including Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, advocated on their behalf. Four years later, the Russian government permitted 7,500 Doukhobors to emigrate to Canada.

Today, said Poppoff, Doukhobors throughout western Canada commemorate the Burning of the Arms each year on June 29, praising God for their ancestors' vision of peace.

Walter Klaassen, an Anabaptist scholar and historian, began the second narrative by stating, "On April 2, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. That is one of the reasons why I'm here today."

Klaassen's grandfather Jacob and his brother Michael were farmers in Bessie, Okla. Not granted an exemption from the draft they sought, Michael's son John and about 50 other young Mennonite men were conscripted into military service. When they refused to wear uniforms or cooperate

with their commanding officers, the men were abused, tortured and eventually court-martialled. John was sentenced to 25 years in Leavenworth military prison in Kansas.

"This was a sign for Jacob Klaassen and four or five other families to take action," said Klaassen. Jacob sent two of his sons north to Canada, where Mennonites had military exemptions. Eventually, Jacob sold his farm in Oklahoma and secretly left for Canada with the rest of his family. Other families followed. They settled close to Eigenheim Mennonite Church, near Rosthern, Sask.

Less than a generation later, another world war challenged Mennonites to faithfulness. Leonard Doell, historian and historical society board member, told of several Holdeman families, members of the Church of God in Christ Mennonite, who served time in jail during the Second World War. Among them were the Unruh and Becker families who lived in the Waldheim and Hague areas.

Around 1940, the Canadian government passed legislation requiring everyone aged 16 and older to register. The Holdeman families felt they could not comply. Citing a journal written by a member of the group, Doell read, "Because we could not obey God's laws and people's laws, we refused to register."

Members were arrested and taken to court in Hague, where they were fined for non-compliance. They paid the fines and were released, but were arrested and charged a second time. This time they did not pay the fines and were sentenced to jail. Both men and women served time. So conscientious were they that on completing their sentences, "these families sent money to reimburse the government for their food and lodging while in jail," said Doell, adding, "Their money order was returned."

Lyle Stucky, a farmer in the Osler area who was born near Moundridge, Kan., added his story to the peace narrative. When he turned 18, the U.S. was at war in Vietnam. He registered for the draft,



Mae Poppoff, a member of the Doukhobor Society of Saskatchewan, displays a picture depicting the Burning of the Arms at the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan's recent 'Stories of Peace' event in Saskatoon.

as required by law, but sought exemption based on his religious beliefs. From 1966-70, Stucky attended Bethel College in North Newton, Kan. During that time, people from the community who were angered by the Mennonite school's pacifist stance assaulted Bethel students and vandalized the college campus.

"In January 1970, four months from completing my education degree at Bethel College," said Stucky, "I was drafted and agreed to do two years of alternative service." Those two years were spent in Minneapolis, Minn., where he and his new wife, Linda, lived in a voluntary service unit administered by the General Conference Mennonite Church.

Stucky worked as a caseworker and counsellor at the Minneapolis City Workhouse Prison. "I experienced some harassment [from staff who were veterans], but also had discussions with some of them about Christianity and the peace position," he said.

Reflecting on the afternoon, Jake Buhler, president of the historical society, said, "Today, warfare continues. There is tension today between loyalty to our nation and loyalty to our God." ❧

For more photos and a video, visit canadianmennonite.org/peace-stories-sask.

Sword, struggle and shalom

Symposium features Mennonite peace theme

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

B.C. Correspondent
LANGLEY, B.C.

The morning after the Paris bombing and three days after Remembrance Day, some 30 people gathered at Trinity Western University (TWU) for a symposium on “War, Peace and the Struggle for Shalom.”

The Nov. 14 all-day event was sponsored by TWU’s Anabaptist-Mennonite Centre for Faith and Learning (AMCFL) and ACTS Seminaries. Among the six presenters were faculty members from two Mennonite Church Canada institutions: Derek Suderman from Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont., and Gareth Brandt from Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, B.C.

Suderman noted that out of the four types of psalms in the Bible—hymn, confession, thanksgiving and lament—the psalms of lament number almost one third but are often overlooked.

“The purpose of lament,” said Suderman, “is not to complain but rather to speak out when things aren’t right and to call for a change. The goal of lament is to establish or re-establish peace.”

The vast majority of the psalms not only speak to God, but about God, Suderman said. “When reading the psalms, we can ask, ‘Who is the audience? Who might pray such a prayer today?’ Most psalms talk not only to God but to other people.”

Giving a brief history of the Anabaptist movement, Brandt focussed on the disastrous Münster rebellion of 1534, resulting in torture and execution for radical Anabaptist leaders. Calling this the “most violent event in Anabaptist history,” Brandt asked, “Why do human beings do such violence when Jesus . . . abolished violence centuries earlier?”

Ironically, the aftermath of the violent events in that city led to the growth of Anabaptism, Brandt explained. Dutch priest Menno Simons was concerned about the blasphemy committed in

Münster and began to give leadership to the early Anabaptist movement. “Without Münster we may not have Menno,” he said.

Other speakers for the day included J. Janzen on “Making Peace with Force: Rethinking Anabaptist Mennonite Nonresistance,” Dorothy Peters on “The Sword—Sheathed and Unsheathed in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” Kyung Beak on “The Sword-in-the-Mouth of Jesus the King: Declarations of War and Peace in the Gospel of Matthew,” and Bruce Guenther on “Mennonites and Peacemaking: Tensions in Theology and Practice.”

