

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

June 5, 2017  
Volume 21 Number 12

‘Without CoSA  
I’d be lost’

pg. 20

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

## On engaging millennials

ALLY SIEBERT

**M**illennials, born between 1981 and 2001, are known to be the first generation contending with technology and social media in our personal, professional and relational lives from the start.

We also hear that we're lazy, entitled, screen-obsessed narcissists (with nice beards and cool cafés). If that weren't enough, there are plenty of legitimate headlines that decry millennials for "killing" a lot of important things, including hotels, the napkin industry, democracy, handshakes, the European Union and breakfast cereal.

Are millennials "killing" the church? This, too, feels laughable and unfair. Sure, we're the ones leaving, but I think this decline in numbers has been a whole team effort. Targeted in this blame game, I'm entirely unsurprised that only 40 percent of millennials actually want to be one, according to the Pew Research Center.

How can churches work together to engage the millennial generation? In the spirit of unauthorized click-bait lists, here are five questions to ask yourself:

**1. ARE YOU** inviting young people to things outside of Sunday morning?

We want to be a part of your church life, not just your church service. Invite us to coffee, ask us to help wash potluck dishes, introduce us to your families or drive us home to our student dorms. We may be hesitant about institutional religion, but if you are real with us in moments outside of worship, we might

discover how our doubts and dreams are in good company. This is how church becomes what Angelika Dawson, this issue's feature writer, calls our "tribe."

**2. ARE YOUNG** people only participating in things related to other young people or fixing your technology?



Meeting people of the same age can be enriching, but the inter-generational makeup of a healthy church is fairly unique. We crave friendships across generations and we have gifts to offer the whole church: preaching, seniors

ministry, administration, even quilting. Especially when we're known for our shortcomings, the church can play a role in encouraging our strengths. Don't forget: We love your enthusiastic calls, but we also burn out when over-committed (or over-committed).

**3. DO YOU** know what we're reading, protesting or talking about over beer?

There is nothing new about a world of inequality, violence and fear, but our technology makes us more rapidly informed and mobilized than ever before. Millennials join the Occupy Movement over social media. We watch Philando Castile's murder at the hands of police, filmed with a camera phone. We're baffled by fake news, incensed by colonialism, and trying to do something about it. And we believe Jesus is out there with us, but where's the church?

**4. DO YOU** know what we do for fun, where we volunteer or what kind of ice cream we like?

Paid work is a stressful topic for

millennials. When *The Economist* asked, "Why aren't millennials buying diamonds?" we tweeted back, "Because I work at a grocery store." It's not avocado toast that is keeping us from financial stability, but rather the impossible job market that forces us into unpaid internships and contract work without benefits.

For these reasons, we cannot be defined by our jobs or lack thereof. Change your small talk about work to, "What keeps you busy?" We can still answer about work, but we can also tell you about a new ice cream we've discovered or new park we've explored.

**4. ARE YOUR** interactions with us based predominantly on anxiety about departure and doubt?

It's hard to arrive at church and be greeted with, "Wow, we haven't seen you in a long time!" We don't need your anxiety about our attendance added to our pre-existing confusion and guilt. If church isn't fulfilling our needs, find out directly from us (and not from our parents) how we're doing and if we'd like your support. Churches can't do better at what they're too scared to know, and millennials are hurt when our disillusionment and frustration is always dismissed as impetuous or selfish. Instead, you might learn from us about where God is leading.

Notice something familiar about this list? I hope so, because a genuine community showing genuine love is something we all want when we experience doubt, unemployment and isolation. It might be time for change in the church, but it's not just for millennials. It's for all of us.

*Ally Siebert chooses to be a proud millennial. She lives in Ottawa, works with teenagers and is a member of the Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service Board of Directors.*

## ABOUT THE COVER:

Mennonite Central Committee welcomes the Canadian government's announcement that it will provide nearly \$7.5 million over five years to Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), which helps convicted sex offenders reintegrate into the community. See story on page 20.

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Award-winning member of the Canadian Church Press



GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH FEATURE

# A big fan of Jesus . . . the church not so much

BY ANGELIKA DAWSON

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANGELIKA DAWSON



*'In the last couple of years, I've been embarrassed to tell people that I went to church or was a Christian. I knew that if I identified that way, people might assume that I am judgmental or racist or holier than thou—the exact opposite of what you'd expect people to think of Christians if we actually lived by the book we say we live our lives by.'*  
(Aaron Dawson)

A lot has been said and written about millennials: What's wrong with them? What's influenced them? What does their future hold?

Google “millennials and the church” and dozens of articles pop up: “5 things millennials wish the church would be,” “12 reasons why millennials are over church,” or “Is Christianity dark enough for millennials?” So much hand-wringing and wondering why our young adults are leaving the church, like this is something that's never happened before.

*Canadian Mennonite* published a feature focussing on millennials who are quite content in the church (“10 under 30,” Jan. 16, page 4), and it was an inspiring read. Still, it made me wonder if there was going to be a follow-up article about millennials who are discontented with the church. Well, here it is, sort of. Unlike that story, this isn't about a group of dissatisfied millennials from across the country. It's the story about one: my son.

Aaron is 25 years old, born towards the end of the timeframe that typically categorizes this generation. He is our only child. My husband John and I are both Christians and have both been involved in pastoral ministry, camp ministry and lay leadership in the various churches we have attended. To a large extent, Aaron grew up in a fairly traditional Christian home. He went to secular schools and so has had friends both within and outside the church. He grew up going to Sunday school, summer camp and youth group. He played guitar on music teams, and was involved in youth leadership and in summer ministries trips.

But when he graduated from high school, things began to change. About a year ago, he decided he didn't want to attend church anymore. As his parent, this made me somewhat sad, but I didn't fret about it too much. Every generation of young adults is somewhat dissatisfied with their parents' institutions. It was that way with me, I reasoned, so why should it be any



*I have also been deeply hurt by experiences in the church and have sometimes wondered why I stay. But I have stayed because, in the end, unlike Aaron, I find that it does matter to me. This is my tribe, warts and all.*

different for my son?

As he and I talked about faith and church, I realized that there were, indeed, similarities in our experiences but some significant differences as well. When I was a young adult, I naively viewed my parent's generation as lacking passion. I saw them simply going through the motions, hanging on to tradition for tradition's sake. In some people, I saw blatant hypocrisy. Aaron expresses these views as well. The difference between us is that I never walked away from my faith in God and I sought to change the church from within. Church was still important to me, but I wanted it to look different. Aaron's experience has been the opposite.

Aaron recognizes that, in some significant ways, his church experience has been positive. He's had opportunities to develop leadership skills and have some interesting ministry experiences. He's also developed some long-lasting relationships.

"I think the best thing that I got from church is a network of friends, some who also went to high school with me," he says.

But when asked if his discontent with the church happened gradually or if he could pinpoint a moment, he didn't

hesitate. "I can tell you exactly the moment," he says. "It was when my youth pastor resigned."

It was the summer of 2010. He had just graduated from high school and come back from an excellent summer ministries trip to Los Angeles, Calif. Given that the trip was such a good experience and there had been no indication that anything was wrong, the announcement came as a shock. But more impactful for Aaron was the realization over time that his church was a place where hurtful things could happen, where relationships could be broken and where trust could be eroded.

His growing awareness of the way things worked in his own church and in the wider church community left him with an increasing number of questions. He questioned the process of baptism, for example.

"The Bible says 'believe and be baptized,' not 'believe, go to baptism classes, then give your testimony to the deacons and then the church, and then you can be baptized.' So why do we do that?" he asks.

Recent conversations in Mennonite Church B.C. around the inclusion of the LGBTQ community leave him shaking his head, asking why we're still talking

about this. In his mind—and in the minds of many of his friends—we should accept same-sex relationships and just move on to more important issues, like addressing human rights, injustice, racism and poverty.

"In the last couple of years, I've been embarrassed to tell people that I went to church or was a Christian," he says. "I knew that if I identified that way, people might assume that I am judgmental or racist or holier than thou—the exact opposite of what you'd expect people to think of Christians if we actually lived by the book we say we live our lives by."

As I listen to my son talk, I'm realizing that my husband and I "created this monster," as the saying goes. Don't misunderstand me. We love our son deeply and we are proud of the young man he has become. He's not perfect, of course; he does bear some of the traits with which millennials have been branded, like a certain sense of entitlement and a bit of a lazy streak that I could do without. But we love his sharp sense of humour and his creative nature. He is a loyal friend and a devoted "uncle" to his cousin's son. And as we talk, I'm amazed again at the depth with which he thinks about things.

He doesn't understand my amazement. "You and dad raised me to be an independent thinker, to come to my own conclusions. I'm my own person," he says.

I have to accept this, of course, because it's true. When he was a child, we always said we wanted to raise him to be a person who could think for himself, who would make good choices. Of course,

*[W]hen asked if his discontent with the church happened gradually or if he could pinpoint a moment, he didn't hesitate. 'I can tell you exactly the moment,' he says. 'It was when my youth pastor resigned.'*

when he started to do that, I realized that what I really wanted was for him to make the choices that I would make for him. But I can't have it both ways.

Aaron doesn't fault John and me for choosing to live out our faith in the context of the church. He hasn't cut other people out of his life simply because they go to church and he knows that his friends don't judge him because he doesn't. He understands that our church community is important to us; it just isn't important to him anymore. Since he's stopped going to church, he hasn't missed it and feels like he doesn't need it. He's not alone in this feeling; several of his friends have expressed the same frustrations and some have also stopped attending.

Aaron's questions run deeper than simple church politics. He's not sure if he really believes in God and says he's never experienced God's presence or profound answers to prayer. Still, he's a big fan of Jesus. He loves Jesus' teachings and the way he interacted with people.

"Maybe if we could all just live like Jesus taught—love your neighbour, don't steal, don't lie, don't be a jerk—I think the whole world would just be a better place," he says.

I can't argue with that. In fact, there's a lot that I can't argue with. I, too, am dismayed by hypocrisy, judgmental attitudes and exclusion. I wish the world would judge Christians by their good works and not by their failures. I have also been deeply hurt by experiences in the church and have sometimes wondered why I stay. But I have stayed because, in the end, unlike Aaron, I find that it does matter to me. This is my tribe, warts and all. Unlike Aaron, I have had profound answers to prayer and I experience the presence of God all the time.

And suddenly I'm hit by a memory. Me, twenty-something-years-old, crying out in prayer to God, seeking direction for my life, asking, "Where are you?" It was a moment of deep, spiritual crisis when I wondered if there really was a God or if the faith to which I clung was actually empty nonsense.

So maybe Aaron and I are not all that different. I think that the difference in our



*Aaron Dawson and his mother Angelika in their Star Wars 'Force for change' T-shirts.*

*[Aaron] understands that our church community is important to us; it just isn't important to him anymore. Since he's stopped going to church, he hasn't missed it and feels like he doesn't need it.*

age and life experiences impacts how we respond to church. One might think that, as a parent, I would be terribly concerned about my son's "lack" of engagement with church or with God but, in fact, I'm not. He is not flippant about this, he gives it great thought, and I believe he continues to be open to possibilities. What I do know for certain is that we are both still

on a journey, and as long as we can continue to have these deep conversations I know that we will influence one another on the way. For that, I am truly grateful. ❧

*Angelika Dawson lives, writes and practises her faith in Abbotsford, B.C.*

### ❧ For discussion

1. Angelika Dawson writes, "Every generation of young adults is somewhat dissatisfied with their parents' institutions." Do you agree? What dissatisfactions did you have with the church when you were young? Did you ever feel like giving up on the church? Why do you think the church is important?
2. Dawson writes that her son Aaron has "never experienced God's presence or profound answers to prayer." Is this common for this generation of young adults? How important are these experiences for a deep faith?
3. Do the young adults who grew up in your congregation still attend regularly? Do they seem less committed to the church than earlier generations? How do you explain this phenomenon? Should the church respond with acceptance, hoping they'll return, or work harder to engage millennials?
4. Why do you think Dawson is not more concerned about her son's lack of engagement with the church? What would be your response if you were in her place? If God is leading us to a new kind of "church," how do you think it will be different from the one we have known?

