

Peace on Earth

CANADIAN MENNONITE

November 26, 2018

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EDITORIAL

A season of change

VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Since 1939, Mennonite women in British Columbia have been gathering each spring for a day of spiritual encouragement and fellowship. But this year, as the planned date approached, no location had been determined and no one had stepped up to coordinate the day. Was the tradition dead? One concerned woman took the initiative and secured a speaker, found a meeting place and hired a caterer.

Women across the country enjoy getting together for inspirational days and retreats. They invite special speakers, study the Bible, sing together, learn crafts and go on hikes. The time away from work and family responsibilities is a welcome break.

Occasionally *Canadian Mennonite* reports on these, with stories about the good connections, fun and inspiration. This past spring, Laura Wiebe of Mennonite Church Alberta wrote a testimonial about how she values “women’s conference.” (See the April 23 issue, page 12, or online at bit.ly/2qry7oD.)

In the past, regional executives committees, each comprised of three to five women, planned and carried out regular events for women of the area, raised money for mission projects and for women’s education, and connected with the efforts of the nationwide women’s organization.

But the scene is changing for women’s groups across Canada. At a regional church level, it is increasingly hard to find volunteers to head up their respective executive committees, a core of women committed



to leading and planning activities in their area. Short-term volunteers emerge to plan individual enrichment days and retreats, but they don’t want to commit to a term of service doing committee work.

Over the past eight years, women in Mennonite Church B.C., MC Alberta, MC Saskatchewan and MC Manitoba determined that their traditional structures were no longer viable and they disbanded the regional executive committees. A committee is still functioning for MC Eastern Canada, but it too is seeking direction for the future.

While it’s harder to get details about women’s activities at the congregational level, it appears that some churches still have a core of—mostly older—women who meet for devotional times, service projects and mutual support. They make quilts and comforters for Mennonite Central Committee relief work and they raise money for charitable needs. But younger women are not necessarily joining them.

The social realities have changed, with more opportunities for women’s leadership within the congregation, at the job and in the larger community. With many women employed outside the home, schedules are less flexible than they used to be. Some women look outside the congregation and the region to find connections, choosing book clubs, sports activities, moms groups, or other small informal groups.

The situation is also tenuous at the nationwide level, for the organization called Mennonite Women Canada. In addition to

coordinating regional efforts, MW Canada offers financial support to international Witness workers and provides educational grants to women preparing for ministry. In cooperation with MW U.S.A., MW Canada publishes a yearly Bible study guide that is used by groups in both countries.

The October MW Canada “Connections” newsletter raised some poignant realities: “Our women’s groups are not meeting like they used to; our funds are decreasing; and our women aren’t taking on leadership positions. Do we allow MW Canada to die out and wait to see what new shoots will appear?”

A nationwide transition team is in place and it plans to bring questions and recommendations to the next nationwide assembly next June. You can read more about their work at mennowomencanada.blogspot.com/.

It is good news that opportunities have opened up for individual women to take leadership outside of the traditional women’s organizations. What does that mean for the existing women’s groups?

“We are finding our way as sisters in faith during a season of change,” writes Elsie Rempel, interim chairperson of MW Manitoba. It’s clear that Mennonite women still like getting together to study, pray, serve and have fun. What new models might help us do that in the coming decades? What new opportunities will we seize? Let us hear your stories, thoughts and suggestions.

Looking ahead

The magazine has entered into a three-week holiday schedule, and plans are to mail the next print issue on Dec. 17. Given the current irregularities at Canada Post, postal delivery continues to be spotty across the country, so your next issue might arrive late. To stay in touch, follow *CM* online and consider adding a digital subscription to your print subscription, at no extra cost.

ABOUT THE COVER:

‘During the Advent season, our church communities . . . focus on expectant waiting. Mary and Joseph were waiting for their baby to be born,’ writes Carol Penner in our Advent/Christmas feature, ‘Pregnant with peace,’ on page 4. Included with the feature are works by student artists on the theme of ‘Peace on Earth.’

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Hebrews 10:23-25 • Accuracy, fairness, balance • Editorial freedom •

Seeking and speaking the truth in love • Open hearts and minds in discerning God's will

• Covenantal relationships and mutual accountability

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Pregnant with peace

Praying in Advent

BY CAROL PENNER

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

From the moment we learned I was pregnant, the baby we longed for was continually on my mind. What would it look like? What kind of personality would it have? How would this baby change our life? I was truly “expecting.” Expectant waiting with our baby in mind transformed not just me and my husband, but our whole extended family.

During the Advent season, our church communities also focus on expectant waiting. Mary and Joseph were waiting for their baby to be born. The angels told them that their baby was the “son of the most high,” the long-awaited Messiah for Israel. If we know that Jesus has already come, is all this Advent waiting we do now just pretend?

Christianity focusses on waiting in Advent because we actually are still waiting. We are waiting for Jesus to be born again in our hearts in a new way. We are waiting for the kingdom of God to be revealed in all its fullness. We are waiting for Jesus to come again.

The angels told the shepherds about the birth of the Saviour and the expectation of peace on earth. As God’s people, we are waiting to see that good news play out, even in our own lives. We are all expecting, we are pregnant with God’s peace.

I think our prayers in Advent should reflect that pregnancy, that peace-on-earth message that the angels delivered. Our conversations with God about peace can transform us; they can help prepare us for Jesus’ arrival. Through our prayers the Spirit helps us imagine ourselves into that new reign of God on earth.

I’ve observed that when we gather for worship, prayers for peace are very limited. If you analyze the content of our prayers, often the bulk of what we request is for people in our own congregation. Are we assuming that Jesus is coming again only to visit our church?

I know that our congregational prayer time is full. We need to say thanks, we need to pray for the pastoral concerns of those in the church. That’s important. But our staying power with a spoken prayer means that the worship leader runs out of time, and so quickly asks God to “end war in [name the country],” or to “help people who are suffering.”

I think we need more time to pray together, especially in Advent. I would like to see robust prayers for peace that imagine God’s work in the world. Prayers that are visionary, hopeful, specific.

In one congregation where I ministered, during every Advent service we had a special separate “Advent peace prayer.” These were not general prayers about peace. When I was pregnant, we

(Continued on page 6)



‘MIDNIGHT ON OCEAN’ BY SHIRLEY ZHANG,
GRADE 12, ROCKWAY MENNONITE COLLEGIATE

*How would you pray if we are
wanting to support clean rivers
and lakes and oceans?*



ARTWORK BY CELENA HARDER, GRADE 11, MENNONITE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

(Continued from page 4)

didn't have conversations about the "next generation." We talked about a specific child—our child—and those conversations made us ready to act in loving ways when our child arrived. In the same way, specific prayers for peace can transform us.

In that congregation, one week we prayed for people in prison, another week for homeless people, another week for refugees, another week for survivors of abuse. On Christmas Eve, we prayed for Bethlehem. The concrete prayer helped us enter into the suffering of that group and long with them for Jesus' arrival. You can't pray for everything but you can pray expectantly for what God places on your heart.

If you put yourself in the shoes of a person living in prison, what would you pray for? How would you pray if you fled your home and were living in a refugee camp? How would you pray if we are wanting to support clean rivers and lakes and oceans? Even prayers that we speak spontaneously from our heart can be informed by imaginative preparation.

A worship team can decide together, "What concerns are uppermost in our mind this year?" Worship leaders can draw on their own experience, memories of people in the congregation or news reports, to pray for peace for that group. There are books and online collections of prayers gathered from around the world and across the centuries. Reading the prayers of others can expand our prayer horizons.

There are people in your church who are working for peace. Maybe they work for a social service agency, in a hospital or with children; maybe they are caring for the earth. Maybe you are supporting a mission worker in another county. Ask them to write an Advent prayer for peace coming out of their experience.

Prayers of peace can be prayed together aloud, but they can also be printed in a bulletin, posted on a church blog or pinned on a bulletin board in your church foyer. Why not encourage your congregation to share prayers for peace, either prayers they write or prayers they find. You could make a booklet to use in the coming year. Prayers for peace



ARTWORK BY CHRISTY ZHANG, GRADE 12,
MENNONITE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

happen corporately, and they happen at home as we pray alone or with family members. How is the Spirit moving us to pray for peace?

Jesus came as the Prince of Peace into a world filled with violence. As a Mennonite community, we believe that we are called to follow Jesus in his choice to be nonviolent and to pursue justice, because our world is still filled with

violence. Praying is a part of our calling as people of peace.