Launched one year ago, the AMCFL at Trinity Western is an initiative of the Mennonite Faith and Learning Society. It



A panel discussion that covered many aspects of peacemaking concluded a symposium at Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C. on Nov. 14. Among the presenters were Derek Suderman, left, associate professor of religious studies at Conrad Grebel University College, and Gareth Brandt, professor of practical theology at Columbia Bible College, centre. At right is J. Janzen, pastor at Highland Community Church, Abbotsford.

is TWU’s first university-based research centre for the study of the integration of faith and learning from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective. ☘



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Staff changes

Pastoral transitions in Ontario

• **Jan Steckley** has transitioned from full-time pastor at Hillcrest Mennonite Church in New Hamburg, to half-time at Hillcrest and half-time with Mennonite Church Eastern Canada as ReLearning Community coordinator. The role of the coordinator is to provide leadership, administrative support and coordination to the various aspects of the ReLearning Community project with 3DM Europe, under the direction of the mission minister. Steckley earned a certificate in spiritual formation from Eastern Mennonite Seminary in 2007, and a master of theological studies degree from Conrad Grebel University College in 2011. She first explored ministry at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont., for two years, followed by two years as assistant pastor, a half-time position she and her husband Jeff



shared. She then served as associate pastor at Breslau (Ont.) Mennonite Church from 1989-98, and Hillcrest Mennonite, where she has served since 1998.

• **Doug Schulz** began as outreach worker at Grace Mennonite Church in St. Catharines on Sept. 1, 2015. His focus is on engaging congregants in local-to-global mission initiatives and encouraging them to reach out to others to encourage participation in the worship, fellowship and mission. In his first two months the primary focus was on developing a Syrian family refugee sponsorship partnership with the Masjid Al Noor mosque in St. Catharines. He has a bachelor of religious studies degree from the former Mennonite Brethren Bible College, Winnipeg, a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Winnipeg, a bachelor of education degree from the University of Western Ontario, and a degree from Mennonite Biblical Seminary.



• **Susan Kennel Harrison** became the minister of Windsor Mennonite Fellowship on Sept. 6, 2015. She pastored at Evanston (Ill.) Mennonite Church, and served as interim/supply pastor at Grace Community Church, Chicago, and at Warden Woods Mennonite Church and Jane-Finch Community, both in Toronto. In addition, she has been supply preaching in Mennonite, United Church of Canada, Presbyterian and Anglican churches for over two decades. She has a bachelor's degree from Goshen (Ind.) College; a master of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.; and a master of theology degree from Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto. She is a doctoral candidate in theology at Emmanuel, writing her thesis on how peace theology contributes to a theology of religions.



—BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Staff changes

Pastoral transitions in Saskatchewan

• **Patty Friesen** was installed as pastor of Osler Mennonite in Oct., 2015, after completing a year as interim pastor. Before coming to Osler, Friesen served as chaplain at the Mennonite Nursing Home in Rosthern for six years.



• **Rod Suderman** assumed pastoral duties at First Mennonite in Saskatoon on Nov. 2. Since 2006, Suderman and his wife, Kathi, served with Mennonite Central Committee as Northeast Asia representatives, based in Beijing. Though he has spent a total of 16 years overseas, Suderman is no stranger to



MC Saskatchewan, having served as pastor of Aberdeen Mennonite from 1992 to 1998.

• **Abe Buhler** is retiring effective Jan. 3, 2016, after serving Zoar Mennonite in Langham for over eight of his 40 years in ministry. Buhler and his wife, Janet, will return to British Columbia, where their family resides.



• **Ric Driediger** has been hired by Zoar Mennonite in Langham as interim pastor. Driediger, who owns and operates Churchill River Canoe Outfitters, will serve until May 1, 2016, when canoe season begins.



• **Herman Wiebe** will be retiring from a long career in ministry at the end of March 2016. In his 31-year career, Wiebe served

Eyebrow Mennonite, North Star Mennonite in Drake, Zoar Mennonite in Langham, and for the past seven years, Zion Mennonite in Swift Current. Wiebe looks forward to possible involvement with Mennonite Disaster Service, and says, "Retirement isn't a stop sign; you're just changing lanes."



• **Lois Bukar** will assume pastoral duties from Herman Wiebe in April, 2016. Bukar has served several terms with MCC, teaching in Christian schools. She served as pastor of Wideman Mennonite Church in Markham, Ont., from 2010 to 2013. Currently, Bukar teaches English as a second language in Lethbridge, Alta.



—BY DONNA SCHULZ

Staff change

New Anabaptist Learning Workshop

WATERLOO, ONT.— Matthew Bailey-Dick has been appointed coordinator of the new Anabaptist Learning Workshop (ALW), a church and ministry certificate program of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and Conrad Grebel University College. The workshop will offer a regular rotation of non-formal workshops, grant certificates for those who want to pursue this option, and facilitate creative and interactive educational experiences. Workshops will be offered in a variety of locations for both lay people and church leaders. Bailey-Dick has completed a master of arts degree in peace studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind. He is completing his doctorate in adult education and community development at the University of Toronto and attends Erb St. Mennonite Church, Waterloo, with his family.
—Mennonite Church Eastern Canada



Staff changes

New MDS director

Ross Penner, 54, of Winnipeg, began working as director of Region V operations at the Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) office in Winnipeg. Penner most recently spent two years in Bangladesh, where he worked with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and then World Vision. He had been lead pastor at Vineland United Mennonite Church, Ont., and prior to that served as lead pastor at Glencairn Mennonite Brethren Church, Kitchener, Ont., and Hepburn Mennonite Brethren Church, Sask. Penner succeeds Janet Plenert who, with her husband Steve, has accepted a service assignment with MCC in Bolivia beginning in 2016.
—Mennonite Disaster Service



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How Mennonite education can contribute toward the “healing of the nations”—seminary president Sara Wenger Shenk reflects on the most urgent work for Anabaptist schools in these troubled times.