—BY BARB DRAPER

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## VIEWPOINTS

## /// Readers write

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## ✉ What does—and doesn't—define us

**SOMETIMES I THINK** most of our Mennonite lay people, like myself, don't realize how serious the Future Directions endeavour is that is going on right now. Many think that they are just another bunch of meetings, followed by numerous serious people making long, wordy pronouncements, and then, probably, not much will change.

It's not difficult to see that what we know as the Anabaptist Mennonite church is at a serious crossroad in North America. Many congregations are leaving the main organization and there seem to be more traditional Mennonites attending non-Mennonite churches than Mennonite ones.

Somehow, the core of our belief system is slipping through our fingers. There must be something to this core, or else it wouldn't have lasted for 500 years.

*(Continued on page 8)*

## FROM OUR LEADERS

## Spaces of trust

LIZ WEBER

**“W** e aren't going to lose youth because we haven't entertained them. We'll lose them because we haven't trusted or challenged them.”

I heard this quote from Shane Claiborne at a conference in 2012, and it came back to me a few weeks ago at Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's annual church gathering during a lunch meeting with leaders of youth.



One of the topics in our conversation was around how we can better equip youth to be leaders. Following this conversation, I attended a workshop that was hosted by some of the local Mennonite camps. A panel of three camp counsellors shared how counselling at camp helped to equip them to be leaders not just at camp but also within their own congregations.

Maybe we can learn something from how camps train their counsellors. Training camp counsellors usually

consists of time spent in learning sessions as well as practical hands-on experience. This training is led by senior counsellors who mentor the new counsellors, walk alongside them and work with them to prepare them for leading on their own. Often training takes place over multiple weeks, and it isn't until the second or third summer that counsellors are given full responsibility.

I think that this could be a great model for growing young leaders within the church: creating a space where we can walk alongside the youth and mentor them while also allowing room for them to bring their own voice. Instead of merely asking for youth to participate—which can at times seem daunting or terrifying to them—let's provide them with opportunities to lead alongside someone else. I realize that this will take more effort from those already in leadership roles, but in the end it will be worth it.

At the camping workshop, one of the panellists wondered, “What would it look

like to have a church slate with spaces on it for young people to be mentored into church roles?” This could include having an additional position for a youth church council chair, someone who could serve alongside the church council chair to learn the ropes, while also getting opportunities to try out his/her own leadership skills.

We need to take the time to get to know the youth in our congregations, to go beyond seeing them for the age that they are, and, instead, seeing them for the gifts that they have.

What gifts do the youth in your church have that they can share? Who has similar gifts in your congregation and is willing to walk alongside the youth, challenging them to grow, strengthening their gifts and providing support?

Mentoring is about allowing the youth to see what it takes to be church together. It isn't about being perfect or about doing the job right. In fact, most young people are looking for authenticity in the church, so allowing them to be a part of the process would be beneficial.

Let's create spaces of trust in which youth feel safe enough to be challenged to grow into the church of today.

*Liz Weber is Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's coordinator of youth leaders.*

(Continued from page 7)

I hope the Future Directions Task Force is not being too sensitive to the great variety of sentiments and ideas it gathered over the last several years as it tried to check the pulse of our membership throughout this great land.

In some ways, the task should not be that difficult. Make sure we understand what the real Christian church was like that followed the earthly existence

of Jesus of Nazareth until Constantine got hold of it circa AD 325. Then jump to Martin Luther and the Anabaptists, and understand what gave them their drive. Then make sure these core ideas and beliefs are put into language that we can all understand now.

That is what defines us as Mennonites. That's it. Join us or don't.

**RICHARD PENNER, CALGARY**

## KINGDOM YEARNINGS

# 'I expected better from you'

RYAN JANTZI

I'll never forget the moment that Bill came to sit with me in the penalty box. I was rather embarrassed.

It was a Bible college intramural hockey game. I had been a little chippy with my stick. I had been a little lippy with my mouth. Unfortunately, it wasn't the first time that game. The referee didn't appreciate my antics, and off to the box I went. As I settled in for my two minutes of reflection in solitude, my teammate Bill climbed in too. "Um, Bill," the referee queried, "what are you doing? We didn't give you a penalty."

"I know. I just need a little chat with this young man for a moment," Bill replied.

"Ryan," he said quietly. Play resumed as we sat in the penalty box side by side. "I'm not sure what the problem is tonight, but the way you're playing does not display the man of God I know you to be. I expected better from you." And that was all he said.

We sat in silence the remainder of the penalty. My ears burned red. I knew he was right. I also knew that my classmates both on the ice and in the stands were aware I'd been confronted. The words of challenge had been heard and received.



This experience stands out as a significant moment of my discipleship. It played a pivotal role in maturing my on-ice conduct towards the glory of God. You see, Bill was my 60-year-old residence director. He served as a pastor and mentor to a whole host of college students.

In my life, he was the epitome of the discipleship approach labelled "Invitation and Challenge" by Mike Breen of 3DM Movements. In *Building a Discipling Culture*, Breen writes, "A gifted discipler is someone who invites people into a covenantal relationship with him or her, but challenges the person to live into his or her true identity in very direct, yet

*Bill had lived a life of invitation, playing hockey alongside us, eating meals in the cafeteria, asking over and over how he could pray for us.*

graceful ways."

Bill had lived a life of invitation, playing hockey alongside us, eating meals in the cafeteria, asking over and over how he could pray for us. We knew that Bill loved us and would be with us each step of the way on our journey as students. Bill had invited us into a friendship of

commitment and trust.

Following his explicit challenge, that invitation continued in the dressing room. With tears in his eyes, Bill looked at me and said, "Ryan, I really admire the way you played the rest of the game." That was all he said. Truth be told, I didn't do anything extraordinary. I shut up, put my head down and, still embarrassed, simply played out the rest of the game. But apparently Bill saw more than that. He saw God at work in this process of discipleship. Having challenged me, Bill extended yet another invitation.

This is the life of disciples of Jesus. Invitation and challenge. Through faith in his life, death and resurrection, we are in Christ. And now we are called to become like Christ. It is no easy journey. My heart and mind are not inclined towards holiness. It's a daily struggle. This is why we need disciplers, those who extend invitation and challenge.

Who is discipling you in this way? Who might the Holy Spirit be calling you to disciple through invitation and challenge?

*Following five years with the Kingsfield-Clinton church plant in southwestern Ontario, Ryan Jantzi now pastors the nearby Kingsfield-Zurich Mennonite Church, where he's fascinated with exploring the interplay between traditional church and new expressions of mission.*



## ✉ Words matter when it comes to describing the church

**RE:** “A VISION of Healing and Hope for MC Canada,” April 24, page 19.

If we are looking for an organizational structure that is hierarchical and authoritarian, then using the words “level” and “levels” is entirely appropriate; these words have authority and hierarchy built into them. But if

we are looking for a structure that is more egalitarian (“priesthood of all believers”), then “level” and “levels” are completely inappropriate.

As for Keith Regehr’s comment that he sees “a grove of aspen trees as a metaphor for the various levels of church,” I would say that every tree is unique and grows and flourishes in its own way. And the whole grove is nourished by the same sun, soil, air and water.

**JIM SUDERMAN, WINNIPEG**

## /// Milestones

### Births/Adoptions

**Bartel**—Briar May (b. April 26, 2017), to Calvin and Leah Bartel, North Star Mennonite, Drake, Sask.

### Deaths

**Albrecht**—Harry, 96 (b. Sept. 29, 1920; d. April 15, 2017), First Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.

**Block**—Harry, 92 (b. March 7, 1924; d. Sept. 8, 2016), Harrow Mennonite, Ont.

**Block**—Walt, 74 (b. Jan. 22, 1943; d. March 19, 2017), Harrow Mennonite, Ont.

**Boese**—Vic, 76 (b. May 19, 1940; d. May 1, 2017), Bethany Mennonite, Virgil, Ont.

**Epp**—Helen, 94 (b. June 30, 1922; d. April 27, 2017), Vineland United Mennonite, Ont.

**Janzen**—Peter John, 97 (b. Dec. 1, 1919; d. March 21, 2017), Springridge Mennonite, Alta.

**Lepp**—Henry, 88 (b. Sept. 10, 1928; d. Oct. 4, 2016), Harrow Mennonite, Ont.

**Neudorf**—John, 93 (b. Jan. 27, 1924; d. April 11, 2017), First Mennonite, Saskatoon.

**Neufeld**—Jacob, 83 (b. July 25, 1933; d. April 23, 2017), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

**Rempel**—Peter J., 83 (b. July 2, 1933; d. April 18, 2017), Rosthern Mennonite, Sask.

**Schwartzentruber**—Katie, 87 (b. June 29, 1929; d. April 30, 2017), Riverdale Mennonite, Millbank, Ont.

### Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones

**announcements within four months of the event.**

**Please send Milestones announcements by e-mail to [milestones@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:milestones@canadianmennonite.org), including the congregation name and location. When sending death notices, please also include birth date and last name at birth if available.**

## A moment from yesterday



An idea mixed with passion and solid financial support were the ingredients that combined for a great accomplishment. In 1977 and '78, young Bill Reimer from Winnipeg set out with elder statesman J.B. Toews to cross North America in a truck and trailer microfilming congregational records. Working 12-hour days, the pair collected, sorted, and filmed more than 175,000 pages of documents that now make up 30 rolls of microfilm. Mennonite Brethren commentator John H. Redekop had this to say about the microfilm project: ‘In the light of the past, the future takes on new meaning and potential.’ What ideas, passions and support can you offer that will combine to make a lasting impact for the future?

Text: Conrad Stoesz / Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies

Photo: MB Herald Photograph Collection / Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies



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## MILLENNIAL REFLECTION

## Hearing each other

JONAS CORNELSEN

**H**earing each other well is essential for being church. This is a delicate theme, because we aren't doing it well. The effects of distance—both geographical and theological—are being felt within and among our churches.



The column for things nobody said might include:

- **SPLIT THE** church.
- **DEMAND EVERYONE** think the same way.
- **VALUE BEING** right over personal relationships.

Reading the responses we collected on our Emerging Voices Initiative (EVI) 2016-17 workshop tour, and reflecting on my experience, I notice two major threads:

- **WE FEEL** strain in our relationships. We desire unity, but it's hard work.
- **WE FEEL** a disconnect between different "levels" of Mennonite Church Canada.

**Relationships**

If our workshops are any indication, almost all of us want unity and good dialogue in and between churches. The hard part is doing it.

At every workshop across the country, we heard desires for a church that acknowledges and respects differences, instead of emphasizing disagreement. Some named the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process as a source of tension, others spoke in broader terms. The reaction to BFC shows where we are strained, but it's not the whole picture.