The goal is not to have good prayers. The goal is for God's Spirit to transform us as we pray. Like Mary, we are pregnant with God's love, and we are expecting the coming of Christ into our world today. Can we give peace more space in our prayers this Advent? ✚



Carol Penner teaches and writes in the area of practical theology. After many years as a pastor in various Mennonite congregations, she now teaches at Conrad Grebel University College.

Artwork on the front cover and pages 4 to 7 are by students at Mennonite Collegiate Institute, Gretna, Man., and Rockway Collegiate, Kitchener, Ont., who submitted works on the theme of "Peace on Earth" for our Advent/Christmas issue. View more student art at canadianmennonite.org/peace-on-earth.



/// For discussion

1. What places or situations in our world today have a special need for peace? If you were putting together a list of peace prayer concerns, what three things would be at the top of your list? If you can envision a more peaceful world, what might it look like? Do you feel confident that prayer can help bring it about?
2. The front cover and artwork accompanying the feature article in this issue are by students asked to portray "peace on earth." Which images do you find most expressive? If you were asked to illustrate the angels' message of "peace on earth," what image would you choose?
3. Carol Penner writes that praying for peace in specific ways can transform us. Can you think of examples of how prayers have been transformative? Do you agree that it is important to pray for specific situations? Which prayers have more impact: those that are spontaneous or those that are carefully crafted and read? What are the advantages of each?
4. What organizations work at bringing about a more peaceful world? Which ones do you support? How do you work at fostering peace?

—BY BARB DRAPER

See related resources at
www.commonword.ca/go/1686

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An everlasting light

Christmas Eve prayer for Bethlehem

CAROL PENNER

God of grace, today we pray for peace for the City of Bethlehem. It has had more than its share of conflict, as it has changed from a sleepy little town to a bustling city that is visited by millions each year.

Lord, you know the walls that separate people in Bethlehem:
 walls of concrete, walls of prejudice, walls of hatred,
 walls between Israeli and Palestinian,
 walls between Jew and Muslim and Christian,
 walls between cultures and languages.

We can hardly think of another place on earth with such high walls and such deep hostility. Yet this is where you were born: your everlasting light still shines in those dark streets. Thank you that your light shines in the goodwill of people who do not return evil for evil; it shines in the patience of people who wait for a better future; it shines in the creativity of people who make plans for peace, even as powers and principalities make plans for war. Your hope shines in refugee camps, in narrow city streets, and it shines in churches around the world who pray tonight for peace in Bethlehem. Bulldozers and tanks can't crush that hope. Laws and regulations can't stifle that hope. Blockades and barricades can't stop that hope. Bombs and guns can't blow it up. Tonight the eyes of all the world turn to Manger Square, as we remember the birth of the Prince of Peace.

*"How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
 So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of the heavens.
 No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
 where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.
 O holy child of Bethlehem! Descend to us we pray;
 cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.
 We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell,
 oh come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel."*

Amen. ☩

- *The italicized lines of the prayer are from Philips Brooks's "O Little Town of Bethlehem," which he wrote in 1867 as he reflected on his visit to Manger Square in Bethlehem.*
- *Examples of peace prayers can be found in Carol Penner's blog leadinginworship.com under the heading "Church year: Advent peace prayers."*



ARTWORK BY EMMA UNGER, GRADE 11,
 MENNONITE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

VIEWPOINTS

/// Readers write

We welcome your comments and publish most letters from subscribers. Letters, **to be kept to 300 words or less**, are the opinion of the writer only and are not to be taken as endorsed by this magazine or the church. Please address issues rather than individuals; personal attacks will not appear in print or online. All letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Send them to letters@canadianmennonite.org and include the author's contact information and mailing address. Preference is given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

✉ CM photo collection at Mennonite Archives of Ontario website

RE: "A UNITED witness," Oct. 8, page 4.

The *Canadian Mennonite* photograph collection lives on through the Mennonite Archives of Ontario's ongoing efforts to digitize more than 8,000 photographs. The collection is a treasure trove of Mennonite life in Canada and around the world in the 1950s and '60s. It can be viewed online at bit.ly/cm-photo-collection.

LAUREEN HARDER-GISSING
(ONLINE COMMENT)

FROM OUR LEADERS

Stepping into the gap

BY LONTFOBEKO (LINDO) MANANA AND BRENDA TIESSEN-WIENS

Creating space for important cross-cultural discussion is crucial work for the church today. Our paths for the coming year have merged at Foothills Mennonite Church, where Lindo is serving with Mennonite Central Committee's International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) for a term as a pastoral assistant, and Brenda is a part of Lindo's mentoring group.

Our conversations began on Oct. 27, with six hours traveling together on our way to and from the Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Edmonton, where religious leaders from both faiths talked about walking together, honouring each other and taking action against hatred in faith-based work. We appreciated the ample time for discussion and getting to know the Muslim women at our table. We shared our stories, thoughts and challenges, and found numerous points of connection and commonality. At times, it seemed almost too easy to find things in common!



This was the first time either of us had attended an event like this. Initially, it seemed that stepping into the context of faith-based dialogue would involve a level of vulnerability and risk. When we find ourselves in new contexts, our tendency can be to fill the gaps in our knowledge or experience with things that we know from our own familiar contexts. All too often, this can lead to looking at the world through only our own eyes, without even considering other points of view.

In reality, we have choices in how we approach the unfamiliar. We can seek out different perspectives and learn from others, including people of other faiths. We can allow those thoughts and experiences to shape us. We can choose to open our hearts and minds to new possibilities, and to not make up our minds too soon. The dialogue was an opportunity to relearn that when we take the time to listen to one another with respect and love, the fear and uncertainty of the unknown quickly dispels any perceived risk or vulnerability that initially we might have had.

Although we have known each other

for only a short time, we have begun discovering the richness that stepping into the gap of the unknown can bring. The IVEP program not only creates that gap, it creates an opportunity to take a giant leap into the unknown. But it also bridges the gap, as it draws our journeys together for the coming year.

When we step into the gap, change is initiated. Consider paint, and how the blending of colours can create something entirely new and unique. The qualities of the original are still present in the new colour, but the hue is richer and more vibrant than before. Taking initiative and inviting new experiences into our lives produce the same result: we're not the person that we were before.

To us, that's what it's all about. God continuously calls us to be renewed, to rediscover ourselves and the richness of his created world. As we continue to move through this world and encounter unknowns, we look forward to being moulded and shaped into the people God desires for us to be.

Lindo Manana is a member of Kukhanyokusha (New Light) Church in Zion, Swaziland, and is serving as an IVEPer at Foothills Mennonite Church, Calgary. Brenda Tiessen-Wiens is a member of Foothills Mennonite Church, currently serving as moderator of Mennonite Church Alberta.

✉ Lessons for Haiti in the pages of *Canadian Mennonite*

RE: “FROM ‘NEVER a teacher’ to ‘why not?’” and “Following the signs,” Sept. 24, pages 4 and 26, respectively.

I often take time during my regular four-and-a-half-hour flight from Montreal to Port au Prince, Haiti, to

read the past month’s issues of *Canadian Mennonite*. Having spent the better part of the last 50 years observing a country that my father often referred to as “the graveyard of good intentions,” the life and work of Henry Neufeld and Rachel Braul, as portrayed in these articles, reveal a methodology that, as commonsensible as it appears, can be considered revolutionary,

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FAMILY TIES

Can we talk about death?

MELISSA MILLER

“In the midst of life, we are surrounded by death.” These words are often spoken by a pastor during a graveside service at which loved ones gather to bury the deceased. They are taken from the Mennonite Church’s *Minister’s Manual*. When I first read them as a new pastor, I was startled by their sharp contrast. Now I often ponder how true it is. I appreciate such poignancy as I speak to the living who are releasing a body to the grave.

As a pastor and the daughter of an 87-year-old, I encounter and think about death a great deal. My mother will sometimes list “all those that are gone,” recounting the friends her age who have died in recent years. It’s like a lonesome roll



call of the companions who once journeyed with her and are no more. I feel her sadness as we sit together recalling the faces and the memories.

At other times, congregants share their questions, struggles and faith. “What happens when we die?” someone asks. Another weeps, “I don’t know where she is now.” Another worries, “I am not afraid of death, but I’m afraid of dying [meaning the possible pain, suffering and loss of abilities].” Another wonders if cremation is acceptable for Christians, or will flames

destroy the human body that is intended for resurrection. As we listen for God’s voice at such times, I know we are on holy ground. Eternity Sunday is marked in many of our churches in November, a corporate experience of lamenting our losses and proclaiming Christian hope in the face of death.