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The people of Halle, Germany, are responding to the influx of refugees by offering practical help and building relationships with the newcomers, in the name of Jesus.

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MDS project directors deeply rooted in service

Canadians Peter and Susan Thiessen bring a tradition of service and years of experience to their current roles with Mennonite Disaster Service.

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GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Manitoba unveils restorative justice strategy as jails bulge

BY WILL BRAUN
Senior Writer

Manitoba, which leads all provinces in putting people behind bars, also wants to lead in restorative justice programming.

Its new Restorative Justice Act and an accompanying five-year plan aim to increase referrals to alternative justice programs by at least 30 percent—from about 4,000 annually to 5,200—over five years. The plan comes with \$320,000 in new funding in 2016. That represents an 18-percent increase in provincial spending on restorative justice. Overall, Justice Department spending tops \$500 million annually.

What's less clear is how the act—the first of its kind in Canada—relates to a justice system in crisis.

Restorative justice focusses less on punishment than reconciling offenders with victims and the community. It forces offenders to recognize, and take responsibility for, the effects of their actions. In many cases it is better at reducing repeat offences than traditional means.

Among other programs, Manitoba's plan will expand mediation options as an alternative to court proceedings, and expand mental health courts and drug courts, which focus on rehabilitation and treatment. These programs will be used only in cases deemed appropriate by authorities. Much of the focus is on indigenous communities.

Gord Mackintosh, justice minister for Manitoba's NDP government, said in a phone interview that the new measures "send a very clear message that restorative justice needs to be institutionalized as one of the core features" of the justice system. He says that, when used in appropriate cases, it makes society safer and attends more effectively to victims' needs.

Of the new money, \$10,000 will go to Candace House, a victim-support initiative headed by Wilma Derksen, whose daughter Candace was abducted and murdered in 1984. However, the plan does not include new funds



Manitoba's Headingly Correctional Centre was established in 1931.

for Circles of Support and Accountability, another project with Mennonite ties.

John Hutton, a former Mennonite Central Committee volunteer who heads the John Howard Society of Manitoba, says the province desperately needs alternatives to a system that isn't economically or socially sustainable. Manitoba incarcerates a higher proportion of its population than any other province, more than double the national average. The system is clogged, backlogged and costly. The provincial auditor general predicts the prison population will double between 2014 and 2020, despite the fact that crime rates are dropping.

Most dire is the situation of indigenous people. The 1991 report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry—which was called after a police shooting of an unarmed indigenous man and was co-chaired by Justice Murray Sinclair—began thus: "The justice system has failed Manitoba's aboriginal people on a massive scale." That year, about 46 percent of the prison population in Manitoba was indigenous. Today it is 70 percent, although they account for less than 17 percent of Manitobans.

Mackintosh says he expects the new measures will have a positive impact on incarceration rates in the longer term and ease some stress on the court system in

the short term, but the government has shied away from presenting its new plan as a cost-saver or as part of a broader strategy to address the overwhelming stress facing the justice system.

By contrast, influential conservatives in the U.S.—many under the banner of Right on Crime—are pushing for less incarceration and more treatment as a cheaper and more effective path to public safety.

The Restorative Justice Act stands in awkward contrast to the Manitoba NDP's support of Stephen Harper's tough-on-crime agenda, including public backing of Bill C-10, the 2012 omnibus crime bill that brought in stricter mandatory minimum sentencing and other measures generally considered counter to restorative justice principles. Within a year, that bill increased the number of people incarcerated in Manitoba by 25 percent, according to Hutton.

Since 2008, the province has spent \$182 million to add 651 beds behind bars. If the auditor general is correct, another 2,744 beds will be needed within five years.

Despite that, Mackintosh says changes to Bill C-10 were not on his agenda when he met recently with new federal justice minister, Jody Wilson-Raybould.

Some analysts say justice funds would be better spent on employment programs with a proven track record of improving the lives of former inmates and keeping them from re-offending. Hutton agrees that employment is an essential part of the solution in terms of helping people stay out of trouble.

While larger questions loom, Manitoba's restorative justice initiatives were welcomed by advocates and indigenous leaders alike, many of whom attended the announcement last November.

Mackintosh says of restorative justice that its "time has come." Or perhaps its time has come back, because, as he notes, its concepts are rooted deeply in the cultures of indigenous people.

As the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry report pointed out 25 years ago, while changes to courts, policing and jails are crucial, "far more important" is a fundamental transformation of the relationship between aboriginal people and the rest of society. Aboriginal people, it stated, deserve "justice in its broadest sense." Restoration must extend well beyond the justice system. ❧

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MENNONITE CHURCH EASTERN CANADA



Members of First Hmong Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont., pose with children of a village in Thailand. Members of the Canadian congregation went on a mission trip to the country their families had left 40 years ago as refugees.

Treasure in Thailand

Stepping out of their comfort zone to minister on their former home turf

BY LISA WILLIAMS

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

“I wanted to see what God can do with me and how he might use me,” said Gao Hlee Vang of First Hmong Mennonite Church, in Kitchener, Ont., reflecting on her congregation’s mission trip to Thailand last summer. Twenty-three people participated in the trip.

Teaching English in local schools, offering vacation Bible school in the evenings for children, and providing school and health kits are some of the things that First Hmong Mennonite Church did when they visited small towns and villages, and even an orphanage.