To summarize the longing for unity we heard, it's tempting to make a table of "things lots of people said" and "things nobody said." The first column, things lots of people said, would include:

- **ALLOW EACH** other to be different. (Alberta)
- **CO-EXISTING IN** disagreement. (Manitoba)
- **[WE] DON'T** want to lose our connections, relationships. (Ontario)
- **WE'RE COMMITTED** to unity, don't want to fracture. (B.C.)
- **AGREE TO** disagree, respect others' views. (Saskatchewan)

I imagine you've thought of a few counter-arguments. These might include:

- **THE PEOPLE** who bothered to show up to our events are like-minded. We're only hearing one side.
- **WE BASE** our dreams for the church—at least the ones we say out loud—on our ideal selves. In reality, people on both sides aren't willing to put in the work.

There is truth in these critiques. To find truth in the hope as well as the cynicism, remember that hope isn't naive. For every dream of unity we heard, there was also lament of broken relationships. Area churches have seen congregations leave. Congregations have lost members. Nobody said unity would be easy.

A personal memory from our tour stands out to me here. At our Abbotsford, B.C., workshop a participant asked, "One of the foundational questions for the churches that aren't here today is the question of scriptural authority. Is there a way for that question to be engaged . . . that's not adversarial?"

My response began with, "I wish I knew," and then I rambled. Probably the most useful thing I said was, "The best way not to be adversaries is to be friends."

To be friends, we need to realize that underneath every conversation about Scripture, theology or church institutions, there's really nothing but personal relationships. MC Canada is not some far-off entity telling us how to read the Bible. It's just us—it's another way we've organized ourselves to do God's work

together. There's no "they" and "we."

**Levels and connections**

The personal nature of our church structures is where the idea of "levels" comes in. When we see the functions of area and national churches primarily as resourcing and decision-making, we lose the sense that we are all participants. We think MC Canada is distant from us or dictating to us. But what if we imagined that everything we do in our churches is part of what makes up MC Canada as a whole?

When we think in levels, we also tend to pin conflict on other groups—congregations that adopt different practices or MC Canada for allowing them to do so. But we need not look outside our church walls to find relationships that need work. Keeping ties between congregations and area churches could help us share and learn from each other as we do that work.

One could say the proposed new structure for MC Canada—with national priorities determined by regional executive leaders—widens the gap between levels by limiting delegate participation. I fear increasing disconnect to some extent. But I hope individuals and congregations might be freed to collaborate on national projects without feeling burdened by as many decision-making processes. I also hope regional leaders will find and connect churches in their respective regions that have similar goals or needs, giving them a reason to relate.

To hear each other well, we need to think of the church less in terms of levels. We might picture ourselves as part of a web in which relationships link each individual to every other through different modes of organization.

As EVI, we've tried to focus on being "glad to be church with you," cherishing one another's friendship and our core identity as disciples of Jesus in a changing world. Could this be a way forward? ☼

*To respond, visit [emergingvoiceonline.wordpress.com/contact/](http://emergingvoiceonline.wordpress.com/contact/). This is the first in EVI's series of in-depth reflections on its 2016-17 workshop tour. The views expressed are the author's and don't necessarily reflect all of EVI.*



## PERSONAL REFLECTION

# How it feels to give a house away

YANN MARTEL

*Yann Martel is known to many as the author of *Life of Pi*, an international bestseller that became an Oscar-winning movie. But at Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Saskatchewan, he is also known as the man who welcomed a Syrian family of six into the home he owns in Saskatoon. The family arrived in 2016, and he wrote about the experience for the London Sunday Times. What follows is an excerpt from that story.*

**W**hat do you do with a sweet little house when you don't need it anymore? I bought a house in Saskatoon when my partner and I didn't have any children yet. I say I bought it; it would be more accurate to say that every reader who acquired a copy of *Life of Pi* bought it.

It's a clapboard house built in 1912. The rooms aren't big, there's only a single bathroom, the walls have only newspaper for insulation, in every part of the house you hear what's happening in every other part—but it has a nice feel to it. It's cozy. Too cozy when the children started coming—we have four—and my partner and I both work at home. So we upgraded to a bigger house. But what to do with the old place?

The obvious thing to do was to sell it. But it was the first place I'd ever owned, and we'd put a lot of work into fixing it up. I'd stripped and painted all the doors in colourful patterns and touched up other details in the house. We'd tended the garden and the vegetable patch. It was where we first welcomed into the world three of our children. I was still attached to it.

I considered renting it out. But did I really want to become a landlord?

In October 2015, a third option presented itself. It was splashed all over the papers every day: refugees. To give is to receive. When we gift something to someone, whether a smile or a kind word or a service or an object, we create good will, we create bonds. Surely that was a

worthwhile investment.

Then a friend suggested I try calling MCC. Let me briefly sing a song of praise about the Mennonites. Up until that fateful phone call, they were just a name to me. Then I called them and they became real. I've never encountered a group that so walks in what I imagine is the spirit of Christ: a spirit of loving-kindness, where help is given without judgment. The Mennonites cottoned on immediately to what I was offering. Sure, said Dana, the young woman I first spoke to. That sounds wonderful. Where's the house? Can we see it today?

MCC made it happen. Within days everything fell into place. A group from Wildwood Mennonite Church in Saskatoon was bringing in furniture, setting up bedrooms, stocking the kitchen, doing everything so that a family might

live in their new home.

Then the waiting game started. At first, the house was supposed to welcome a family from Myanmar. But the little boy contracted acute bronchitis and that caused a delay. Months went by, the house remained empty. Finally, we had to move on. Another group, from Mount Royal Mennonite Church, and another refugee family. There, too, we had to wait.

Then they finally arrived, from Aleppo, Syria. Omar and Ramia and their four children . . . and their adorable baby girl. They didn't speak a word of English. Whenever we went to their house, big smiles and vigorous nods had to say it all.

They are very friendly. One day I had to drop by because there was some flooding in the basement. In rapid order the plumber and I were offered cups of sweet tea, pastries Ramia had baked, and then—lo!—pizza she made from scratch while we were there. Meanwhile, Omar helpfully mopped away the water off the floor and the children broke into the "ABC" song at every chance they had. The children are at the vanguard of integration, gleefully taking in every aspect of their new Canadian lives . . . eager to speak English.

So that, for me, is what you do with a sweet little house you don't need anymore. You turn it into a safe house for children and a grateful family, a place for future citizens, a home where you can knock on the door at any time of day and be greeted with smiles, open arms and, likely, good pizza. ☺

MCC PHOTO BY LEONA LORTIE



*Ramia Sraa and Omar Falah Hindawi with their children Hala, 1, Dima, 9, Mohammed, 8, and Rahaf, 4. The house where they live in Saskatoon is owned by Canadian author Yann Martel. Working with MCC and Mount Royal Mennonite Church, Martel offered his house for use by the family when they arrived from Lebanon last year.*

## GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

# Seeking spiritual renewal through prayer

*Mennonite Church Saskatchewan enters a season of listening*

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent  
SASKATOON

Where does one begin to renew a church? According to Betty Pries, the best place to start is with prayer, saying, "Finding our way through times of spiritual upheaval depends on spiritual renewal."

Pries, who is a managing partner with the L3 Group in Waterloo, Ont., was the presenter at a workshop hosted by Mennonite Church Saskatchewan. Entitled "Refresh, refocus, renew: Open to God's leading," the workshop was held on April 28 and 29 at Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon.

MC Saskatchewan has hired Pries to guide the area church through a yearlong visioning and direction-setting process. The first step was an online survey of members. The weekend workshop was the second step.

The workshop began with a session on spirituality and prayer. "There are three

rhythms that are consistent in spiritual life," said Pries. The first, "awe and wonder," is associated with blessing and joy. The second, "suffering," is linked with original sin, brokenness and wilderness. The third, "transformation," is related to acceptance and surrender. "The church in Canada is in the suffering, wilderness stage," she said, adding, "The way out of suffering always involves surrender."

"Prayer," said Pries, "is about letting go of all that keeps us removed from God's presence." While there are many forms of prayer, the listening prayer can be highly effective in opening heart, mind and soul to God. Listening prayer is not about hearing God's voice while praying. Rather, it is about returning to God's presence, again and again, in order to open oneself to God's leading in the rest of life. "For most," said Pries, "it is really hard to do."

During the second session, Pries presented the results of the online survey. The 77 respondents represented 29 congregations; 44 percent were in the 51-65 age range, and 30 percent have been involved in MC Saskatchewan churches for more than 50 years.

Results indicate that members feel a deep love for the church and experience a strong sense of belonging, meaning and purpose. They expressed disappointment in declining or sporadic attendance, the tilt toward aging congregations and differences that have resulted in divisions between people. Hopefulness came from seeing young people grow in faith and from ministry projects that tear down barriers and open congregations to the world.

Said Pries of the results, "MC Saskatchewan is more about community, relationships and belonging than about structure."

In the discussion following this presentation, participants asked some difficult questions:

- **LISA MARTENS-BARTEL** of North Star Mennonite in Drake noted that "the same conference people" filled out the survey, and asked, "How do we fill the gap between the engaged and the less engaged?"
- **JOE HEIKMAN** of Wildwood Mennonite in Saskatoon said, "Those who aren't engaged, but would like to be, named that there is grief."

Pries acknowledged that "differences are painful and powerful," but added, "We need differences to be strong, to be sharp. The Holy Spirit doesn't just talk to me or to you, but to us working together. In differences, we find our way forward."

In the remaining session, Pries led participants through a study of the "congregational life and renewal cycle."

- **DURING "CREATIVE formation,"** congregations experience the nearness of God's presence and a strong sense of vision.
- **THE NEXT** stage is "thriving," in which congregations experience strong leadership and know why they are in existence.
- **EVENTUALLY, ENERGY** begins to wane, and the congregation moves into the "struggle" phase, in which "structure



Workshop presenter Betty Pries draws the life of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan as a river.

begins to drive mission rather than the other way around," said Pries. While there is a deep desire to return to the "thriving" stage, it is impossible to recapture what was.

• **THE NEXT** phase, "crisis and confusion," is characterized by sorrow, grief and blame. "It's not wrong to be in a stage of suffering," said Pries. "If we stay in a stage of awe and wonder, we get to be ego-driven. Struggle brings our feet back to God's fire."

• **"SURRENDER" FOLLOWS**, and is "hard, hard work," said Pries. It involves relinquishing control and being open to hearing one another. Pries cautioned, "This is where most congregations and denominations stop the potential of their renewal journey."

• **THE FINAL** stage is "listening." "Don't expect God to speak immediately," said Pries. "It takes a bit of time to surrender enough to hear God speaking." She asked participants to try to discern what questions they are to bring to God as a collective of congregations.

The next months will be a time of listening for MC Saskatchewan. The reference group, which includes Christy Martens-Funk, Anita Retzlaff, Pauline Steinmann, Josh Wallace, Kirsten Hamm-Epp and Ryan Siemens, will invite congregations to intentionally engage in a time of listening prayer during worship each week, seeking God's guidance for the area church. ❧

Congregants gather on week nights and Saturday to pray. "They love to pray," he says. "When God called, 'Adam where are you?' God knew Adam's location. What God wanted to know was, 'Where are you in my will, in my power?'"

The congregation now has about 150 adults and 75 children under age 14. Like many new Canadian congregations, the tension between the Tigrinya-speaking adults and the increasingly English-speaking children is growing. Other new Canadian growing pains—members scattered over a wide area, the need to work shifts to make a living, and people not living to the full potential of their education and training—give Abraham concern. He thinks that an Eritrean community centre would help both the adult refugees and their children.