Whatever our age or stage, each one of us is affected by the death that is always present in life. We may come to it with curiosity and our eyes wide open, and with faith that sustains us in the uncertainty. Or we may come to it reluctantly, fearful of the losses death brings and

To accept death is to live fully in the span we are given so that we can ‘die well.’

hesitant to give it too much space in our lives. It’s one of those difficult topics that can erect blockades between loved ones. More recently, we face the questions and possibilities that come with medical assistance in dying, legalized in Canada in 2017. I will address this in a subsequent column.

Our society is often critiqued as one that thinks death is “optional.” Once, while I was in a drug store, an older man leaned up against me and began to talk about the vitamins and supplements on

the shelf in front of us. He pointed at one that he believed was necessary to counter the effects of one of his medications. “Otherwise you’re a goner,” he said.

Apart from the odd intimacy of the encounter, I found myself puzzling, “Aren’t we all ‘goners’ in the end? Isn’t that where we are heading?”

I support healthy lifestyles and being good stewards of our bodies. I also advocate for acknowledgment and acceptance of the real-ness of death. To acknowledge it means that we make space in our lives to talk with each other about death, giving voice to whatever emotions we feel. To accept death is to live fully in the span we are given so that we can “die well,” to borrow a phrase from Catholic theologian Henry Nouwen. Nouwen calls dying well “the greatest gift”; that is worth pondering.

At a minimum, the Christian church

has a mission to face death steadily, with hope and trust. The prayer I cited at the beginning continues: “With whom can we find refuge? Only with you, Lord God. Do not let us be the prey of death, but grant us eternal life through your Son’s death and resurrection. In his strong name we pray. Amen.”

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

(Continued from page)

innovative and instructional for anyone working with marginalized populations.

Imagine responding to a community upon “invitation,” adjusting classroom time to allow children and families to “get used to the rhythm of school life,” and “respecting the language of the community,” as Neufeld did. Imagine “considering the experience of

others,” “employing critical thinking and being able to self-analyze,” and “checking your power, bias, ethics, privilege and power,” like Braul.

Imagine the peaceable kingdom here on earth. For Haiti, poverty would no longer be its commodity, and we would find the redemption we are seeking.

BETSY WALL, KITCHENER, ONT.

GOD, MONEY AND ME

Planning to give this Christmas?

MARLOW GINGERICH

The gift-giving season is upon us, and with it comes Christmas shopping for our loved ones. We all know people who will be running around the mall five minutes before closing time on Dec. 24, looking for that spontaneous token to tuck under the tree. Then there are those meticulous planners who have every gift listed in a spreadsheet and finished their shopping way back in October. While this kind of careful preparation is great for holiday shopping, it can present a unique challenge when it comes to charitable giving.

From yearly fundraising campaigns to bell-ringers in the mall, the Christmas season provides ample opportunities for us to be generous. However, meticulous planners often find this array of options difficult to navigate. Unlike their more spontaneous counterparts, they need every detail of a project planned out before they begin. Planners cannot imagine choosing a charity without a clear, step-by-step blueprint and a long-term strategy in place to guide their efforts. As a result, the joy of giving becomes mired in stress.

It's certainly important to consider the big questions of how much to give, to whom, when, for how long and why, along with the factor of whether we want to be identified or to donate anonymously.

However, if we get too wrapped up in having all the answers, it can prevent us from ever giving in the first place. Sometimes we just need to give what we can, then build from there. That is not to say we should proceed with no plan at all, but some flexibility allows us to meet new challenges and opportunities as they come along. After all, the most joyful generosity journey begins with the first gift.

Charlotte and Matt (pseudonyms) were meticulous planners. The year they sold their farm, they wanted to make a sizeable gift to charity. However, they were unsure about the specific charities or the amount they ultimately wanted to contribute to specific projects. This made it hard for them to start giving. However, by opening a flexible gifting account, they

their generosity journeys. They're often surprised to learn that they don't need to have all the details worked out immediately. They don't even need to know exactly where they will make their charitable distributions over the long term. It may seem disconcerting at first, but soon they realize that half the fun of their generosity journey is getting there. The most important thing is to get started. After that, we can work together to develop a strategic plan to help guide their decisions and set goals, while leaving a lot of room for flexibility and to test things in the short term.

My clients who are planners often find a flexible gifting account combines the kickstart of an immediate gift with the security of future planning. They get the momentum of giving right away, gain the charitable donation receipt for their initial transfer to Abundance Canada, then have the joy of planning their distributions in as much detail as they want. Abundance Canada offers a variety of donor-advised funds, some with longer-term and others with shorter-term distribution options.

So how do you approach your charitable giving? Do you need it all planned out before you start? If so, a donor-



Sometimes we just need to give what we can, then build from there.

were able to make their gift to charity, addressing the specific year's tax situation in the process. Afterwards, they enjoyed seeking God's direction and working out the exact details and plans for specific distributions over time.

One of the most exciting parts of working with my Abundance Canada clients is helping them take those first steps in

advised fund might help put the joy back into your giving. There are so many opportunities to give this Christmas, so why not get started today?

Marlow Gingerich is a gift planning consultant at Abundance Canada. Learn more by visiting abundance.ca or by calling toll-free 1-800-772-3257.

Betsy Wall is executive director of the Foundation for International Development Assistance productive cooperatives Haiti and a member of Rockway Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

Correction

Lydia Cruttwell's surname was misspelled in "New identity for Vancouver church," Oct. 22, page 13. Also, her position at Peace Church on 52nd is co-pastor. *Canadian Mennonite* regrets the errors.

Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Hosler—Theo Jacob (b. Oct. 18, 2018), to Kristy Letkeman-Hosler and Jason Hosler, Morden Mennonite, Man.

Kelly—Isla Mae (b. Oct. 11, 2018), to Candis and Scott Kelly, Tavistock Mennonite, Ont.

Lenshyn—Ayla Grace (b. Oct. 19, 2018), to Chris and Katrina Lenshyn, Emmanuel Mennonite, Abbotsford, Ont.

Neufeldt—Adeline Miriam Lily (b. Sept. 8, 2018), to Paul and Joani Neufeldt, Lethbridge Mennonite, Alta.

Marriages

Au/Friesen—Dustin Au and Annika Friesen (Hamilton Mennonite, Ont.), at Knox Presbyterian, Toronto, Oct. 13, 2018.

Epp/Frank—John Epp and Shannon Frank (both of Toronto United Mennonite), at Toronto United Mennonite, Oct. 6, 2018.

Martin/Miller—Wilmer Martin (St. Agatha Mennonite, Ont.) and Phyllis Miller, at Kern Road Mennonite, South Bend, Ind., Oct. 6, 2018.

Deaths

Helmuth—Vera (nee Nafziger), 97 (b. April, 19, 1921; d. Oct. 30, 2018), St. Agatha Mennonite, Ont.

Leis—Lorne Laverne, 81 (b. Oct. 4, 1937; d. Oct. 17, 2018), Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

Martin—Oscar S., 85 (b. March 17, 1933; d. Oct. 8, 2018), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

Regier—Russ, 64 (b. April 2, 1954; d. Oct. 9, 2018), Mount Royal Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Schwartz—Matthew Jason, 41 (b. May 8, 1977; d. Oct. 9, 2018), Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

Steckly—Arthur, 86 (b. Nov. 3, 1931; d. Oct. 30, 2018), Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones announcements within four months of the event. Please send Milestones announcements by email to 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



Did your summer include a bicycle trip? In 1891, 19-year-old Fred Coffman, far left, his brother William, and their friends Abram and Aaron Kolb biked more than 700 kilometres from Elkhart, Ind., to Niagara Falls, Ont. Fred would become Bishop S.F. Coffman, an influential Ontario Mennonite leader. Abram would become a publisher of Mennonite periodicals, choir director and hymnwriter. Aaron helped found the Elkhart Institute (later Goshen College) and, like his brother, was a choir director and hymnwriter. This photograph captures these future venerable churchmen in their youth, ready for adventure.

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing

Photo: Almeda Kolb / Mennonite Archives of Ontario



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LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

'What's next, God?'

An Advent reflection

TROY WATSON

Advent means arrival. During Advent we contemplate and celebrate the arrival of our Messiah. However, the purpose of Advent for Spirit-filled followers of Christ is not to pretend to long for the coming of Christ, whose presence we are already intimately familiar with. For us, Advent is an opportunity to cultivate a deeper longing for what God wants to pour into our lives next and for what God wants to pour into the world through us as individuals and as churches.