Several members of the church have roots in Thailand. Many fled Southeast Asia and arrived in Canada as “boat people” in the 1970s. A few generations later, the group travelling from the church included those who had left as refugees, but also those who have only heard stories from parents or grandparents about life in Thailand.

“We felt that it was time for us to step out of our comfort zone and fulfill what Jesus has asked us to do,” said Chung Vang, one of the organizers. “Our congregation has been around for 30 years and we have never done something like this. I always wanted to go back to another country where people are more interested in Christ. In this country we are so rich and busy. We have no time for Christ. There, you can talk for hours with people and you can see that they are hungry for Christ.”

While the young people taught, the others went into the village and visited with whomever they met, talking with them about the gospel, listening to them and praying with them. The villages were high in the mountains, and the local people were excited to receive visitors.

While the young people on the mission trip stayed together in congregational buildings, the older members stayed in

people’s homes within the villages.

“Sleeping and life in the villages was hard,” Gao Hlee said. “I have heard my parents talk about life in the villages, but now I actually experienced it. You appreciate and understand what your parents went through—not fully what your parents experienced, but you understand just a little bit more.”

Chung Vang added, “It was different for me. I used to live like that, but don’t any more. It was hard returning to those memories.”

Reflecting on the trip, Gao Hlee said, “The first village we went to was the remotest. I think it was there that most of us left our hearts,” adding, “You feel like you are going there to help them. When you get there, you realize they are actually helping you!”

It has been a year since the group went to Thailand and poured their energy into the country from which many in their congregation had come. “It gives our congregation a good perspective,” Gao Hlee said. “We do need to share the gospel when we can and allow Christ to use us. I would love to go back.” ❧

This story appeared originally in the fall 2015 issue of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada’s Sprout publication. See more photos online at canadianmennonite.org/treasure-in-thailand.



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/// Briefly noted

Goertzen featured as CO in local newspaper

DIDSBURY, Alta.—“How could we stop Hitler? Was the war against him a just war?” Henry Goertzen reflected 70 years later in an interview with the *Didsbury Review* as part of the Remembrance Day edition, Nov. 10. As a member of the Bergthal Mennonite Church, Goertzen has been collecting stories of Alberta Mennonites who were Conchie—conscientious objectors—during the Second World War. He recalled the story of Christmas Day in one sector of the battle when Germans and the British sang Christmas songs together. Then they were given orders to get back into the trenches and start shooting at each other again. Another story concerns Siegfried Bartel, an immigrant Mennonite who had been an officer in the German army in the First World War and had come to Alberta. “The possibility of being in the Second World War was that he might kill some of his own (German) church members shocked him really seriously.” Goertzen also noted the extreme suffering both of his family and his wife’s (Erna Warkentin) in Ukraine trying to evade the bandits of the Whites and Reds who fought each other in a bloody civil war to decide whether the Communists or the Czarists would govern Russia. He also referenced other pacifists church groups such as the Molokans and Doukhobors who separated from the Russian Orthodox Church and burned their rifles as a symbol of their opposition to church-sanctioned participation in war. In Canada, he noted the 75-member United Church splinter group calling themselves “Witness against War,” including several on the prairies and in Alberta, who continue to advocate for Christian pacifism. Goertzen, the longest-living member at Bergthal, started the Mennonite Historical Archive in Calgary in 1985 and was the initiator of the first Mennonite Central Committee relief sale in Didsbury.

—DICK BENNER, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

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GOD AT WORK IN US

Taking off the mask

'Erin is a beautiful butterfly, testing her wings in what sometimes seems to be an unforgiving world,' says Alma Wiebe of her transgender daughter

BY RACHEL BERGEN

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

Childhood is all about the endless possibilities, the dreams that will come true if you wish hard enough.

Erin Wiebe's childhood was no different in those ways. She knew if she wished hard enough, the dream of her outside appearance matching the way she saw herself would become a reality. Every night, Erin says she wished she would wake up a girl.

In fact, Erin was born with a gender variance: she is transgender, identifying as female, as opposed to the male sex biologically assigned to her at birth.

Being transgender wasn't her choice, nor was it a result of the way she was raised. Scientific evidence presented in a 2008 BBC online story maintains that people experience gender variances because of genetic differences, brain structure and function, and exposure to certain hormones in utero.

"Like you, my gender identity is an innate, fixed part of who I am," Erin says. "I can do no more to change it than I can my race."

On her 15th birthday, everything changed for Erin. She recalls being at her grandparents' home in Alberta. She woke up on a Sunday morning to her family getting ready for church. She stepped in the shower and realized her dreams wouldn't come true.

"I was 15 and terrified of what male puberty was doing to my body. I began to resign myself to the harsh reality that had suddenly replaced my childhood innocence," she says. "I was trapped in this body. I would never wake up the next morning in the body that I needed. No amount of wishing would change the situation, and I began to hate myself."

Erin says she wore a metaphorical mask,

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WIEBE FAMILY



Erin Wiebe

hiding her true identity and projecting a false self that was more socially acceptable in her community, for the better part of her life. In fact, she didn't tell anyone about her struggle until she was nearly 40.

"I made the decision to forever lock that part of me away because there was nothing I could do about it," she says. "I was ashamed and I felt that everyone would think I was a pervert or something. I was so afraid. For all I knew, I was the only one in the world that felt this way."

Love and marriage

Even when Erin met a woman, fell in love and got married, she didn't reveal her true self to anyone, not even herself. Erin met her wife when she was 16. They got married when Erin was 20 and had a child together.