MC Eastern Canada is "an umbrella for me," says Abraham, who was licensed towards ordination on May 20. Every leader and every congregation needs to be responsible to someone, he believes, and the area church offers that to him and his congregation. But he also hopes that the area church will support him and his congregation in mission plans they are drawing up. His ministry includes going back to Sudan, Ethiopia and other East African places to preach and teach Eritrean refugees living in refugee camps there. ❧

## Growing in spirit and godliness

*Eritrean church a part of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent  
KITCHENER, ONT.

**V**oices rise in Tigrinya, the most widely spoken language in Eritrea, and in tongues. Waves of music wash over the gathered congregation of refugees from the East African country in the sanctuary of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener. Leading the ecstatic worship is Pastor Jonathan (Joni, pronounced Yónie) Abraham, microphone in hand, backed by a group of women all clad in white, as they practise one of the Shalom Worship and Healing Centre's priorities: connecting with God.

According to Abraham, the other priority—the "healing" in the church's name—is godliness, living lives of discipleship that lead to freedom and wholeness. Himself a refugee from the communist-like Eritrean government's persecution of Christians, Abraham came to Canada seven years ago, gathered the 12 Eritreans he found and began a congregation.

They find the openness of Mennonites to

be "from heart to heart" in both the congregation at First and leaders like Brian Bauman, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's mission minister. The congregation became an emerging church in MC Eastern Canada a year ago.

Abraham talks about a prophecy in Eritrea that Eritreans would go out into the world to bring the good news to all the people. No one took it very seriously until government persecution began and, like the Jerusalem church in Acts 8, the scattered Christians began to share the good news of Jesus wherever they went.

With other Eritrean Christians, the Kitchener congregation wants to reach this generation with the gospel. They want to reach not only Eritreans, but anyone in Canada who needs to hear the good news about Jesus and receive the healing of the Holy Spirit to live lives of discipleship.

"Fasting and praying" lead to the power of the Holy Spirit being released, he says.



*Pastor Jonathan Abraham, backed by women singers, leads worship at the Shalom Worship and Healing Centre, which conducts services at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont.*

# Faith in the Age of the Anthropocene

*Albertans challenged to think anew about how creation care is a pivotal issue for Christians*

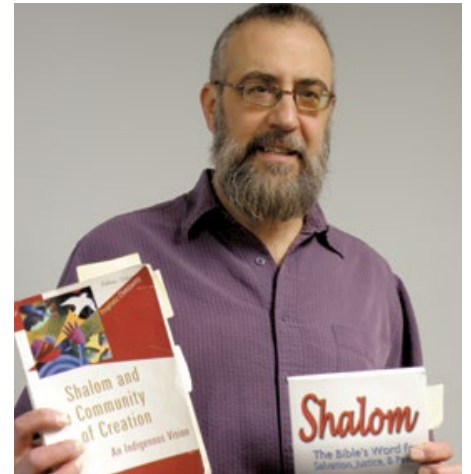
STORY AND PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD  
Alberta Correspondent  
EDMONTON

“I believe this is the defining issue of our time, how humans relate to creation.” Caleb Gingrich, a student at McGill University in Montreal, was so taken by the theme of Mennonite Church Alberta’s annual Faith Studies event that he travelled across Canada to take it in. Gingrich, who is currently working on a research project called “Economics and the Anthropoceny,” commented, “My faith is important to me, I was looking for an opportunity to see how these two parts of me come together.” “Called to peacemaking with all creation: Living faithfully in the Age of the Anthropocene” was hosted at Holyrood

Mennonite Church over three days in May. Professor Randolph Haluza-Delay, a social scientist at King’s University in Edmonton, was the speaker.

With more than 30 years studying the interaction of Christian faith and the environment, he challenged participants to think anew about how creation care is a pivotal issue for Christians. At a time when humanity’s impact on the planet is so large it can be identified as a new era—the Anthropocene—Christians have an important voice.

During one session, participants were divided into groups and given a wide



**Randy Haluza-Delay holds up two books he highly recommends on the topic of creation care and faith: *Shalom and the Community of Creation* by Randy S. Woodley, and *Shalom the Bible's Word for Peace* by Perry B. Yoder.**

variety of biblical passages. Haluza-Delay urged them to read their passages from the point of view of the whole creation, including humanity, but not from an exclusively human perspective. It proved surprisingly eye-opening for many, as the verses referred to the land, the animals and all creatures, while some regularly assumed they always referred to people.

The results inspired Pastor Leng Thang of Calgary Chin Christian Church to preach a sermon on creation care as a Christian issue. “This has impacted my heart, touched my heart,” he said. Formerly from Burma, he saw ecological degradation first-hand, as mountains were flattened in pursuit of precious minerals while poverty and desperation increased. “If I go back to my province, my country, I would like to preach this. I have this experience now,” he said.

In two evening public lectures, Haluza-Delay presented a deluge of facts, issues and stories of environmental struggle threaded through with notes of hope. This hope is particularly present in the faith community because of its acknowledgement of God as creator, redeemer and sustainer of all life.

He encouraged everyone to engage others of different views in conversations about creation care. “Simple conversations can start shaping people’s thinking on the subject,” he said. “[We] have to find out

PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN



**Painting matryoshka dolls was one of the Family Day activities at the Mennonite Heritage Museum in Abbotsford, B.C., on May 22. Pictured from left to right painting their dolls are Shanti and Simiah Mutta and their mother, with Lacey Friesen at right. Other activities included a story time, face painting, crafts, a scavenger hunt, watching a quilt being made on an antique sewing machine, and dressing up in vintage clothing for pictures at a photo booth. All ages could visit the museum displays, including Mennonite time capsules; research their family tree with the Mennonite Historical Society; and enjoy lunch outside. Sunny Victoria Day weather brought out 327 visitors, 133 of them children.**

what works with people. Look for shared values. . . . Normalize the conversation, [engage] the messy middle that isn't clear, so conversation can progress."

Haluza-Delay attends First Mennonite Church in Edmonton. He is the editor of the book *How the World's Religions are Responding to Climate Change* and served as an observer with the World Council of Churches to the UN-sponsored climate negotiations in Morocco in 2016. ❧

## New name?

### MWC considers identity and brand



Mennonite World Conference  
BOGOTA, COLOMBIA

**W**hen someone mispronounces or misspells your name, does it seem as though they aren't quite addressing you? We choose names carefully, perhaps to honour someone or express a hoped-for characteristic. They form part of our sense of identity.

Changing a name is not a process entered into lightly. There are legal steps, and friends and acquaintances must learn to use the new name. More importantly, the change says something about identity: Something significant has changed, or the new name better describes who you have always been.

Over the past 30 years, the leaders of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) have been in conversation around the possibility of a name change. In 2016, the Executive Committee gave the Faith and Life Commission the task of leading a process to bring a recommendation to the General Council in 2018 and for decision in 2021. Regional representatives will pursue conversations and gather feedback.

A formal request from leaders of the Brethren in Christ Church in the U.S. who experience a sense of exclusion motivated the current conversation. They observed that when the MWC assembly was held in Pennsylvania in 2015, the news media reported on the event almost exclusively in terms of "Mennonite," despite the many

Brethren in Christ congregations involved.

The identity of an organization can change over time. At its beginnings, MWC was a conference that European church leaders convened in 1925, 1930 and 1936, to address specific issues, particularly the refugee crisis among Mennonites in Russia. By 1948, an organizational structure had emerged using the name "Mennonite World Conference." In 2003, the official name became: "Mennonite World Conference: A Community of Anabaptist-Related Churches."

Building widespread recognition of an organization's identity—or brand—requires time and energy. MWC is widely known by its acronym. A name change would need to consider the linguistic consequences in its three official languages: English, Spanish and French.

Possible alterations to MWC's name trend in two directions: replace "Mennonite" with "Anabaptist" and replace "Conference" with "Communion," "Community" or "Alliance."

### "Mennonite"

Historically, and in the context of the global church, "Anabaptist" includes a broad spectrum of groups with a commitment to believers baptism, a view of the church as a visible community and an earnest desire to follow the teachings of Jesus in daily life. Theologically, "Anabaptist" is often used to denote an ideal or standard, a belief tradition separated from the cultural ties sometimes attached to "Mennonite."

Of the 105 national member churches in MWC, 76 use Mennonite, 13 are Brethren in Christ conferences and some 11 employ "Anabaptist" in their title, often in conjunction with "Mennonite."

The Global Anabaptist Profile research project found that churches in North America had the highest preference for "Anabaptist" as a self-descriptor (58 percent) compared to 41 percent in Europe, 38 percent in Africa, 23 percent in Asia, and 21 percent in Latin America.

For "Mennonite," the numbers were: Europe (62 percent), Asia (60 percent), Africa (55 percent), Latin America (33 percent), and North America (31 percent). (*Groups could choose more than one designation.*)

A drawback of the word "Anabaptist" is that it is both too broad and too limiting: the descriptor is claimed by a much larger group than associates with MWC; but it also focusses on believers baptism as the marker of Mennonite identity to the exclusion of other important theological emphases like discipleship and the mission of reconciliation.

### "Conference"

Almost 100 years after its first convening, MWC is best known for its once-every-six-years assembly. Today, however, the organization functions year-round to foster relationship and support among diverse members of the Anabaptist family.

In 2012, the General Council affirmed a document from the Faith and Life Commission that provided extensive theological reflection on the Greek concept of *koinonia* as a descriptor of MWC. It highlights the centrality of "shared identity and life as the 'body of Christ,'" writes Thomas Yoder Neufeld, a retired Canadian theologian. *Koinonia* is "both the reality undergirding our life together, and . . . a goal toward which we are moving . . . both fact and vision."

The word that most closely expresses this concept is "communion," used in MWC's constitution and other documents. "Communion" suggests a body committed to relationships of sacrificial love, accountability, and mutual aid for the purpose of fellowship, worship, service and mission.

Alternatively, "community" or "fellowship" suggests a gathering of shared interests, goals and activities, while "alliance" or "federation" suggests a legislative body made up of independent groups that gather to pursue common goals.

A final option is simply to retain the name. Mennonite World Conference remains a strong brand, and though it does not fully convey all aspects of the family's identity, other names are also partial descriptions.

Whatever the outcome of the conversation, MWC will continue to serve the family of Anabaptist-related worshipping communities around the world with prayer, support and mutual submission as we follow Christ's example of sharing and living good news to the world. ❧

## GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

# 'It doesn't feel so lonely anymore'

*Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights ends its reconciliation journey in nation's capital*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ALLY SIEBERT

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*  
OTTAWA

The crowd that gathered at the Human Rights Monument in Ottawa on May 13 didn't allow the rain to dampen their celebration of the arrival of the Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights.

More than 30 walkers rallied together with indigenous leaders, government officials and a few hundred supporters to mark the completion of their 600-kilometre journey and to demand that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) be fully adopted and implemented by the federal government.

The pilgrimage began three weeks earlier in Kitchener, Ont., and was coordinated by Mennonite Church Canada and

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's "94 Calls to Action," focusing on the articles that name UNDRIP as "the framework for reconciliation" and point to faith groups as key players in historical wrongdoing and future transformation.

Walkers hailed from across the nation's many treaty and traditional lands, including unceded and unsurrendered territories. Nearly 20 completed the entire journey, but innumerable others joined for parts of it, whether a few weeks, a few days or simply a few minutes. Eighteen different churches served as overnight hosts, with occasional nights at community halls and



MP Niki Ashton addresses the Ottawa rally. She will bring an inscribed birch bark scroll to Parliament on behalf of the walkers, who carried it from Kitchener, Ont., to Ottawa.

recreation centres. In their last week of pilgrimage, walkers spent a memorable evening with hosts at the Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nation near Arden.