The point of Advent isn't to recapture the spirit of waiting and anticipation of people who lived more than 2,000 years ago. It's about entering more fully into our own hope and expectation that God's presence will flow into our own time and culture in new, exciting and surprising ways.

Meister Eckhart puts it this way: "What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself? . . . What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I also do not give birth to him in my time and my culture?"

Advent reminds us of God's desire for Christ to be born in the soul of every human being. But Advent confronts those of us who have already experienced this



rebirth, and are aware of Christ's presence within us, with a pressing question: What divine expression of life does God want to birth through us next, both personally and as a church?

We need to regularly reflect on this question with openness to God's Spirit.

If we don't, we may become spiritually barren. We can lose our capacity to give

The message of God always comes to us with a call to change, grow and act. God's message rarely comes to us as ideas to appreciate and affirm.

birth to new expressions of God's life in the world.

Jesus says many curious things. One of those puzzling statements is found in Matthew 13:12: "To the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Jesus' math here is unorthodox. If Johnny has zero apples, you can't take any apples away from him. So what does Jesus mean by saying "the man who has nothing, even what he has will be taken from him"? How is this even possible?

When we look at the context, we see Jesus is talking about spiritual understanding in this passage. Matthew 13 begins with Jesus telling the crowd a story about a farmer who sows seeds on four different types of soil. Then Jesus tells his disciples the meaning of the parable. He explains that true spiritual understanding occurs when the seed of God's message takes root in our lives, produces growth and bears fruit. When God's message fails to manifest externally in our lives in

tangible ways that benefit others, we have not truly understood God's message.

In Matthew 13:12, Jesus is saying that those who have gained no genuine spiritual understanding will eventually lose even their capacity to understand the wisdom of God. If we habitually resist the germination of God's seeds in our lives, we eventually become infertile soil. We become spiritually barren. Of course, Advent also reminds us that nothing is impossible with God, including the barren giving birth (Luke 1:5-25).

The message of God always comes to us with a call to change, grow and act. God's message rarely comes to us as ideas to appreciate and affirm. God's word must be embodied in our lives, attitudes and behaviour. This is the core message

of Christianity: the Word became flesh! This isn't merely a statement about Jesus; it's intended to be a way of life for us. The word of God must become materialized in our lives. As James says: "Be doers of the word and not hearers only. Otherwise you deceive yourselves" (1:22).

Advent reminds us that God's revelation to us is also something God wants to reveal in us and through us. The season of Advent challenges us to open ourselves to the arrival of God's revelation in our lives, which will give birth to new and fresh expressions of divine life for our time and culture.

If my reflection on Advent has only served to confuse or overwhelm you, I offer this: Entering the spirit of Advent is as simple as holding this question: "What's next, God?" and then waiting for an answer with hope and expectation. ✎

Troy Watson is getting into the spirit of Advent.

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MCC UNITED NATIONS OFFICE PHOTO

César García, MWC general secretary, second from right, is pictured with, from left to right: Abby Hershberger, program assistant; Thien Tran, IVEP Intern; Katie Garrison, program associate; and MCC UN office director Doug Hostetter.

VIEWPOINT

Young people key to a resilient church

A greeting from the Vietnam Mennonite Church to the world

THIEN PHUOC QUANG TRAN

MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE / MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Throughout its history, the people of the Vietnamese Mennonite Church have never failed to demonstrate their resilience and their commitment to live out the peaceful way of Christ.

First established in 1964 in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City), the church went through many periods of hope, suffering and then restoration. And we have a secret for this resilience. We always emphasize the role of young people in the development of the church. Young people are steadfast in their belief. They have the energy, skills, and, with the right visions and guidance, they can contribute

so much more.

Understand that we encourage young people to step up, take responsibility and lead the way. We take this Bible verse to heart: *“Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity”* (I Timothy 4:12).

We started doing that when the church was first established 50 years ago, and we continue today. When the U.S.-Vietnam war came to an end in 1975, communication between the Vietnamese church and the Mennonite world community was mostly cut off. For four decades, we were considered an underground church.

But in 2009, the church received legal status from the Vietnamese government to operate. Later that year, we became a member of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) at the assembly in Paraguay. We knew it was time for the church to reconnect with the Mennonite world community.

One of the ways to do that is through volunteer exchange programs for young people, such as Mennonite Central Committee’s programs: International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) and YAMEN, a joint program with MWC.

During their year of service, these young people are ambassadors for the church and, upon their return, they play a central role in generating friendship and collaboration between the Vietnamese Mennonite Church and other member congregations of MWC.

These young leaders will also make good use of the experience they learned from MCC to help strengthen the church when they come back. I came to truly appreciate the MCC motto: “Relief, development and peace in the name of Christ.”

With that expectation and dedication, I was the third young person from Vietnam to serve with MCC. We all finished our terms ready to share great stories of friendship and hospitality received, and about how the experience broadens perspectives about the global Anabaptist community.

During the war in Indochina, MCC came to Vietnam to do relief work and advocate for peace between the American and Vietnamese peoples. After the war, other non-governmental organizations left with the American troops, yet MCC remained to continue development work, helping the people of Vietnam. That model continues to be applied in North Korea, Iraq, Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other conflict zones. Regardless of people’s political or religious systems, MCC works with those who are willing to partner.

The future is full of hope and anticipation, as young volunteers help the church stay connected with the Mennonite world community and bring up new opportunities to do God’s work in Vietnam and elsewhere. ❧

PROMOTIONAL SUPPLEMENT

SUPPORTING PEACE

through Research and Community Engagement

Kindred Credit Union is excited to sponsor this four-part series featuring the Kindred Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement (CPA) at Conrad Grebel University College. This final segment highlights organizations and faculty members located within the CPA who are pursuing community engagement and action-oriented research. As a dynamic mix of people and groups who are independently involved in peace and community-building initiatives, they form a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Action-Oriented Research: BANNING LETHAL AI

Technology is rapidly changing warfare. That, in turn, is changing how peacebuilders need to do their work, says Dr. Branka Marijan.

Marijan is a program officer at Project Ploughshares, where she leads research into the ethical concerns related to lethal autonomous weapons systems (commonly known as “killer robots”).

Right now, humans oversee the deployment of these systems, but technologies are rapidly becoming more autonomous. Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) are leading to systems that are able to identify, track, and kill targets in the battlefield—without human judgement or input.

This raises the concern that machines will decide whether humans live or die in the context of war.

It also means that computing mistakes could have devastating results, particularly for civilians caught in the crossfire.

“What happens when a system is autonomous and the algorithm determines the target?” Marijan asks. “We really are in danger of crossing a line as we start to rely on algorithms to make decisions over human life.”

In 2017, more than 100 founders of AI and robotics companies sent a warning letter to the United Nations. They noted that lethal autonomous weapons could set the stage for wars waged on a bigger, faster scale than humans can comprehend.



Dr. Branka Marijan and Dr. Elke Schwarz discussing the ethics of killer robots at the United Nations.

“We do not have long to act. Once this Pandora’s box is opened, it will be hard to close,” said the letter, whose signatories include Elon Musk of Tesla, Mustafa Suleyman of Google, and Ryan Garipey of Clearpath Robotics, a Waterloo Region tech firm that was the first in the world to pledge not to build so-called killer robots.

Project Ploughshares joined the international Campaign to Stop Killer Robots in 2016. Marijan encourages anyone concerned about this issue to reach out to Ploughshares for information and to contact local political representatives.

“The good news is that there are talks happening at the UN between countries,” she says. “Canada can contribute to the conversation and lead the way, to ensure there is regulation. You don’t have to be an AI expert—if you feel strongly that algorithms should not make decisions over human life, it’s important to speak up. Our politicians need to be aware of our concerns.”

Project Ploughshares is calling on Canada to join 26 other countries that have supported a ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems. To learn how you can support this effort, contact bmarijan@ploughshares.ca.

“We really are in danger of crossing a line as we start to rely on algorithms to make decisions over human life.”

PROMOTIONAL SUPPLEMENT

Co-location SPARKS INTERACTION

Having an office within the Kindred Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement (CPA) allows Project Ploughshares to draw upon academic resources and insight, while conducting applied, policy-oriented research. The CPA acts as a connection point between the university and the community, Marijan says. "What better way to build bridges than to draw on scholarly and practical knowledge and have the opportunity to apply it?"



Co-location within the CPA not only amplifies an organization's impact, it also facilitates interaction and sparks ideas. Every Tuesday, resident core collaborators gather with CPA staff and Epp Peace Incubator members for coffee and a short presentation highlighting another member's work. One time each semester they join the CPA's Research Hub gathering to share updates and explore collaboration and funding opportunities.