"When I got married, I thought, 'If I try, maybe I can manage to be what she needs me to be and what society expects of me,'" she says, but she couldn't.

she says, but she couldn't.

Erin loved her wife and their son, but she suffered crippling depression. She had nobody to talk to about her gender crisis and difficulty accessing resources. This is common in the trans community

Erin also realized she had a false impression of other trans people. "My own ideas about transgender people were highly skewed and ill informed," she says. "I had no experience or exposure to others like me. I thought being trans was to be like drag queens: flamboyant and highly sexualized. They were the type of people you would see at Mardi Gras, not walking down the street. I soon realized I had many of my own trans-phobic issues to work through if I was to explore my gender identity authentically."

"I was so ashamed. I didn't want to risk everything by telling my wife," she says.

Erin's bouts of depression intensified and became more frequent. They became so bad that she isolated herself and contemplated suicide nearly every day.

One day, Erin saw a group of high school girls talking and laughing with each other. "I suddenly realized I'd never experience the freedom these girls enjoyed and took so much for granted. To simply be yourself, to laugh and enjoy yourself effortlessly with a group of friends. I fell apart inside. I broke down and wept. I knew then that I was at a point where I either had to do something about it or I was afraid I would just go out on the highway and drive into oncoming traffic. I was so close."

Coming out

Finally, Erin worked up the courage to do something about it.

It was 2010. Erin put her son to bed and sat her wife down to talk. "I told her, 'I'm transgender.' I thought if I presented all the evidence in the right way, we could get through it," she says. The couple went to counselling and therapy, but there was no reconciling the relationship.

Erin's parents, Art and Alma, who are members of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, say they didn't have any idea that she was suffering from a gender-identity crisis. It was a complete shock when she came out to them when she was 38.

"I had no idea how they were going to



Alma and Art Wiebe

respond,” Erin says. “My mom said, ‘You mean you’re a woman trapped in a man’s body? . . . What can we do to support you?’”

Art says they never had the closest relationship with Erin but never understood why. “Imagine misdiagnosing the real gender of your own child,” he says. “Now that the mask is off, we are proud parents to a daughter we can finally embrace. We’ve always misunderstood her,” he says.

Metamorphosis

For trans people, hormone therapy is one of the first steps in the process of transitioning into one’s true self. The same was true for Erin after she came out to her family.

She eased into it by taking testosterone blockers and small doses of estrogen.

“It’s a rather strange experience to go through a second puberty at 38,” she says. “This time, it was the right puberty. My skin softened, my breasts were growing and I grew my hair out. But more importantly, I felt an inner calm I’d never known before.”

Obvious changes to secondary sex

characteristics aside, Erin says equally important psychological changes were taking place.

Before she began taking estrogen, she says paying attention was very difficult.

“It was like standing on one side of a busy road and trying to hear a bird sing,” she says. “Everything I did demanded all of my attention and all of my energy. A few months after starting hormone replacement therapy, I realized I was able to focus my thoughts in a way I was never able to before.”

“The dysphoria I felt was beginning to ease and as my mind relaxed, the noise in my head quietened. It felt as though the traffic had ceased and I could hear the bird without effort or strain.”

The pieces started to come together, but there were still problems.

Erin says there was also a gap between how she imagined herself and how she looked. Her masculine-looking face was especially difficult for her to look at. “I would shower in the dark, shave in the dark to avoid looking at myself,” she says.

For Erin, it was important to correct the incongruence she felt between mind and body before feeling comfortable presenting herself to the world in an authentic way. In 2013, she travelled with her parents to Thailand to undergo facial feminization surgery. And in 2014 she underwent sexual reassignment surgery in Montreal, again with her parents by her side.

“I often think of Erin as a butterfly,” Alma says. “Erin is a beautiful butterfly, testing her wings in what sometimes seems to be

an unforgiving world.”

The need for support

Throughout the process, Art and Alma attended Bethel Mennonite Church and participated in its Pilgrim Group, a support group for lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) people and their families and friends. In turn, they found the strength to support their daughter through her transition process of taking off a proverbial mask.

Erin, who has not felt comfortable in the Mennonite church for many years, compares her transition to being a prisoner who has been kept in solitary confinement for her whole life. “Suddenly one day the jailer unlocks the door and says, ‘Here, you’re free to go,’” she says. “To the prisoner who hasn’t known anything other than a life lived in a horrible dark cell, how would they know how to go out and explore the world like everyone else?”

While Mennonite Church Canada is currently discerning issues of sexuality through its Being a Faithful Church process, Art and Alma believe that people suffering from gender crises need particular support.

“I feel it’s imperative that the church learns to treat transgender people, as well as homosexual people, as normal human beings who happen to have a birth variance,” Alma says. “They need to be accepted, affirmed, loved and encouraged in life, just like anyone else.”

“Our diversity isn’t an ethical or moral issue,” Erin says. “It’s just what is.” ❧

Key terms

FACIAL FEMINIZATION SURGERY: A set of reconstructive surgical procedures that alter typically male facial features to bring them closer in shape and size to typical female facial features.

GENDER: Refers to the personal sexual identity of an individual, regardless of the person’s biological and outward sex.

GENDER DYSPHORIA: The formal diagnosis used by psychologists and psychiatrists to describe people who experience significant discontent with the sex they were assigned at birth or the gender roles associated

with that sex.

GENDER VARIANT: A person who varies from the expected characteristics of the assigned gender.

SEX: A categorization based on the appearance of the genitalia at birth.

SEX REASSIGNMENT SURGERY: The surgical procedure by which a person’s physical appearance and function of his/her existing sexual characteristics are altered to resemble that of the other sex.