At the final Ottawa rally, walkers stood in solidarity behind indigenous leaders like Sylvia McAdam and Myeengun Henry, their support for host peoples and Bill C-262 at the forefront. Bill C-262 is a private member's bill sponsored by MP Romeo Saganash that would provide the necessary framework to ensure that all forthcoming Canadian laws comply with UNDRIP. Along with other parliamentary colleagues at the rally, Saganash insisted that the government keep its promise of



The final rally at the Human Rights Monument, with walkers standing under the inscription, 'All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights.'



Walkers look on as Leah Gazan, left, and Romeo Saganash receive a cloth covered in supportive messages from Kathy Moorhead Thiessen at Ottawa Mennonite Church. Saganash will carry the cloth into Parliament.



a nation-to-nation relationship with all Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Bill C-262 goes to its second reading in September, making the pilgrimage a timely opportunity for walkers to connect with an estimated 1,500 Canadians in churches and schools, and on the road.

Kathy Moorhead Thiessen, a member of CPT's Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Project, described how "the message got out, over and over, through the media that met us along the way, hundreds of people attending teach-ins in the evenings, and 50-plus walkers. [We] became a community spread out across Canada."

The pilgrimage undoubtedly aimed to put a better political foot forward, but there was also spiritual significance in the embodiment of pilgrimage. Tamara Shantz, interim pastor with Pastors in Exile in Kitchener, spoke at the final Ottawa Mennonite Church teach-in, remarking, "The question, 'What is the spirit of this place?' was a powerful way for us to encounter land and space."

Writing Scripture on human hearts is a common spiritual practice, but in an effort to increase familiarity with UNDRIP, walkers also challenged themselves to commit articles of the Declaration to memory. According to Steve Heinrichs, MC Canada's director of indigenous relations, "We need to take as seriously the beauty of human rights as we do the beauty of the gospel."

Shantz agreed that Christian perception and practice of the gospel needs to change. "Ours is a gospel of reconciliation," she said. "Christ came to remove all barriers, and what a tragedy it is that the gospel has been used for violence and to create barriers instead. We need to reclaim our gospel."

Despite the group's predominantly Christian settler origins, Moorhead Thiessen said that indigenous voices were present in "the discernment circle that guided us preceding the pilgrimage and the indigenous people who walked with us and met us along the way. They told us that seeing so many church people 'walking the talk' gave them hope that change was possible."

One of these indigenous walkers was activist Leah Gazan, a member of Wood Mountain Lakota Nation and an instructor at the University of Winnipeg. She quickly



*The Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights rally ends with an attempted delivery of letters to the Prime Minister's Office, located in the Langevin building, at left. Langevin was a politician who had a key role in establishing the Canadian Indian Residential School system.*

became integral to the pilgrimage, with her warm friendship, penchant for live-feed videography and ardent support for Bill C-262.

Gazan hosted the final Ottawa rally and echoed the gratitude felt by many. "I'm getting tired, so thank you for sharing the load," she told the walkers. "It doesn't feel so lonely anymore."

Already, solidarity walks are taking place in Mennonite communities across area churches, and Heinrichs enthusiastically reported that, although the walkers are tired, "they aren't burnt out!" There are already plans underway to meet with local politicians and dreams of future pilgrimage



*Algonquin elder Annie Smith St-Georges is pictured at the Ottawa Mennonite Church teach-in. The quilt was a gift from the church's quilting group.*

routes being mapped out.

Moorhead Thiessen agreed that this was only a starting point. "We do not have huge expectations that our pilgrimage will be the tipping point," she admitted. "But we do know that our 600 kilometres of hard work, sore muscles and exhaustion have inspired others to walk the talk as well." ❧

*Ally Siebert lives in Ottawa and is a member of the Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service Board of Directors.*

# 'Happy to find a safe place'

*Stream of asylum seekers passes through small town*

STORY AND PHOTO BY WILL BRAUN

Senior Writer  
GRETNA, MAN.

**"T**he world has come to Gretna," says Robin Neustaeter, a resident of the normally quiet town of 550 on the border between Manitoba and the U.S. On May 4, Manitoba's Conservative government opened a "reception centre" in Gretna to provide temporary housing for asylum seekers who walk across the border in the area.

On the first Sunday the centre was open, six asylum seekers from Cameroon and Nigeria attended the local Mennonite church. Co-pastor Jana Wiebe says many in the congregation found it "energizing."

One man had lost his shoes on the walk into Canada and was determined to get shoes by that Sunday so he could attend church. He felt he needed to go to church to thank God he was in Canada.

Also in attendance were a couple with three young children, the oldest a 7-year-old boy with cerebral palsy. The dad had carried the boy on their 14-hour walk into Canada. He held his son throughout the service. Wiebe says it was "heartwarming and heartbreaking."

Wiebe looks forward to seeing who else may attend in coming weeks. She expects church members will go to the centre each Sunday to extend an invitation. Community members are welcome to visit the common room at the centre, which is a formerly unused seniors housing complex.

While media are not permitted, I visited—without notebook or camera—along with several people from Pembina Mennonite Fellowship, including my wife and sons, who were delivering hygiene kits. Inside, a dozen people were eating a lunch that had been brought in. Two men chatted with the security guard. The mood was relaxed.

Asylum seekers are brought to the centre directly from the Canada Customs office, where their initial processing and security screening takes place. They stay for two to

five days, until arrangements can be made for housing in Winnipeg.

While there have been concerns in the community, Gretna is showing hospitality. "People are bringing them *rollkuchen*," Neustaeter says. In the church lobby is a list of the items needed at the centre, including baby strollers and toys.

Students at Mennonite Collegiate Institute in town are also keen to connect. They are gathering supplies, baking and hoping to spend time hanging out with kids.

"I am pleased our kids are excited about this," says principal Cheryl Braun.

Wiebe, Braun and Neustaeter all draw a comparison with Mennonite history. "We have our own story of immigration," says Neustaeter. "At some point, these people were us." Braun, whose parents immigrated to Canada, notes that not everyone was pleased to see Mennonites when we arrived.

"How could we not help?" Wiebe wonders, in reference to our history and faith. "Jesus said to welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and feed the hungry." For her, it is important to "live out of a place of faith rather than fear."

## ***Illegal queue-jumpers straining the system***

Wiebe, Braun and Neustaeter speak respectfully about tensions in Gretna and beyond. Legality is one concern. Tim Wichert, a Mennonite immigration lawyer from Virgil, Ont., says "a legal conflict" exists. While it is not lawful to cross a border other than at a port of entry, Canadian law and international law make provisions for people who face persecution at home to do what these asylum seekers do.

The Safe Third Country agreement with the U.S., which requires people to make a refugee claim in the first "safe" country they reach, does not apply to people who arrive from the U.S. by sea, at an airport or



*Heather Menzies, back right, and Jennifer deGroot and sons deliver hygiene kits to the Gretna refugee reception centre.*

between ports of entry.

This is an established legal process, although the odd need to sneak across the border adds a shadowy character to it.

As for "queue-jumping," Wichert says, "If someone is in danger, and has a legitimate refugee claim, then that person should have their claim considered on its merits. That's an international obligation, and part of an international legal [and moral] regime that says we need to protect refugees."

While many Canadians are more familiar with cases of refugee claimants being processed overseas, walking across a border is another legitimate track.

Understandably, some Canadians ask whether the people coming over face significant danger of deportation from the U.S. Many of the asylum seekers are Somali. A Somali man at the centre the day I visited noted that 90 Somalis have been deported in 2017 and seven of those ended up dead. Although I was unable to verify the second figure, the fear is real.

U.S. officials have said 4,801 Somalis in the U.S. are subject to "final orders of removal," although that does not mean they will all be deported. Last November in Minneapolis, Minn., then-candidate Donald Trump referred to Somali refugees in the state as a "disaster."

The risk of deportation is not new. Former president Barack Obama deported more people than any other president. As of the end of April, 575 people had made refugee claims in Manitoba this

year, equalling the number for all of 2016. Nationally, about 12,000 people made refugee claims in the first four months of 2017, compared to about twice that many in 2016.

Not all those who cross the border will get to stay. Neustaeter says that roughly two-thirds of all refugee claims in Canada are successful, meaning they are deemed by a refugee board to be people with a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country or otherwise in need of protection.

Another concern is that these people are a “drain on the system.” Like most money questions, this boils down to priorities. Is it a societal priority to extend benefits—at real cost—to a segment of people among whom two-thirds are fleeing persecution? Views differ.

Stepping back, Neustaeter sees bigger questions. “Why,” she asks, “do people have to leave their homes?”

Meanwhile, she goes to the reception centre several times a week with her young daughter. “They’re humans just like you and me,” she says. “They are just so happy to find a safe place.” ☘



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## COVER STORY

**‘Without CoSA I’d be lost’***Government funding reinstated for restorative justice project*

BY RACHEL BERGEN

Mennonite Central Committee Canada  
WINNIPEG

**M**ennonite Central Committee (MCC) welcomes the Canadian government’s announcement that it will provide nearly \$7.5 million over five years to Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), which helps convicted sex offenders reintegrate into their communities.

CoSA is a national restorative justice organization for women and men who have committed serious sexual offences. It allows the community to play a direct role

in the restoration, reintegration and risk management of people who are often seen with only fear and anger.

CoSA emerged from a 1994 experiment in which a group of Mennonites in southern Ontario, with the backing of MCC Ontario, brought together a circle of volunteers to work with one particular person upon his release. The experiment caught the attention of others, and there were soon similar circles across the country, with MCC playing a pivotal role in their development.

The model supports newly released and often repeat offenders who find themselves ostracized because of the nature of their crimes. There are two “circles” of support for these core members of CoSA. The “inner circle” involves several trained volunteers who work with the core member to address practical needs while also serving as an emotional support system. The “outer circle” is made up of professionals who can offer training and advice to the volunteers.

According to a 2014 report by the Church Council on Justice and Corrections, only 2 percent of CoSA-involved offenders sexually reoffended again within three years of leaving jail, compared to almost 28 percent of offenders who did not have CoSA—a reduction of more than 92 percent.

Over the years, the federal government provided some financial assistance to CoSA programs, but initial exploratory funding ended a number of years ago. Some circles managed to forge on with a bare-bones budget through donations, some money from MCC, grants or provincial funding, but it wasn’t sustainable.

In Montreal, for example, 45 circles dwindled down to eight in the years following the end of the federal funding. Many staff people had to be laid off, and some CoSA sites are run entirely by volunteers.

The new grant, announced on May 6,

will strengthen and grow the work of CoSA in 12 or more communities across the country during the first year of funding. MCC currently is significantly invested in nine CoSA sites across the country.

Daniel, whose last name isn’t being used for security reasons, has been a core member of a CoSA circle in Alberta for seven years. He credits the program with keeping him out of prison and helping him to build healthy relationships. After experiencing years of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of family members, Daniel began abusing girls himself. He was sentenced to more than six years in a federal penitentiary in 2005.

Moira Brownlee, the CoSA program coordinator for MCC Alberta, visited Daniel in prison for several months prior to his release. For the last seven years she has been a part of Daniel’s circle.

“CoSA is very important to me,” Daniel says. “It was a security blanket for me on the outside. Moira talked to me like I was a person, not a piece of trash from jail.”

“I have my struggles,” he adds. “I suffer from depression and anxiety issues and borderline multiple personality disorder. It’s a constant struggle for me, day by day. But I always know I can pick up the phone, send a text message, and I’ll always have someone on the other end who will talk to me.”