CPA CORE COLLABORATORS

Organizations



Project Ploughshares is an operating division of The Canadian Council of Churches that works with churches, governments, and civil society to advance policies and actions to prevent war and armed violence. ploughshares.ca



Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement develops and supports learning communities that help people to collaborate, co-generate knowledge, and achieve collective impact on complex community issues. tamarackcommunity.ca



WPIRG (Waterloo Public Interest Research Group) is a student-run organization supporting students and community members to research, educate, and take action on pressing social and environmental justice issues. wpirg.org



Intercultural Dialogue Institute promotes respect and mutual understanding among people of all cultures and faiths through dialogue and partnership. uwaterloo.ca/centre-peace-advancement/core-collaborators/idi

Researchers

uwaterloo.ca/centre-peace-advancement/core-collaborators/researchers

Reina Neufeldt, Associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, researches ethics and peacebuilding, the development of civil society, action research, and reflective practice in conflict transformation.

Ernie Regehr, Research Fellow, is a former executive director and co-founder of Project Ploughshares, and a recipient of the Order of Canada (2003) and the Pearson Peace Medal (2011). His current research interest is Arctic security and defense policy.

W. Derek Suderman, Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Theological Studies, teaches in both Religious Studies and the Master of Theological Studies programs. A Hebrew Bible/Old Testament specialist, Suderman's current research focuses on individual lament psalms.

HOW YOU CAN CONNECT:

- Visit the core collaborators' websites and read about their work.
- Follow @GrebelCPA on Twitter
- Subscribe to the CPA monthly e-newsletter: http://eepurl.com/cT_D8b

GOD AT WORK IN THE CHURCH

Gifts symbolize Indigenous relations

BY AMY DUECKMAN

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

A vest and moccasins presented to the Mennonite Church Canada director of Indigenous-settler relations symbolized the ongoing work of Indigenous relations in B.C.

During an Oct. 27 meeting of the regional church's volunteer Indigenous Relations Group, Lorne Brandt, chair of MC B.C.'s Service, Peace and Justice Committee, honoured Steve Heinrichs with the gift of a beaded moose-hide vest and high-top moccasins. Brandt had acquired them while working at a federal nursing station at South Indian Lake, Man., in 1974. As these are Cree crafts, Brandt said he believed it was more important for Heinrichs to wear these in Manitoba than for him to keep them in non-Cree territory in B.C. In his presentation, Brandt also specifically

mentioned the six valuable book resources Heinrichs had edited, as a reason for the gift.

In previous years, MC B.C. had a part-time staff person for Indigenous relations work. As of this year, though, a staffer is no longer employed, so the work is continuing under the leadership of a team of interested volunteers.

In an effort to engage more regional church members in the ongoing work, the group arranged a half-day workshop on Oct. 27 at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, which some 30 people from Vancouver to Yarrow attended.

Bridget Findlay of Mennonite Central Committee B.C.'s Aboriginal Neighbours program began by acknowledging the meeting took place on Indigenous

territory. A welcome and address by Shirley Hardman of the Stó:lō Nation and University of the Fraser Valley followed. ❧



PHOTO BY HENRY KRAUSE

As a sign of honour and respect for the work of Steve Heinrichs, left, MC Canada's director of Indigenous-settler relations, Lorne Brandt, the chair of MC B.C.'s Service, Peace and Justice Committee, presents his vest and moccasins, that were made by Cree craftspeople in Manitoba in 1974, to Heinrichs at an Oct. 27 meeting of the regional church's Indigenous Relations Group.

Dirk Willems statue unveiled at Mennonite Heritage Village

STORY AND PHOTO BY JAMIE ROY

steinbachonline.com
STEINBACH, MAN.

A statue of an iconic moment in Mennonite history was unveiled on Nov. 10 at Mennonite Heritage Village.

The sculpture is of Dirk Willems, an Anabaptist martyr who was imprisoned for his beliefs in the 1500s. Willems managed to escape but, as he was being chased over a river surrounding the prison, a jailer fell through the thin ice and started crying for help. Instead of running, Willems turned around to save his captor from drowning. Willems was later executed for his faith on May 16, 1569, in Asperen, the Netherlands.

Elbert Toews, chair of the Peace Exhibit Committee, says this is Phase 2 of the committee's three-phase project. The first stage was the conscientious objectors' monument that is already in place at the museum and the third phase will be an interpretive centre.

According to Toews, the statue serves as a reminder that, in this world of war, there are other ways of resolving conflict. "I think that is what this is supposed to represent," he says. "That we as human beings, we do have minds, we do have understandings,



The statue of Dirk Willems was sculpted by Peter Sawatzky.

we know how to resolve conflicts in many situations, but we still don't seem to know it at the greater level, the world level."

Toews praises the work of sculptor Peter Sawatzky: "If you look at the sculpture and how he has interpreted the faces on these individuals, as they are seen in the rescue operation, if you will, is quite amazing." ❧

Is 'you do you' an ethical base for living?

Wilfrid Laurier professor engages with congregation on ethical issues like legalized cannabis and medical assistance in dying

BY ZACH CHARBONNEAU

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
LEAMINGTON, ONT.

When discussing the question of ethics in the church or in society at large, there is an increasing cacophony of voices laying claim to the ideological space governing the collective sense of right and wrong. What's more, the loudest and most prominent voices tend to drive home the idea that what is right for one may be wrong for another, so people should live and let live. Is this a good and proper perspective for the church to take? Does the presence of many perspectives negate the notion of objective truth? Can modern Christians hold to an objective understanding of right and wrong?

These are some of the questions that Elmer Thiessen endeavours to wrestle with in his work as professor of ethics in Wilfrid Laurier University's Lifelong Learning Department. However, he recently undertook the role of lecturer in a different context. On a chilly early November weekend at Leamington United Mennonite Church he gave four lectures, a Sunday sermon and then led an adult Sunday school class.

Pastor David Dyck was the driving force behind bringing Thiessen to Leamington. "As a pastor, I realize that a lot has changed in the world in terms of ethical thinking and discernment," he said. "I sometimes wonder if people understand the changes that are happening. I think it would be helpful for our people to have a bigger picture in terms of our culture and how things have been evolving; why ethics are changing in our world today."

Using the 2016 legalization of medical assistance in dying (MAID) as a case study, Thiessen addressed a few dozen congregants in a packed youth room during his lectures. By observing this recent legislation, Thiessen finds grounds to ask important questions

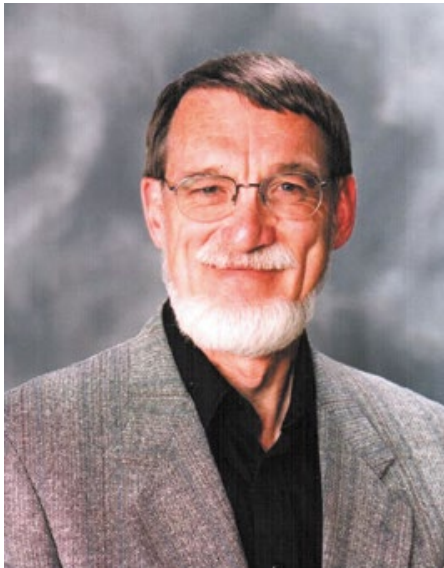


PHOTO COURTESY OF ELMER THIESSEN

Elmer Thiessen, a Wilfrid Laurier University professor, spoke and preached at Leamington (Ont.) United Mennonite Church earlier this month on ethics and objective truth.

about how the church is to faithfully exist in and engage with a culture that appears to hold norms, values and ethics that conflict with what he considers to be biblical values.

While there remained a diversity of opinions, the discussion became more robust during the course of his presentations.

Besides MAID, the recent legalization of cannabis for recreational use across Canada is another massive change driven by shifts in public values and norms over recent decades. A question that Thiessen asked in response to these shifting norms is: Are the

way things are now, the way things ought to be? If not, what is the church's response?

By providing a cursory overview of ethical development from the post-Enlightenment period to the postmodern era, Thiessen contrasted those ethical values deemed post-modern with biblical teaching on the matter.

His evidence suggested that an increasing number of young people are entering post-secondary education with very little, if any, significant moorings to a code of ethics beyond "You do you." But how, he asked, can society be built in the midst of such an inherently illogical contradiction? In the world of "you do you," he said, all that is needed to contradict what a person holds right or wrong is for another person to disagree, and "do them." Even the most democratic of societies become increasingly fragmented, and their members detached from one another, something that he said is increasingly playing out in society.