TRANSGENDER (OR TRANS): A term for those who identify with a gender other than the sex they were assigned at birth.

ARTBEAT

BOOK REVIEW

War is 'development in reverse'

Disarming Conflict: Why Peace Cannot be Won on the Battlefield.
By Ernie Regehr. Between the Lines Books, 2015, 217 pages.

REVIEWED BY BARB DRAPER
BOOKS & RESOURCES EDITOR

War does not resolve conflict, says Ernie Regehr in his recent book, *Disarming Conflict*. He examines the wars of the last 25 years and concludes that while military force can win battles and can cause widespread destruction, the end of conflict comes through diplomacy and the right political process. Safety for people cannot be achieved militarily because it requires a political consensus of the population, which needs to see the government as legitimate and trustworthy. Regehr declares that trying to bring military solutions to political problems almost always ends in dismal failure.

research and peace promotion based in Waterloo, Ont., Regehr has lots of experience in presenting evidence-based arguments. He advocates for avoiding armed conflict not from a Christian or theological point of view, but from simple practicality. Wars are expensive and destructive, and they generally don't deal with the problem. Only after there has been massive destruction are the combatants ready to admit that they are not winning and finally sit down to negotiate. Regehr wishes that countries would put more funding into diplomacy so that unwinnable wars could be avoided.

The book refers to the conflicts in

Regehr never argues that war is morally wrong, but over and over again he shows that it is expensive and tends to be ineffective.

Reading this book in a time of increased rhetoric about military responses to terrorism, I couldn't help but feel that it should be required reading for all political leaders. It is probably human nature to assume that if all else fails, force is the trump card that will defeat "evil," but Regehr reminds us that this is a myth. If a conflict is not solvable politically, the use of force will not solve anything. In fact, a military presence with a mission to destroy things often makes things worse.

As a co-founder of Project Ploughshares, an organization of

Afghanistan and Iraq as examples of wars where quick military defeats were followed by years and years of civil war. In the modern world, governments that get involved in armed conflicts against insurgents rarely win, and the costs of fighting are immense. In fact, "armed conflict is development in reverse," according to Regehr. He argues that human development and economic equity are more important for the security of a state than a strong military. An astute government would shift its resources to war prevention, rather than military capability.



Regehr finds hope in the fact that, as of 2015, there are no country-to-country wars and there is less violence in human society than in the past. But he points out that there are far too many civil wars, the international arms trade is far too active and worldwide military spending is near an all-time high. He doesn't seem very optimistic about a quick resolution to the conflict with Islamic State because it has not seemed interested in negotiation.

Regehr writes confidently. He has done the research and includes lots of statistics and details to strengthen his arguments. However, some of the quotations, details and definitions make it a somewhat challenging read. He includes some anecdotes, but the writing style is dense and the stories are few and far between. Regehr presents his argument from several perspectives so that, at times, it feels a bit repetitive.

On the other hand, the book is very convincing. Regehr never argues that war is morally wrong, but over and over again he shows that it is expensive and tends to be ineffective. Hopefully, political leaders around the world will be able to hear this message. ☘

Celebrating embodied incarnation

God's fleshy existence in Jesus has implications for our understandings of discipleship

BY KIM PENNER

Special to Young Voices

Who delivered the baby and laid him at Mary's breast, skin upon skin?

Was it the Innkeeper's wife?

Who cut the cord tethering him to the womb, birthing a new kind of attachment?

Was it Joseph?

Without words, the WORD becomes flesh, God with skin on!

- Don Penner, "A Christmas Eve Poem," 2013

Baby, breast, skin, cord, womb, flesh—these are words that remind us of the physicality of human existence. They are also words that connect us to Jesus, God incarnate. What are the implications of this very embodied and lived understanding of the incarnation for us as Christians?

This is not an easy question to answer. The most common use of the word "body" in Mennonite circles I'm a part of (the churches I attend and the scholarly work I engage) tends not to be an understanding of the literal, fleshy, human body, but Paul's reference to the church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). In our denominational conversations regarding sexuality, there are very few references to the actual physical bodies of particular people and/or how inequalities supported by disparate relationships of power related to gender, sexuality, age, race, class and ability impact different people differently.

In the "Being a Faithful Church" resources, for example, only five of 58 references to the body are references to the physical body of a human being. The other 53 uses

are references to the Body of Christ and/or a delegate or conference body. These numbers are striking and reveal a focus on the corporate body over the particular bodies of individual believers, thus ignoring many of the power dynamics at play in these relationships between individuals within the community of faith.

I affirm the use of the word "body" to refer to the Body of Christ (i.e. the church). However, it doesn't yet get at the answer to my earlier question regarding the very fleshy transformation of the Word in the incarnation and its implications for each of us as individual disciples with unique bodies and bodies that bare the social markers of our given society.

In addition, I find the underdeveloped attention to an embodied view of the incarnation in Mennonite theology and ethics surprising given our low Christology (affinity with Jesus' humanity). While we draw on Jesus as a moral guide with regard to most matters, we have given less consideration to how the Word made flesh has implications for discipleship.

To begin to consider the implications of an embodied view of the incarnation for discipleship, I draw here on the work of theologian Kelly Brown Douglas, who has considered the implications of an embodied view of the incarnation for the Black Christian community in America and which has implications for us as well.

These key implications are as follows:

(Continued on page 28)

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The Pietà, a Renaissance sculpture by Michelangelo, located at St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, reminds us of Jesus' physical body.