Randy Klassen, MCC’s national restorative justice coordinator who sits on CoSA Canada’s board and also volunteers in a circle, says CoSA’s emphasis on supporting and holding people accountable who have histories of sexual offenses is a response to the Christian call to radical hospitality. “It’s part of the larger vision of MCC to serve where there is need and to create the vision for shalom with those who seem furthest from it and seem the least deserving,” he says.

For people like Daniel who are benefiting from these circles, it makes all the difference. “I’d still be in prison without CoSA,” he says. “I’d be lost.” ❧

MCC PHOTO BY SHANE YUHAS



*A former core member of a Mennonite Central Committee-supported Circle of Support and Accountability program run by the Moncton Community Chaplaincy. He wishes to remain anonymous so that he can reintegrate into society without the stigma related to sexual offenders.*



**Randy Klassen**



*The St. Agatha Roman Catholic School Choir, with Roberta Harrison of Wild Strawberries, sings 'A Wish for Peace' at the PeaceWorks Studio curriculum launch on May 17 at 50 Kent Avenue in Kitchener, Ont.*

## Empowering student peacemakers

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

Eastern Canada Correspondent  
KITCHENER, ONT.

**P**aceWorks Studio—not to be confused with PeaceWorks Technology Solutions of Waterloo, Ont.—kicked off a new curriculum to create and support student peacemakers in Canada and beyond on May 17 at the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario headquarters in Kitchener.

Founded by Stephen Jarnick in 2011, and cultivated in the incubator program at the Centre for Peace Advancement at Conrad Grebel University College, the curriculum is for use in schools across Canada, equipping teachers to use it in the class or in a school peace club.

The curriculum teaches peacemaking skills to students from grades 6 to 12, focussing on such themes as compassion and social justice.

Each group that studies the material in public or parochial schools will be connected with a peace club in Africa. These clubs were begun in 2006 in Zambia by Issa Ebombolo to help bridge the gap between Zambian students and Democratic Republic of Congo refugee students flooding into Zambia. There are now 600 clubs in 14 countries across Africa working at peace together across ethnic, religious and cultural fissures.

Each group will also collect materials for MCC hygiene kits to be sent to troubled places in the world. Classroom groups will either gather and assemble the kits themselves, or send the materials to MCC for assembly.

Naming itself “Canada’s student peace movement,” PeaceWorks Studio will host a Peace Day, the first to be held in June 2018 at the Paris, Ont., fairgrounds with bands, food and merchandise. The day will be free to all Grade 6 to 12 students in a school, even if only one class or group uses the curriculum.

Kitchener Mayor Berry Vrbanovic, present at the kick-off, noted that the program works “with kids to resolve conflicts nonviolently, creating safer schools” and better communication holistically.

The website (PeaceWorks.tv) includes an online album of peace photos, YouTube clips and music. The material is free.

Supporters of the curriculum include MCC, Ten Thousand Villages, and a host of musicians and media personalities like Susan Aglukark, a seven-time Juno Award-winning indigenous singer. ☘

### ☘ Briefly noted

#### Auction of Maud Lewis art raises \$45,000 for MCC

KITCHENER, ONT.—The thrilling and tumultuous saga of the Maud Lewis painting found in a thrift shop donation bin has come to a successful end. The on-line auction of “Portrait of Eddie Barnes and Ed Murphy, Lobster Fishermen, Bay View, Nova Scotia” concluded on May 20 with the winning bid reaching \$45,000. The proceeds from the auction will support the relief, development and peace work of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The painting was first discovered over a year ago by Louis Silcox, a volunteer at the New Hamburg Thrift Centre, an MCC Ontario thrift shop. Thankfully, another volunteer thought the painting might be genuine. After the painting was authenticated, MCC put it up for auction. Despite the initial auction having a false start due to a fake bidder acting in bad faith, the re-started auction saw the painting sell for more than three times its assessed value and more than double the price of the previous highest price of a Maud Lewis painting. “We are thrilled with the selling price, and it’s poetic that the art of a Canadian artist who lived in poverty will be going toward helping others in need,” says Rick Cober Bauman, MCC Ontario’s executive director.

—MCC Ontario



# Making sandwiches for the hungry

*A pantry box helps meet needs in local church community*

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent

PRINCE ALBERT, SASK.

**W**es Neepin opens the door of a small wooden box and places two paper lunch bags inside. The bags contain sandwiches, cookies and juice boxes. Before the day is over, they'll be gone.

The box sits on a wooden post in front of Grace Mennonite Church. It is one of eight or 10 such pantry boxes—or blessing boxes—situated throughout the city of Prince Albert. Melanie Wiens says a co-worker of hers built four of the boxes. Inmates at the local jail built several more, and Wiens volunteered to set one up at the church.

The blessing box is a response to hunger in the community. Carolyn Vis, Grace's congregational chair, says, "We know in Prince Albert there is high poverty and there is high hunger. I think, because of our demographics, we tend to experience that several times more than a lot of communities." While programs exist to help alleviate hunger, not everyone can avail themselves of these programs. "The food bank can't be accessed at all hours," says Vis, "and it's downtown, not in some of the far-reaching areas. . . . You can't get there if you don't have a vehicle."

Vis says that, while members of the congregation contribute to the box, they aren't the only ones. Neighbourhood residents and area businesses also add items to the box on a regular basis.

"I think it's an easy way for people to help," says Wiens. "They might not have time to [volunteer at] the food bank, but it's not that hard to grab a couple extra groceries and [put them in the box]."

But, as Vis points out, groceries aren't the only items contributed. Socks, mittens, toques and even blankets find their way into the box. And they don't stay there for long. Whatever is donated is also taken.

"I put stuff in there one day before

church," says Wiens. "An hour later it was empty. It's amazing how fast the turnover is."

Neepin contributes daily. Usually he makes sandwiches from whatever he and his wife Betty have in their fridge. Each brown bag contains a couple sandwiches and two cookies. In December, he committed to preparing the lunches through the winter months. On cold days he wrapped the sandwiches in newspaper so they wouldn't freeze.

He has heard people express concern that one person might come along and take all the food in the box, leaving nothing for the next person. But, he says, "I check it off and on. There'd be one bag gone and one bag still there." He adds, "I've got to trust in God. I believe God will do things to help us out."

On Easter Sunday, Neepin announced in

church that he planned to quit his sandwich ministry, now that winter was over. Later that week, the 84-year-old was required to fast in preparation for blood tests. When the blood work was done, he enjoyed a breakfast sandwich and a cup of coffee at a restaurant. "After I ate that, I felt so good," he says. "Then I thought about these guys, you know. Do I have to keep doing this?" He headed over to the church around noon and found the box empty. So he went home, packed some oranges and apples into bags and put them in the box. He's been bringing sandwiches every day since.

What motivates Neepin to keep making sandwiches? "I went through it myself growing up," he says. "I was hungry many times. We lived in a little log shack, and we'd get up in the morning and we didn't have anything to eat. We'd have to go to the neighbours to get something to eat. That happened quite a few times." He adds, "I don't like to see anybody else go hungry."

Vis believes the blessing box is a model that can benefit any community, regardless of size. "Sometimes in a smaller community, people hide their needs because they don't want the community to know," she says. The blessing box is a way to help meet those needs without embarrassing people. And, as Vis points out, it's also "a way of helping without judging." ❧



*Wes Neepin puts brown bag lunches into the blessing box in front of Grace Mennonite Church in Prince Albert, Sask.*

## GOD AT WORK IN US

# It's not just about singing

*Men's choir fosters community, generosity as well as love of music*

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent  
SASKATOON

“To me, it’s always amazing how the guys come and keep coming to sing,” says Russ Regier. The guys he refers to are A Buncha Guys, an informal choir made up of young men in their early post-high school years.

In late 1997, Russ and his wife Val were asked to lead a choir of young men at Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, where they are members. “We decided to keep going after Christmas,” he says. “The guys invited their Shekinah connections,” and the choir grew from there.

For many years, the Regiers have hosted the choir in their home every Sunday evening from September through the end of April. Rehearsals last two hours and are followed by a snack. “Then the visiting can happen, and I get a chance to talk with them,” says Russ.

Over the years, most singers have been Rosthern Junior College (RJC) alumni. Others, as Regier notes, have been campers and counsellors at Shekinah Retreat Centre. This year, a number of choir members are graduates of Canadian Mennonite University.

When Russ initially approached Shekinah staff about renting their Timber Lodge for a Christmas concert, he was told, “Forget the rent, we’ll take an offering.” And so the concert became a fundraising event for the camp. It was sold out before the end of October. What began as a one-time event has turned into an annual tradition. Each December, the choir performs two concerts—one in Saskatoon, the other at Shekinah—with offerings taken for the camp.

The Guys are also the featured entertainment at RJC’s annual Guys and Pies fundraising event. While pies are served,

the choir sings. Between sets, cakes are auctioned, and it has become a matter of pride for the singers to purchase the highest-selling cake. This year, they paid \$7,500 for a confection created by the wife and father-in-law of one of the choir members.

Although the cause has varied from year to year, A Buncha Guys’ spring concert is also a fundraiser. This wasn’t the intention when the choir began. “Nothing about this was intentional,” says Russ. Over the years, many of the singers have been students, or in the early stages of careers, and this may be on his mind when he adds, “It’s a nice way to donate if you don’t have money.”

This year A Buncha Guys prepared a special 20-year reunion concert. The current choir, along with 25 former members—A Buncha Guys alumni—met for a weekend of rehearsals. The performance, held April 30 in Saskatoon’s Knox United Church, garnered an offering of in excess of \$20,000 for Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan.

A Buncha Guys is not an auditioned

choir. Anyone who wants to sing is welcome. Members are recruited by word of mouth. Since its inception, says Russ, well over 100 men have claimed membership in the choir, some for as little as three months, others for more than 10 years.

The Guys sing a broad range of music, from baroque to bluegrass. The Regiers try to choose music suited to the abilities of each year’s group. The words they sing are also important. “It’s important that the text speaks to people,” says Russ. “It needs to be biblically sound and faith-based. The music is chosen more for the singers than for the audience.” Not all selections are spiritual in nature. Folk songs such as “Loch Lomond” combine with pop tunes like “Sweet Caroline” to add variety to the program.

But the choir isn’t just about singing. It’s also about community. “It feels to me the guys are comfortable here, accepted here,” says Russ. “We hope it’s a place you can come and sing with other guys who like to sing.”

The Regiers feel they benefit from leading the choir as well. “It’s been a very pleasant experience to get to know the guys,” says Val. She appreciates the fact that “they’ve let us into their world.” Russ says the two-hour rehearsals go by quickly and admits he feels energized by them. “I get a lot of adrenalin from the group,” he says, adding, “It’s good to be part of young people’s lives.” ❧

Visit [canadianmennonite.org/buncha-guys](http://canadianmennonite.org/buncha-guys) to watch two videos of A Buncha Guys in performance.



*A Buncha Guys is an informal choir of young men who love to sing. Conducted by Russ Regier and accompanied by Val Regier, the Guys perform several fundraising concerts each year.*

## ARTBEAT

## BOOK REVIEW

# ‘What does God have to do with any of this?’

*Fall in One Day.*

By Craig Terlson. Blue Moon Publishers, 2017.