Some participants reflected on the idea of two opposing narratives available to people. One is the dominant cultural, postmodern narrative that has come to exclude faith and the divine itself from the question of what it means to participate in life and society, and the other is the narrative of the world as revealed in the Bible. People, he said, will come to different conclusions based on which narrative they pursue and commit to.

Overall, participants found Thiessen to have provided helpful material on the topic of modern ethics. While there remained a diversity of opinions, the discussion became more robust during the course of his presentations.

When asked what participants were feeling afterward, Dyck said, "The comments were mostly about how it's helpful to have someone bring clarity to the confusion we sense in a world of ethical relativism. Where

there was once a clear sense of objective truth, everything today seems to be up to the individual." ❧

Modern ghosts of a horse-drawn scandal

Part IV: Humility

BY WILL BRAUN
Senior Writer

Eight men went to prison, the media gaze moved on, and colony life resumed. But the saga of mass rape in the Bolivian corner of our family of faith is far from over.

It's hard not to talk about something as sensational and consequential as a mass rape case on an intensely conservative colony in the jungled interior of South America. Indeed, it would be irresponsible to remain silent. But Wilmar Harder, former co-coordinator of Mennonite Central Committee's work with colony Mennonites in Bolivia, responds to all the attention, whether from the BBC or me, with a simple question: "Who tells the story and why?"

Since the 2011 convictions of eight men in the case, the two most prominent efforts to tell the story were by Jean Friedman-Rudovsky and Miriam Toews.

Friedman-Rudovsky is an American journalist who lived in Bolivia for six years. She covered the rape case for *Time* in 2011. In 2013, she spent considerable time at the Manitoba Colony, staying in the home of the former civic leader. She spoke with numerous women and men. The resulting "Ghost rapes of Bolivia" article for *Vice* was published in 25 countries in 20 different languages. The accompanying 25-minute video provides a rare first-hand glimpse into the Manitoba Colony, both beautiful and horrific. The people—most notably, the women—speak for themselves.

The Toronto lens

The August release of *Women Talking*, by one of Canada's great writers, has again put Bolivian colony Mennonites in the spotlight. Sort of. Similar to interviews Toews has done, the book begins with a note describing the rape crisis and calls the novel a "response in fiction" to the "true-life events."

In the book, a group of women from the fictional Molotschna Colony gather in a

hayloft to discuss how to respond to mass rape.

Toews offers a masterful mixture of images and emotions, ending with a crescendo of metaphors so powerful it made me want to start back at the beginning. That said, her book felt uncomfortably at odds with the conversations I'd had in previous months with people who have thought deeply about their response to the Bolivian crisis.

Someone with Toews's breadth of imagination is touching on something broader than how mainstream Mennonites should respond to one specific situation but, in that deeper endeavour, shouldn't the situation she so explicitly uses as her launching pad also be illuminated?

My trouble is not that Toews clearly

conflates Bolivia, the Steinbach, Man., of her youth, and Mexican colonies she has visited. The book's hayloft, mile roads, suspenders, dining halls, coffee fields and summer kitchens belong to places other than the Manitoba Colony. Fiction allows this.

Perhaps it also allows for virtually all of the men of the colony to be away in the city posting bail for the accused rapists so they can return, where the victims will be forced to forgive them or face excommunication, this latter point being something Toews also states as fact in her interviews. In the true-life version, the men actually went to disturbing lengths to ensure suspects were locked up for good—though it took them four torturous years to get to that point—and excommunication for failure to forgive is not the practice.

Fiction can take truth beyond the realm of fact. But it can also be a shortcut. At a minimum, I think Toews owed readers and the people of Manitoba Colony a note that the characters portrayed in the book "could belong to any one of several groups that came to Canada from Russia [some of which moved south]," to borrow and adapt wording from Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. She could have also said the book is not set in Bolivia.

As Toews said in an interview, the characters are based on women she knows, and not through her research of Bolivian colonies. The result is still fascinating, if irritating, in its seeming sloppiness—when carrying buckets of water to livestock, one cannot run—but I don't think it gets us to the actual isolated Bolivian women.

At one point in the novel, the character taking English minutes of the hayloft gathering, which serve largely as the narration of the book, admits to inserting the word "patriarchy" into the minutes, even though the women would be unfamiliar with the term. An apt word, of course, but the entire book felt like someone putting foreign words in the mouths of others. I would have hoped that someone with the giftedness of Toews might have somehow brought me into the foreign reality of the colony. I wanted to better understand those women. Instead, I feel I read what a literature-steeped, progressive, Torontonians might have colony women think.

But to the extent that the book views

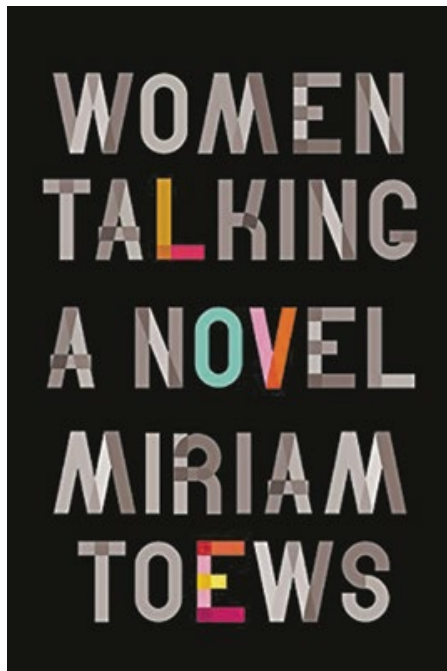




PHOTO BY NOAH FRIEDMAN-RUDOVSKY (NOAHFR.COM)

If Manitoba Colony members are accused of a crime, they are brought before the congregation and judged. For serious offences like incest, they may be excommunicated, but if they ask for forgiveness, they can return a week later.

colony Mennonites through a North American lens, it contradicts what seems essential in supporting colony women. In the context of interviews and Toews's earlier writings—including a 2016 non-fiction essay for *Granta* entitled "Peace shall destroy many"—it is hard not to see in *Women Talking* a bias towards formal education, literature, and urban western society. That is, a bias towards the narrative of civilization, progress and progressiveness.

Our adoption of progress and civilization—including its rampant individualization, materialism and inherent sense of superiority—is largely why colony Mennonites consider us devoid of moral authority and see us as unwelcome inter-veners. It's a shortcoming as glaring to them as their patriarchy and closedness is to us. We see ourselves as better; they see themselves as better. And the women remain isolated behind a wall of men, beyond the reach of concerned North Americans.

Canadian Mennonite

Wilmar Harder's question of who tells the story and why was not just for the likes of Friedman-Rudovsky or Toews. It was for *Canadian Mennonite* magazine. For me. Why talk about the Manitoba Colony crisis?

First, we report news. The push for release of the men in prison and the view of some credible observers that justice has likely not been fully served—as reported earlier in this series—is news. Second, I am deeply concerned about the victims and possible future victims. Of course, that's what everyone would say. It's true, but



PHOTO BY NOAH FRIEDMAN-RUDOVSKY (NOAHFR.COM)

Mennonite families watch the rape trial in May 2011. After discovering the rapes, Manitoba Colony leaders considered locking the accused in shipping containers for years but eventually called in the Bolivian police.

motivation is complex.

I grew up in the then solidly Mennonite town of Winkler, Man., which included mainstream Mennonites and Mennonites from colonies in Mexico. The latter wore more plaid than the rest of us and had names like Frank or Helen. The churches, social groups and economics of our town were clearly segregated along these lines. Every kid in school knew what a "Mexa" was, and that you didn't want to be one. When my younger sister Sara was born, I was adamant that her name be spelled without an "h" to differentiate it from the

Mexa version.

I have never heard a faith leader—or anyone else, for that matter—acknowledge this segregation. So how genuine, then, is a sudden interest in colony Mennonites when a salacious scandal hits them? Or when does our concern for colony Mennonites lead us to grapple with our own ghosts?

Is there not some small part of us that likes to hear about the dysfunction of colonies, in part because it reinforces our rickety sense of enlightened superiority, even though we know we have, in our embrace of progress, given ourselves over to a world of rampant materialism, busyness, polarization, individualization, destruction of the earth and widespread mistreatment of women?

Toews calls colony people "my people" in interviews. If they are our people, and we are their people, we must seek to see the world through their lens if we expect some degree of the converse.

Harder, now a pastor in Kansas, says that, if outsiders tell the Manitoba Colony story, they should do so "with the greatest humility . . . otherwise it is imperialism from the north." He in no way downplays the problems on colonies, nor does he imply leaders were innocent in their handling of the crisis. But he does report that colony leaders he met with "openly wept" when discussing the problems in their community.