Kim Penner

(Continued from page 27)

- God is present with us through our humanity and, in this way, affirms our particular bodies in all their diversity.
- By becoming fully human, God affirms our sexuality.
- Coming to us in the particular body of a Jewish peasant living under occupation, God reveals to us God's particular presence in the experiences of the oppressed as they seek justice.
- To be a disciple of Jesus is to be motivated by God's love to enter into relationship with the rest of God's creation, including oneself, just as God became human in order to enter into relationships with us.

Let us not lose sight of the implications of God's fleshy existence in Jesus for our understandings of discipleship, particularly as they relate to conversations about

sexuality and the body.

One way of doing so would be to develop a worship ritual or practice for Christmas and/or Epiphany that seeks to grow our understanding of God's presence with us in our unique physical bodies. This ritual could do so by celebrating, for example, healthy body image (a particular need among young women in a society in which women's bodies are routinely objectified), gender diversity and equality, and a positive view of sexuality. ☸

Kim Penner, 29, is a doctoral student in theology and Christian ethics at the University of Toronto. She lives in Toronto with her partner Dylan Tarnowsky (and their cat, Max), and attends Shantz Mennonite Church in Baden, Ont. and Toronto United Mennonite Church.

Secret songs

Singer-songwriter Paul Bergman branches out

BY AARON EPP
Young Voices Editor



Anthropology was recorded over the course of four years. Bergman enlisted some of Winnipeg's top recording engineers and musicians to realize his vision.

It doesn't seem right that more people aren't familiar with singer-songwriter Paul Bergman.

Over the past 12 years, Bergman has quietly released five albums. Steeped in the tradition of songwriting legends like Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen and Tom Waits, the 32-year-old's music is carefully crafted and displays a unique voice reflecting on rural life, death and the ways people connect—or fail to connect—with their surroundings.

"He's entirely too well-kept a secret," says Darryl Neustaedter Barg, who recorded Bergman's first four albums: 2003's *Po' Lazarus*, 2005's *As For Me and My House*, 2006's *Rootbound* and 2008's *Crow Scarecrow*. "[His songs] sound so simple, but once you start paying attention to the lyrics, you realize there are some very thoughtful things going on... I've never met anybody who works as hard as he does on his songs."

Bergman released his fifth album, *Anthropology*, this past November. It's his



IMAGES COURTESY PAUL BERGMAN

"I've never met anybody who works as hard as he does on his songs," a friend says of singer-songwriter Paul Bergman.

most varied collection of songs to date. Just like his previous releases—and, as the title suggests—it's a study of humankind.

Released in the span of five years, each of Bergman's first four albums were recorded live off the floor in a matter of days. Bergman wanted to give *Anthropology* more time.

"I [told myself]... I'm not going to release

this thing until I've got a batch of songs that I feel have moved me before I can even think about hoping that they might move the listener," Bergman says by phone from his home in Altona, Man., 100 km. south of Winnipeg.

Recording spanned four years and a number of locations. Two of Winnipeg's top recording engineers, John Paul Peters and Michael P. Falk, were involved, as well as a handful of the city's most in-demand musicians, including jazz drummer Curtis Nowosad and pedal steel master Bill Western.

The album opens with "Down a Dirt Road," a track inspired by an old gospel song. Bergman initially envisioned a full band playing on the song, but ended up going with a sparse arrangement that features just his voice and acoustic guitar.

Barely one minute long, the song was recorded in a friend's barn one August evening as a thunderstorm rolled in. He recorded the song 33 times. Take 27 made it onto the album.

"It sort of sounded like an old field recording," Bergman says. "You could hear the crickets and the creaking chair, and it was all just very present and it seemed to fit the sort of unknownness of the song, better than some of those more fully-rendered versions were able to do."

On the other end of the spectrum, in terms of both production and sound, is the album's fifth track, "Albert Johnson," an atmospheric, seven-minute song with haunting guitar lines comparable to early '90s U2.

With sorrowful violin and pedal steel lines playing in the background, Bergman sings about Albert Johnson, a 1930s fugitive in northern Canada. Johnson's refusal to answer questions about traplines he was suspected of tampering with sparked an RCMP manhunt and an eventual firefight that resulted in his death.

Bergman was inspired to write the song after reading *The Mad Trapper*, Rudy Wiebe's 2003 novel about the incident.

"It's a remarkably sad story and remarkably odd. It's tough to say why it grabbed me, but it just seemed to want documenting and telling at some level," Bergman says.

"One of the inescapable themes of this

record at least, and maybe my writing more generally, it's always about connection and one's inability to connect in any relationship—one's relationship with one's self or one's town, or one's family or whatever it may be, and just how difficult and how fraught all of those relationships are."

Although less overtly on *Anthropology* than on previous albums, faith and Mennonite culture are recurring themes in Bergman's work. He grew up at Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church but no longer attends.

Still, his Winnipeg album release concert—held in a chapel at the University of Manitoba—felt almost worshipful, and ended with Bergman inviting the audience to join him in singing, "This Little Light of Mine."

"It's such a good philosophy and it's such a good note to end off on," Bergman says of the song. "At the end of the day, what bloody else is there to do? We all have our little offering and you just better offer it."

Time will tell whether or not Bergman's little offering remains a well-kept secret or reaches a wider audience with *Anthropology*.

"I hope to create moving and applicable music that might accompany people through their lives," he says. "As for how many people that is, that's a different discussion almost. If that is 50 people or if that is 50 million, there's merit in all of that to me."

Visit www.facebook.com/paulbergman-music. ☘



Bergman's previous releases include Po' Lazarus (2003), As For Me and My House (2005), Rootbound (2006) and Crow Scarecrow (2008, pictured).