REVIEWED BY BETH DOWNEY SAWATZKY  
MANITOBA CORRESPONDENT

**C**raig Terlson is a real-life Bartholomew Cubbins. That is to say, he wears a startling number of hats. He is an erstwhile illustrator, present-day graphic designer, moonlight master chef, a one-time psychiatric nurse’s aide and a longtime writer of fiction. His debut novel, *Fall in One Day*, was released on May 16.



*in One Day* so encompasses, lies sandwiched between two explicitly religious scenes. The first involves a conversation in which Joe is told he is doomed to hell because he was never baptized as a baby, while the last portrays Joe’s “MacGyvered” baptism at the hands of those same two friends, hell bent, as it were, on saving his soul.

Terlson and his wife lodge their membership at the Grain of Wheat Church-Community in Winnipeg, an ecumenical worshipping body that identifies theological or practical “streams of influence,” including Anglicanism, Catholicism, the Mennonite faith tradition and others.

While Terlson himself does not claim any specific denominational label, both of his daughters graduated from Mennonite schools, and nine-to-fiving for Canadian Mennonite University’s communications and marketing team means that many of his friends and colleagues are Mennonite. As a result, most days of the week he finds himself an outsider on the inside, a margin-dweller straddling many intersecting lines. Nevertheless, as a breaking novelist, it is precisely his comfort with ambiguity and his embrace of tension that makes his work glitter.

Several reviewers have already identified his work as markedly theological, blending questions of faith with the book’s other themes in fresh, provocative ways. In fact, all the mess that *Fall*

lines of the book comes from the latter scene, in which Joe asks his friend-turned-self-appointed-cleric: “That white thing, isn’t that what priests wear?” The reply: “This ain’t church. This is more important.”

Terlson, who came to faith in his early 30s, calls episodes like these the natural result of his long-time fascination with the clash between the sacred and profane: “Where do the sacred and profane meet? I say everywhere. Everywhere and all the time.”

Such clashes colour *Fall in One Day* from front to back, and give its mature content a lift, a truthfulness or resonance to the religious reader’s ear that can be difficult to come by. And truth, Terlson says, is the central concern of the book as a whole: “Who holds the truth? What is the truth?”

*Fall in One Day* is being marketed as young-adult fiction, a label Terlson appropriately resists. Most of the story is told from the first-person perspective of its central protagonist, 15-year-old Joe Beck.

While this makes the novel a naturally sympathetic read for younger audiences, its themes are mature, including drug use, family strife, child abuse, violence, mental illness and even suicide. As a historical novel set in the 1970s, this “sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll” book has the politics of Watergate peppered throughout its pages, rubbing alongside the characters’ own discoveries of deceit where there ought to be trust. Furthermore, there are several “main characters” outside of Joe who range in age from 15 to roughly 50, each bringing a different level of complex awareness and life experiences with which the reader must grapple.

Terlson’s book consistently refuses to answer in any concrete way the questions it poses. At best, what the reader can expect is a barely there trail of breadcrumbs to follow, a watermark of wisdom that trickles through from Terlson himself, probably unintentionally. Still, the telling thing about this watermark is that it is left by the waters of baptism—in Joe’s case, the muddy, small-town waters of baptism. Terlson himself notes that, while his title describes one instance or kind of Fall, the novel contains many different and important falls, not the least of which is a pervasive awareness of the biblical Fall of humanity, and the fallen state of things and people:

“We are fallen—and this is what it is—we are fallen,” Terlson says, “but at the same time we are incredibly not just forgiven, but we’re incredibly beautiful.”



Author Craig Terlson



/// Briefly noted

**Play about mental illness and grief leaves Winnipeg crowd in stitches**

Douglas Mennonite Church in Winnipeg hosted an evening of comic theatre in May, featuring Virginia-based actor and playwright Ted Swartz, who performed his latest one-man show, *Laughter is Sacred Space*.



Ted Swartz

Specializing in what he calls “comedic exegesis,” and being partial to intersections between “the worlds of the sacred and profane,” Swartz made the audience howl inside and out. Viewers cried tears of laughter and of sadness by turns as they heard the story of how Ted lost his long-time comedic partner, Lee Eshleman, to mental illness, and how he almost lost himself to grief. Eden Health Care Services backed the evening, meaning tickets were free, and made resources available after the show to any in attendance that wanted to know more about how to engage with mental health issues or to find healing for their own wounds. Swartz will be performing in Winnipeg again on June 28 at Home Street Mennonite Church, in a show called *Discovery: A Comic Lament*.

—BY BETH DOWNEY SAWATZKY



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**GAMEO finds new home at Goshen College**

The online source of information about Anabaptist groups around the world has new oversight under the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism. [canadianmennonite.org/gameo-goshen](http://canadianmennonite.org/gameo-goshen)



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This includes everything from Sanford to *(Continued on page 30)*





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*Heide Braun, a Grade 3 teacher at WMEMS, is pictured at Mother Teresa's home for malnourished children in Kolkata, India.*

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# Breathing new life into the music

*Darren Creech set to premiere 'Mennonite Piano Concerto' in Toronto*

BY AARON EPP  
Young Voices Editor

When a Toronto-based LGBTQ orchestra approached queer classical pianist Darren Creech about performing Victor Davies' "Mennonite Piano Concerto" with it in concert, it didn't realize what a perfect fit he would be.

Unbeknownst to the Counterpoint Community Orchestra at the time, Creech is Mennonite and he grew up listening to the piece.

"I've owned the score for 10 years now, but I've never had the opportunity to play it with an orchestra," Creech says. "Not only did I know the piece so well, but it was my great-aunt, Irmgard Baerg, who premiered it with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra in 1975."

Creech, 26, will give the concerto its Toronto premiere when he performs it with Counterpoint as part of the orchestra's upcoming concert, "Love & Light: Celebrating Canada 150 with Pride." The concert takes place June 10 at Saint Luke's United Church at 7:30 p.m.

The "Mennonite Piano Concerto" is a 30-minute piece that consists of three

movements. Davies based the concerto's musical themes on hymns popular in the Mennonite community.

Creech, who grew up the son of missionaries in Senegal, West Africa, says the concert feels special because it will combine his identity as a Mennonite with his identity as a queer man. "It brings together these two important identities that both influence my life a lot in a way that I don't think has happened before for me," he says.

He adds that it is important to him to breathe new life into the work with an inclusive, cross-cultural lens. The concerto will be performed alongside the premiere of "Elegy for Orlando," a piece composed by orchestra member and cellist Andrew McClure to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Orlando nightclub shooting.

"It's cool to be able to present [the concerto] in perhaps a different context and to a somewhat different audience than maybe it's typically presented to," Creech

*(Continued on page 28)*

PHOTO BY ANTHONY CHUNG



*Toronto-based classical pianist Darren Creech is looking forward to performing with the Counterpoint Community Orchestra.*

PHOTO BY RICHARD RHYME



*Raised the son of missionaries in Senegal, Darren Creech has aspired to be a classical pianist since he was 5.*

TOM@TOMLEGRADY.COM PHOTO



*The Counterpoint Community Orchestra is an inclusive LGBTQ orchestra founded in 1984.*

PHOTO BY CHLOE SQUANCE



*For Darren Creech, who holds a master of music degree in piano performance from the Université de Montréal, being a classical pianist is the fulfillment of a lifelong dream that dates back to when he was 5.*

*(Continued from page 27)*

says. “Given that it’s a queer orchestra, during Pride month and the one-year anniversary of the shooting in Orlando, it feels important to bring these stories of resilience from the Mennonite community and the strength that can be drawn from faith practices.”

“Growing up in Senegal and being Canadian, but also being queer and Mennonite, I think it brings a lot of identities and angles together in a special way,” he adds.

Although it is just now making its Toronto premiere, the “Mennonite Piano Concerto” has been performed by orchestras across Canada and in parts of the U.S., as well as in Bulgaria and China. At one point, Baerg’s recording of the piece—recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra at the legendary Abbey Road Studios in London, England—was one of the most requested works on CBC Radio 2.

“What started out as a very modest piece [has] gone on to have quite an amazing life,” says Davies, who will be in the audience on June 10 and has spoken with Creech a handful of times about the concerto. “He’s a terrific young guy . . . and he’s a wonderful pianist. We’re very delighted that he’s playing it.”

John Edward Liddle, Counterpoint’s guest conductor for the performance, is also delighted. He says that when Creech and the orchestra first rehearsed together, the pianist blew everyone away. “He is truly a world-class soloist,” Liddle says.

Liddle fell in love with the “Mennonite Piano Concerto” after hearing it on CBC, and suggested it to the orchestra. “I’ve listened to a lot of [contemporary] Canadian [compositions], and there’s nothing that’s as poignant, fun and joyous,” he says. “The piece takes you on one of these great journeys. . . . It’s so vast and endless in terms of what it offers the listener.”

In August, Creech will give a concert and workshop at Conrad Grebel University College’s Ontario Mennonite Music Camp, where he previously worked as the piano instructor. That same month, he will perform the “Mennonite Piano Concerto” in a two-piano format in Abbotsford, B.C. Creech is glad that he can bring the concerto to new audiences. “It’s a very fun piece to play and to listen to,” he says. “It ends with a lot of joy. It’s a very rousing piece.” ❧

*For more information about the pianist, visit [darrencreech.com](http://darrencreech.com).*



PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIELLE RAIMBAULT



*Working part time cleaning seniors homes sparked Danielle Raimbault’s interest in working with the elderly.*

## Lessons learned from the elderly

*Working as a chaplain is both challenging and rewarding for Danielle Raimbault*

**BY AARON EPP**  
Young Voices Editor

**D**anielle Raimbault’s first day of work as the chaplain at a residence for the elderly was a memorable one that quickly shattered her expectations.

When the 24-year-old arrived at Chartwell Elmira Long Term Care Residence in Elmira, Ont., a year ago, she sat down beside a resident and introduced herself.

“Did your mom give you permission to

come here today?” the resident asked.

“Whereas I had come in with all of these expectations that I was going to be [her] spiritual guide, she saw me as a child,” Raimbault says, recalling the story with a laugh. “It was very humbling.”

Letting go of her expectations is something Raimbault has learned to do over the past year working one day a week at Chartwell Elmira, which is home to about

40 residents. Many of the residents live with dementia. As a result, Raimbault can have a wonderful conversation with a resident one week, only to come back the following week and have that resident yell at her to leave.

“Every day is going to be different,” she says. “Even though I have known them for a year, I’m still a stranger [to them] every time I walk into the room.”

Originally from Glenboro, Man., a small community located two hours west of Winnipeg, she now lives in Kitchener with her husband Justin. In addition to her work at Chartwell Elmira, she works part time as the youth pastor at Listowel Mennonite Church. She is also an administrative as-

Since then, she has learned that the spiritual moments she shares with residents might be something small, like shaking their hand or touching their shoulder as she greets them and wishes them the peace of Christ after worship.

“It’s just a completely different crowd, as opposed to doing ministry in a church congregation,” she says.

One of the biggest impacts that working at the residence has had on Raimbault is that it has caused her to think about death. “As a 24-year-old, I don’t tend to think about death very much, but as a chaplain, I realize death is a reality and people pass away quite frequently at my job,” she says.

Reflecting on the strong faith of the resi-

*[S]he has learned that the spiritual moments she shares with residents might be something small, like shaking their hand or touching their shoulder as she greets them and wishes them the peace of Christ after worship.*

sistant at Hawkesville Mennonite Church, and she is currently completing graduate studies in theology at Conrad Grebel University College.

Previously, Raimbault worked part time cleaning seniors homes in order to support herself through school. It was that experience that sparked her interest in working with the elderly. “I enjoyed talking and hearing their stories so much,” she says. “I decided I would apply for [the chaplain] job and see what it was all about.”