Perhaps we need to join them. And then learn from each other. ☿

For more online resources, visit canadianmennonite.org/ghost2.



Hitting reset

'Deepening our walk with Christ' through a change in habits

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DONNA SCHULZ

Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON

Anyone who has operated a computer knows that, from time to time, it's necessary to hit reset. The same is true in the life of faith.

"Resetting is an affirmation of God's grace," said Rachel Miller Jacobs, an associate professor of congregational formation at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind. "Things do not have to be the way they've always been. Something new can happen."

Mennonite Church Saskatchewan opened itself up to something new at its annual delegate sessions in March, when the regional church's leaders introduced "Deepening our walk with Christ" as the theme for 2018. It was this theme that Miller Jacobs addressed during MC Saskatchewan's continuing education event, held Oct. 25 and 26 at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon. Miller Jacobs explored the theme within the framework of "Habits, habitus and habitation."

Habits are ordinary practices that shape people's lives. "We don't make decisions about these things," she said. "They are formed by the physicality of doing things over and over." Developing new, nourishing habits takes time and intentional practice. "You have to make choices and keep on

making them," she said. "You don't become a hockey player by watching people play hockey. No one can do it but you."

Deeply ingrained habits become part of one's habitus. Miller Jacobs cited Alan Kreider's book *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*, saying, "The church grew because Christians' behaviour set them apart and encouraged outsiders to have a look." In other words, the early church developed a habitus that distinguished it from its surrounding culture and made it attractive to others.

Habitus is extremely difficult to change and so must be formed with care. "Habitus formation can't only be about ideas and beliefs," said Miller Jacobs. It must also become habituated in people's bodies. "How are we making certain kinds of reflexes that make us more Jesus-like?" she asked.

She encouraged participants to be aware of the habitus of the surrounding culture and know how it differs from that of the church. "We shouldn't be naïve," she said. "Significant parts of an old and deep habitus need to be unlearned and replaced with a new habitus based on Jesus Christ."

But neither habit nor habitus is enough, she said. Ultimately, the church's goal is



Rachel Miller Jacobs of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary teaches participants at MC Saskatchewan's recent continuing education event how to develop habits that deepen their walk with Christ.

God's habitation. "God's reign is the source and end of our being," she said. "It is a whole way of being that belongs not to us, but to God. God wants us to contribute a brick or two, but the owner of the building is God."

"One striking difference between God's habitation and the habitus of our culture is that God's habitation is one of abundance and our cultural habitus is one of scarcity," she said. "We need to attune ourselves to what God is doing. What we are doing in our congregations, [regional] churches and denomination needs to be aimed at the abundance of God's habitation."

To translate theory into practice, Miller Jacobs invited participants to create a rule



Participants in MC Saskatchewan's continuing education event with Rachel Miller Jacobs learn to pray the Lord's Prayer with their bodies.

of life for themselves. She described a rule of life as “a structure of patterned habits” designed to help one live life more fully. Citing Justin Whitmel Earley, creator of thecommonrule.org, she outlined three steps to creating a rule of life:

- **TAKE A** faith-illuminated inventory of your life as it stands.
- **PRAYERFULLY** discern what will help you grow toward deeper communion with God, others and yourself.
- **MAKE REALISTIC** choices about what

you can do.

In creating a rule of life, said Miller Jacobs, include habits of embrace as well as habits of resistance. A habit of embrace might be starting the day with Bible reading, something one does, whereas a habit of resistance might be fasting from technology one day a week, something one resists doing.

“Pay attention to technology habits,” she said. “Technology is ubiquitous. People 1,500 years ago didn’t have to think about

technology, but we do.”

She also urged participants to include habits in and for community, such as having meals with family or friends on a regular basis. “Community of any depth rarely happens unless we make space for it,” she said.

New habits and practices should be integrated into one’s regular day, and they should be achievable. “What’s going to actually work in your daily life?” asked Miller Jacobs, adding, “Big aspirations don’t become realities without small goals.” ❧

Equipping churches to deepen their walk with Christ

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA SCHULZ
Saskatchewan Correspondent
WARMAN, SASK.

How can your congregation connect internationally? Will our children have faith? How do we follow Jesus in a world full of technology? These were among the questions asked and answered at Mennonite Church Saskatchewan’s annual Equipping Day.

Participants from across the province gathered at Warman Mennonite Church on Oct. 27 to explore the theme, “Deepening our walk with Christ.”

Rachel Miller Jacobs, associate professor of Christian formation at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind., presented the opening plenary session. Christian transformation, she said, is a life-long process of regeneration that happens within the congregation. She asked participants, “Where do you sense resonance between being like Jesus and some aspect of



A group activity called ‘Colombian hand hypnosis’ illustrates how difficult it can be to bring allegations of abuse forward in a church setting in which people are so interconnected.

your congregation’s life?”

This year’s workshop offerings included a session with MC Canada Witness worker Jeanette Hanson called “Church beyond borders.” Ana and Daniel Janzen explored ways of passing the faith on to children, and Cindy Wallace led a discussion on “Discipleship in a digital age.”

Johnny Wideman, artistic director of Theatre of the Beat, presented an interactive workshop called, “Safe hands: Reflection and action,” which used theatre activities to explore issues related to consent, healthy boundaries and the abuse of power.

Peace pole reflects prayer for peace and harmony

STORY AND PHOTO BY GLADYS TERICHOW
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
STEINBACH, MAN.

The peace pole and peace garden in front of Steinbach Mennonite Church connects the congregation with more than 200,000 groups and churches worldwide

that desire a world at peace.

The pole displays the prayer, “May peace prevail on Earth,” in eight languages. Surrounding the pole is a newly planted peace garden with an inviting path and benches.

“We hope that people will take time to sit on these benches under the trees and reflect on the meaning of peace,” says Karen Peters, chair of the church’s 75th-anniversary celebration committee.

The peace pole was planted on Peace Sunday, Nov. 12, 2017, when the congregation observed the 75th anniversary of the church and the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The peace garden was blessed on Sept. 30 of this year, when the congregation celebrated Thanksgiving.

For Peters and many others in the congregation, the peace pole project also reflects God's desire for peace and reconciliation among all people who have been wounded by disunity and divisions in the church community. "It is a silent but visible reminder to reconcile what needs to be put right and to move on in a spirit of harmony," she says.

In 2016, just as the church was beginning to plan exciting 75th anniversary celebrations for 2017, theological disagreements and cultural differences created disunity. Pastors and congregants gradually began leaving.

Following the cessation of the German service in early 2017, about two-thirds of the congregation had walked away from Steinbach Mennonite. Those who left did not start another church but scattered in many directions.

A congregation of about 120 remained in a building that has an 800-seat sanctuary, a large foyer, a combined gym and banquet hall for 500 and a large second-floor education wing.

"Suddenly everything changed," Peters says. "We were crying out to God to help us. What do you want us to do?"

One of the many painful aspects of so many people leaving was the absence of children and youth. The second-floor education wing was now empty.

"The group that remained had difficult decisions to make," says Peters, who served as the congregation's chair throughout this difficult period. "Will we remain a congregation? Can we afford to stay in the building? Should we consider amalgamating with another congregation? One of the amazing things is that the church board remained intact and unified in purpose."

Peters was part of a six-member task force that explored these questions. "Every time we figured something out, we had more questions," she recalls. "We are deeply grateful for the counsel and support of Mennonite Church Manitoba."



Karen Peters and Pastor Lee Hiebert stand by the peace pole that displays the prayer, 'May peace prevail on Earth,' in eight languages.

When the task force's findings were presented to the membership, a decision was made to remain as a congregation, stay in the building and hire Victor Kliever as an

interim lead pastor.

Steinbach Community Outreach, a church-supported ministry begun in 2008, was using a large room in the church for distribution of food and clothing to people experiencing homelessness or poverty. This ministry had grown to become a charitable organization with its own board and had plans for expanding services. A decision was made to offer the majority of the upper level to Steinbach Community Outreach.

The second floor of the church is now an inviting drop-in centre complete with a kitchen area for cooking and nutritional programs. Former Sunday school classrooms are filled with donations of clothes, shoes and toiletries for distribution.

These answers to prayers gave the congregation confidence that they would find a pastor willing to lead it. During the spring of 2017, God answered those prayers when Lee Hiebert responded to God's call to serve the congregation as lead pastor.

A year later, amidst restructuring efforts, Peters says the congregation is enjoying an increase in the number of children attending and the return of a vibrant spirit within the congregation.