Calendar

British Columbia

Jan. 24: Joint MC B.C./Columbia Bible College service at Cedar Valley Mennonite Church, Mission, at 10:30 a.m., with a lunch to follow. Music by Columbia students.

Alberta

Jan. 15-17: Junior-high snow camp at Camp Valaqua, Water Valley. For more information, call Jon Olfert at 403-637-2510.

Saskatchewan

Jan. 29-31: Senior-high retreat at Shekinah Retreat Centre, Waldheim. Theme: "Sharing the well: Faith and diversity in a time of fear and division." Speaker: Cory Funk. For more information, call Kirsten Hamm-Epp at 306-249-4844.

Manitoba

Jan. 19: Westgate Grade 6 Day.

Jan. 21: Westgate Grade 5 Day, from 4:30 to 7 p.m.

Jan. 21-22: Westgate Jr. High one-act plays, at the Franco-Manitoba Cultural Centre.

Ontario

Jan. 23: 13th-annual Epicurean Hootenany in support of MCC and hearing impaired children, at the Conrad Centre, Kitchener. Appetizers at 6 p.m.; singing at 7 p.m., with a dinner buffet and dessert to follow. For more information, visit mcco.ca/events.

Jan. 31: "Glorious baroque: Music for trumpet and organ," at First United Church, Waterloo, at 2:30 p.m. Featuring Jan Overduin, organ, and John Thiessen, baroque trumpet. For more information, call 519-699-5362.

For more Calendar listings online, visit canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.



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The Board of Directors of Donwood invites applications for the position of Chief Executive Officer for the Donwood Group of facilities, located in North Kildonan, Winnipeg. Duties to commence in June, 2016.

Donwood (est. 1970) is a non-profit, faith-based organization encompassing five facilities providing personal long-term care & seniors housing to more than 575 residents. The CEO works closely with an engaged Board of Directors and a skilled staff to deliver Donwood's mission, vision & values.

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A detailed job description is available upon request.

Direct all your inquiries to John Janzen, Donwood Board Chair: jjanzen1@mymts.net 204-255-8115 or Attention John Janzen, Donwood PCH, 171 Donwood Drive, Winnipeg, MB R2G 0V9. Closing date: February 5, 2016.



Mennonite Central Committee

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY
Executive Director – MCC
Saskatchewan

The Executive Director provides overall leadership to the work of MCC in Saskatchewan. This position bears responsibility for upholding and implementing vision, purpose, and values of MCC as well as the work of MCC in Saskatchewan as set by the MCC Saskatchewan Board of Directors.

Interested candidates should apply by February 15, 2016 at: <http://mcccanada.ca/get-involved/serve/openings/executive-director-mcc-saskatchewan>

Inquiries regarding salary, benefits or any other information about the role are to be addressed to Karen Grace-Pankratz at karengracepankratzen@mcccanada.ca or 204-261-6381.

MCC requires all workers to have a personal Christian faith, be active members of a Christian church, and be committed to the teaching of non-violent biblical peacemaking. MCC is an equal opportunity employer, committed to employment equity. MCC values diversity and invites all qualified candidates to apply.



Mennonite Central Committee

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Do you know someone interested in service? Mennonite Central Committee needs service workers in our Akron, PA, office for these positions: Administrative Assistants, Canner Operators, Instructional Technologist, Receptionist.

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Jesus sent out the apostles saying:
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PHOTO AND TEXT BY MARIA KLASSEN



Sunday School children from Bethany Mennonite Church in Virgil, Ont., bring empty cereal boxes to church so they can be made into bracelets in Haiti. Betsy Wall, executive director for the Foundation for International Development Assistance (FIDA), takes the flattened boxes to Haiti, where a women's cooperative cuts the boxes into strips, rolls them into beads and makes the bracelets. Wall buys some of the bracelets at the asking price and resells them at the church for \$10 to support FIDA's work in Haiti. One recycled cereal box can yield \$40 for the artisan.

/// Briefly noted

Six-year-olds receive Bibles at Hope Mennonite

WINNIPEG—Seven six-year-olds—Niko Van Geest DeGroot, Calum Goetzke, Matea Thiessen Unger, Frieda Nuss Hildebrand, Vito Stoesz, Nicholas Rempel Nighswander and Isabelle Heinrichs—received Bible story books in a church service focussed on children at Hope Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, on Sept. 13. “The stories we tell and the stories we claim, shape our identity,” said Lynell Bergen, pastor of Hope Mennonite Church. “The stories from the Bible are a part of our life story—as individuals and as a congregation. We are thankful to be able to share those stories with our children, as we learn more about who God is through these stories and who God is calling us to be.” Lyris Short Goetzke says her son Calum was so eager to get to church for the presentation he was awake at 7:30 in the morning; he could barely contain himself as he bounced on the couch waiting for his parents to get ready. Nicholas Rempel Nighswander celebrated by writing on a piece of construction paper, “I have my own Bible and I love it.”

—BY J. NEUFELD

PHOTO BY MARIANNE SIEMENS



Children receive Bibles at Hope Mennonite Church on Sept. 13: Calum Goetzke, Matea Thiessen Unger, Frieda Nuss Hildebrand, Vito Stoesz, Nicholas Rempel Nighswander and Isabelle Heinrichs.

Children receive Bibles at Hope Mennonite Church on Sept. 13: Calum Goetzke, Matea Thiessen Unger, Frieda Nuss Hildebrand, Vito Stoesz, Nicholas Rempel Nighswander and Isabelle Heinrichs.