Every time she visits the residence, she leads two fellowship hours—one on the first floor and one on the second. The fellowship hours consist primarily of singing, sometimes with a short devotional. Afterwards, she goes around to visit residents one on one. Sometimes the visit consists of Raimbault holding a resident’s hand and singing to her or him. At other times, she will have a conversation with the resident and the two will pray for each other.

Along with learning to let go of her expectations, Raimbault has learned that she can’t go into her work at the residence with specific goals. At the beginning, she thought she would be leading the residents through profound spiritual experiences.

dents has inspired her in her own faith. “Family members will come in and talk about their mother or father or friend who is in the long-term-care home, and I like hearing them say, ‘She was such a woman of faith,’ or, ‘She was so kind, she would let anyone into her house and make supper for whoever showed up,’” Raimbault says. “It’s made me think a lot about how people see my faith. . . . What am I doing in my actions that show my faith?”

Being a chaplain is hard work. She comes home from a day at the residence emotionally, physically and spiritually exhausted. “If being a chaplain was my full-time job, I don’t think I’d be able to do it,” she says.

At the same time, it’s rewarding. Raimbault recalls one elderly man with dementia whom she never heard speak or sing during her first three months at the residence. During fellowship hour one day, she launched into a song and the man began singing along.

“I forget which hymn it was, but he knew every word to all the verses and he sang them out,” she says. “Somehow, in the back of his mind, he knew all the words to that song. That was very powerful.” ❧

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN VANGRONINGEN



*Located in rural mid-western Ontario, Chartwell Elmira Long Term Care Residence is home to about 40 people.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIELLE RAIMBAULT



*As a chaplain, Danielle Raimbault leads two fellowship hours that consist primarily of singing familiar hymns.*

## Promotional Supplement

(Continued from page 26)

Saskatchewan, and from Taiwan to Africa.

Principal David Stoesz, from the WMEMS Bedson Campus, spent two years with his family in Burkina Faso, teaching for Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission.

"We lived in a small town with grass huts and tin roofs," says Stoesz, adding, "Our school consisted of a couple of small buildings and our house in a small yard."

Grade 3 teacher Heidi Braun is an avid traveller, and prefers travelling to countries with vastly different cultures to learn more about our world, including India, Indonesia and Ethiopia.

These types of experiences benefit travellers themselves,

but teachers also share their wealth of knowledge with students through social studies, Christian education, health, outdoor education and social justice projects.

"I weave my global experiences into my teaching," says Braun, adding, "The bigger world can seem quite abstract to young kids, yet by telling kids my first-hand stories, it helps kids make it a bit more real in their own minds."

One focus for WMEMS is instilling empathy in the hearts and minds of its students. Seeing a photo of their teacher volunteering in an orphanage can carry more weight than trying to explain some of the difficulties children in other countries face.

## Calendar

### British Columbia

**Sept. 15-16:** MCC B.C. Festival and Auction, at the Tradex in Abbotsford.

**Sept. 30:** MCC B.C. annual general meeting, at South Abbotsford Church, Abbotsford.

### Alberta

**Until June 23:** Poverty Studies Summer Institute, sponsored by the Canadian Poverty Institute, at Ambrose University. For more information, visit [bit.ly/2mfW7Ya](http://bit.ly/2mfW7Ya).

### Saskatchewan

**June 22-24:** RJC musical, "Sister Act." Call the school at 306-232-4222 to book tickets.

**Aug. 12:** Spruce River Folk Festival, at Spruce River Farm, 20 kilometres north of Prince Albert. Music and food in support of landless first nations in Saskatchewan.

**Sept. 15-16:** "Refresh, refocus, renew," a mini-retreat with Betty Pries. To learn more about this year-long prayer and visioning process, visit [mcsask.ca](http://mcsask.ca).

### Manitoba

**Until June 17:** Opening of "160 acres: The Geography of home," a multimedia exhibition by Darlene Derksen, at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg.

**June 20:** CMU Golf Classic. For more information, visit [cmu.ca/golf](http://cmu.ca/golf).

**June 28:** Ted & Co. performs "Discovery: A Comic Lament," about the Doctrine of Discovery, at Home Street Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, call Laura Funk at 204-489-7016.

**Aug. 22:** Westgate Mennonite Collegiate's 13th-annual golf tournament, at Bridges Golf Course, Winnipeg.

**Sept. 9:** Fifteenth annual Head for the Hills fundraising ride for mental health. For more information registration or support for cyclists, visit



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Spring 2017 UPDATE

Extending the Table: Enough for All. The MC Sask Annual Delegate Sessions took place March 10-11 at Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon. With 84 delegates and an additional 100 registrants, volunteers, and guests, it was a meaningful time of fellowship, worship, and decision making.

Refresh. Refocus. Renew. At the 2017 ADS, we launched a year of intentional prayer and discernment around what it means to be the church, and to be MC Sask, in the 21st century. Following an initial survey and mini-retreat, we are now in a Season of Prayer, asking both individuals and congregations to spend time listening for God. Prayer guides and additional resources can be found at [www.mcsask.ca](http://www.mcsask.ca).

Listening, Living Together, & Loving One Another Even When We Disagree workshop by the Listening & Discernment Committee is now available online. This is an excellent resource for learning how to listen to one another in love, congregations are strongly encouraged to consider hosting the workshop.

[www.mcsask.ca](http://www.mcsask.ca)

edenhealthcare.ca.

**Oct. 13-15:** MC Canada special delegate assembly to discuss and vote on the future direction the national and area churches will take. As more information becomes available, it will be posted online at news.mennonitechurch.ca/releases.

**Oct. 20-21:** "Mennonite/s Writing VIII: Personal narratives of place and discernment" conference, at the University of Winnipeg, featuring Miriam Toews and Rhoda Janzen. Presented by the Chair in Mennonite Studies and the "Journal of Mennonite Studies." For more information, email Royden Loewen at r.loewen@uwinnipeg.ca.

## Ontario

**Until May 2019:** "Sites of Nonresistance: Ontario Mennonites and the First World War" exhibit of letters, photographs and documents from the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo.

**June 13:** Annual chicken barbecue at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. Advance tickets required. For more information, call 519-625-8602.

**June 16, 17:** Theatre of the Beat and musical group No Discernable Key present "Yellow Bellies," a play about conscientious objectors during the Second World War: (16), at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, at 7:30 p.m.; (17) at Floradale Mennonite Church, at 2 and 7 p.m.

**June 17:** MennoHomes' "Out-spok'n for affordable housing" bike-a-thon, at Elmira Mennonite Church. Options for cyclists, hikers and motorcyclists.

Contact Dan Driedger at 226-476-2535 for more details.

**June 24:** The annual Nithview Community strawberry social, from 2 to 4 p.m., and 6:30 to 8 p.m., in New Hamburg.

**June 25:** Tavistock Mennonite Church 75th anniversary. Celebration service at 9:45 a.m., followed by a free barbecue chicken meal from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. for 400 ticket holders. To reserve a ticket, call the church office at 519-655-2581.

**June 30-July 2:** Annual camping weekend at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. For more information, call 519-625-8602.

**July 9:** Folk and gospel songs, led by Mike and Diana Erb, at the Detweiler Meeting House, Roseville, at 2:30 p.m.

**July 31-Aug. 4:** Peace Camp, a day camp held at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo. For more information, or to register, call Alison Keyes at 519-885-0220 ext. 24291.

**Aug. 20:** Riverdale Mennonite Church, Millbank, hosts its public closing service, at 10 a.m. Guest speakers include Glenn Zehr, Troy Watson and Jim Brown. A time of socializing and refreshments will take place after the service.

**Sept. 17:** "Sing a new song" from the "Hymnal: A Worship Book" supplements, led by Mark Diller-Harder, at the Detweiler Meeting House, Roseville, at 2:30 p.m.

## U.S.A.

**Sept. 15-17:** The 18th Believers' Church Conference: "Word, Spirit and the renewal of the church: Believers' church, ecumenical and global perspectives"; at Goshen (Ind.) College.

For more information, email John Roth at johndr@goshen.edu.

**To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send Calendar announcements eight**

**weeks in advance of the event date by e-mail to calendar@canadianmennonite.org. For more Calendar listings online, visit canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.**



## Employment Opportunities



### Employment opportunity

MennoHomes is seeking a part-time accountant/bookkeeper with good working knowledge of Sage 50 Premium. The hours are flexible with an anticipated start date in the fall of this year. Primary responsibilities include carrying out the full bookkeeping cycle.

To apply please visit our website at:

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MennoHomes is a non-profit charity that provides affordable rental housing throughout Waterloo Region.



First United  
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### Employment Opportunity

#### Full Time Co-Pastor

Are you excited to help a church revision and deeply consider what it means to be Christ's example of peace?

Do you have a heart for welcoming people of diverse backgrounds into community?

First United Mennonite Church (FUMC), located in South East Vancouver, is looking for a pastor to engage and serve their culturally diverse urban neighbourhood.

We hold to the Anabaptist theology, are members of Mennonite Church BC and Mennonite Church Canada, and are looking for a pastor to join our team as we continue to develop our relationships with Christ, each other and the community.

Ideal candidates would have the following:

- Capacity to relate to various age groups and cultures
- Experience working in a church setting – in the areas of preaching and worship, pastoral care, nurturing gifts within the laity
- Commitment to Anabaptist theology and practice.
- Post-secondary religious education

We are looking for someone who is outgoing and can relate to a variety of people. Someone who has a missional outlook and a servant's heart. We are willing to look outside the box in the way that we do church, as long as it includes following Jesus and his teachings.

Please submit letters of interest and résumés to Liz, Pastor Search Committee Member, via email (lizepp@gmail.com) by July 28, 2017.

## Advertising Information

Contact

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## Classifieds

### Announcement

Three-bedroom cottage at Red Bay on the Bruce Peninsula, nestled among maple trees. Short walk to sandy beach and small park and includes a rear deck. Available June 24 through July 22 and July 29 through Sept. 2. Call Diane at 519-746-4920.

# Let the games begin

*Niagara Region youth play games in support of relief*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JONATHAN SEILING

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*  
ST. CATHARINES, ONT.

More than 30 youth from Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregations in the Niagara Region gathered at Grace Mennonite Church in St. Catharines on May 12 for the



*Karlie Haining, left, and Karli Bijakowski attempt to knot comforters for MCC while blindfolded and wearing gardening gloves during the Niagara Region Youth Hunger Games.*



*Jonathan Seiling, left, Karli Haining, centre, and Karli Bijakowski display two completed comforters that were knotted for MCC during the Niagara Region Youth Hunger Relief Games on May 12.*

“Hunger Relief Games.” Using non-perishable food items, plus items for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) hygiene kits and two comforters, they played a series of five games.

The coffee house afterward, hosted by Doug Schulz, Grace’s associate pastor, included music by youth, and reflections from MCC Ontario’s Sheryl Bruggeling, and Erika Klassen from the Westview Christian Fellowship/Westview Centre4Women; Westview is an emerging MC Eastern Canada congregation. They spoke about the local and global dimensions of poverty and ways that youth can make a difference.

The event resulted in two knotted comforters and more than 100 hygiene kits for MCC, and more than 150 food items for the women’s shelter. ☺



*Nick Schuurman, left, associate pastor of St. Catharines United Mennonite Church, counts the number of cans in the tower contest while competitors look on.*



*One of the games involved creating a structure that could bear the weight of cans of food.*