In her reflections at the Thanksgiving blessing ceremony for the peace garden, Peters spoke of how the plants in the garden celebrate the church's heritage and God's faithfulness.

"The globe cedars were chosen for their 'evergreen' aspect—like faith . . . always living and growing," says Peters. "Karl Foerster grasses represent our prairie heritage and acknowledge the immigrants who started this church in 1942. The little quickfire hydrangeas surrounding the pole will show us that growth and beauty come after dormancy—even after periods of struggle and deep pain."

She concluded her remarks by saying: "May this peace garden serve as a silent visual of a common wish—a permanent reminder to think, speak and act in a spirit of harmony. It is our prayer that all who pass or visit this site be encouraged to promote peace beginning with themselves and their family.

"May those circles widen to include this community, our province and the world. . . . May peace prevail on Earth. Shalom." ❧

God at Work in British Columbia Snapshots



PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

At a farewell service on Nov. 4, Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, B.C., bid farewell to April Yamasaki, the congregation's lead pastor who has served in that capacity for 25 years. A service with the theme of 'Great is Your faithfulness,' based on Lamentations 3, was followed by a church lunch and informal program. Pictured, Yamasaki, along with husband Gary, accepts a gift of a memory book from the congregation.

PHOTO BY LORNE BRANDT / TEXT BY AMY DUECKMAN

Peace Church on 52nd in Vancouver, formerly known as First United Mennonite Church, launched its new name at a celebration service on Oct. 28. A large new sign had been fastened over the old name at the front of the building. The service, led by co-pastor Lydia Cruttwell, included singing, communion and a message by co-pastor Adam Back on metaphors used to describe the church in I Corinthians 3. Attendance numbered 90, the largest in some time. Following the service, a lunch of soup, buns and decorated cakes was served, and outdoor games continued into the afternoon.

MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES at



The Master of Theological Studies (MTS) at Grebel is a two-year degree program open to persons from a range of academic backgrounds. It is designed for those who may be exploring vocations of ministry and service, those preparing for pastoral ministry, a chaplaincy, or further graduate studies, and those seeking personal enrichment.

Learning and Leading Together

Coming from Brazil with Pentecostal background, MTS student Bruno Siqueira Peitl wanted to see what ministry in a Mennonite church was like. For Bruno, First Mennonite Church (FMC) in Kitchener, Ontario, was the ideal place to gain first-hand ministry experience in a Mennonite context. In addition to a professional and academic learning opportunity, Bruno saw this experience as a chance to explore the Christian faith from another perspective.

The help, patience, and dedication of Pastor Rene Baergen and the openness and receptivity of the diverse congregation made Bruno feel right at home with the FMC church family. Alongside the words of welcome and mentorship he received, Bruno says the moments of silence during worship and prayer were impacting because they were “completely new in my experience as a Christian.” He also learned the value of the focused planning that goes into the preparation of a worship service at FMC. Bruno reflects that it was “a great way to see in practice some of the concepts we studied in the classroom.”

Learning is often a two-way street in Supervised Experience in Ministry (SEM) placements. Rene notes that Bruno brought new insight with a fresh set of eyes to FMC. Along with his own language and culture, Bruno brought the ability to recognize and speak about the Holy Spirit in the midst of life and worship. “I think this kind of interaction is key,” says Rene, “to remind us that we are not alone as churches or ministers or students, to encourage us to grow as we bump up against different ways of doing things, and to underline the gift of God’s presence, which we all seek to open or encounter in different ways.”

As Grebel MTS graduates continue on into ministry, engage in further study, or pursue other personal and professional goals, the richness of theological education at Grebel remains a valuable resource along the way. And the Mennonite Church reaps the benefits as well. Rene concludes, “The SEM placements strike me as an ideal way of including other voices, not simply ‘academically’ but in the very practice of what it means for us to be the church.” Whether SEMs prompt students to join Mennonite churches or follow their calling in other contexts, the encouragement and insight that come through connections like that of Bruno and Rene strengthen the body of Christ.

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Rene Baergen
Lead Pastor, First Mennonite Church

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With 13 years as a Mennonite pastor, Professor Carol Penner brings an experienced, hands-on approach to practical theology at Grebel. Carol helps students in the Applied Studies option of the MTS program discern and test their calling. The Supervised Experience in Ministry (SEM) courses are designed to provide diverse ministry experiences, uniting theory and practice. As students gain practical experience and reflect on it, theological education at Grebel takes on intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and relational dimensions.



Offering students opportunities to broaden their ministry experience while pursuing a master's degree, SEMs present the possibilities of encountering unexpected insight and igniting new passion. Carol reflects, "Students try ministry in real-time and they get immediate feedback about their work. Sometimes it's a way to venture out in a new direction without a lot of risk." Applied Studies students are empowered to emerge from Grebel's MTS program confidently equipped with the knowledge, experience, and self-awareness needed to be effective leaders in the church.

"Grebel is making an impact in the Canadian church," observes Carol. Even outside Canada, the MTS program has a far-reaching missional aspect. With students coming from countries like Switzerland, Brazil, and Korea, and international SEMs in places like Cameroon and the Dominican Republic, Grebel's impact spans the globe. Both within and beyond the classroom, Grebel trains interculturally competent church leaders with a capacity for life-long learning. Wherever a call to ministry takes students, Grebel can contribute a unique and inspiring part of the journey.

Student Reflections

"I have found the MTS program at Grebel to be inviting, accommodating, and enriching."

— Glenda Ribey Rozomiak,
MTS student

"What I love most about the MTS program is that I'm not being told what to think. Instead, I'm given the freedom to explore with the help of many caring guides: Grebel faculty and staff."

— Tim Elliott, MTS student

"Coming from a Mennonite background, meeting a diverse group of colleagues and sharing ideas has been one of the highlights of my experience in the MTS program. It always excites me to participate in discussions, hear and exchange different ideas, and grow together in our understanding. The program and professors offer more than just lectures, as a good proportion of the courses involve hands-on experience and applying what we learn to a real ministry setting."

— KyungYoung Kim, MTS student

Grebel/AMBS Sequential Degree

Rachel Wallace has found Grebel to be a door wide open to many of her goals. With full-tuition scholarships for all full-time Canadian students, the resources of the University of Waterloo, and a community learning atmosphere, Grebel has proven a great place to begin graduate theological studies. "While I wouldn't identify as Mennonite," says Rachel, "I have found that Anabaptist doctrine and ecclesiology sit well with me." For her, the opportunity to complete her MTS at Grebel and apply certain credits toward a Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana, is a natural next step.

As Rachel looks ahead, she sees the AMBS MDiv Connect program as the ideal way to continue her studies. This program's online and hybrid courses make it possible for students to earn an MDiv while living and working in Canada, which makes continued graduate theological studies accessible in an innovative way.

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Anabaptist Mennonite
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GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Christian-Muslim dialogue expands to Calgary

BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD
Alberta Correspondent

For the first time in its six-year history, the annual Christian-Muslim dialogue in Alberta held an event in Calgary as well as in Edmonton.

On Oct. 25, Trinity Mennonite Church hosted an evening presentation by Wes Thiessen, who holds a doctorate in Islamic history. Dale Ibsen of A Common Word Alberta, which sponsors the dialogues, followed up by moderating a Q&A session. Eight of the 30 participants were Muslims and were able to add a personal touch to the conversation, making it a time with, rather than about, each other.

Jake Froese, one of the organizers of the Calgary event, said that he and Will Loewen, Trinity's pastor, were "rather pleased with the outcome. We communicated very well and was well received."

Froese sees a need among churches for good information about Muslims. He references Jesus' comment after reciting the Greatest Commandment in Matthew 22:39: "The second is like it; Love your neighbour as yourself." It is hard to truly love your neighbour when you do not know them, Froese said.

In an email response to the question, "Why is an event like this important?" Thiessen emphasized the need for relationships. "Events like this are important because they start a conversation between two groups. . . . As we are all creatures of God, who we are instructed by Christ to love, we can best do that by beginning to converse with each other. Starting a conversation will hopefully help to reduce fear and ignorance."

The Al-Rashid Mosque hosted the annual Edmonton dialogue event on Oct. 27. This event regularly features both Christian and Muslim speakers, as well as significant roundtable discussion times for participants

of both faith groups to get to know each other and share their thoughts.

Thiessen was the Christian speaker, and Zaid Al Rawni, chief executive officer of the Islamic Relief Canada charity, spoke on behalf of Muslims. For the first time since the event began, Muslim participants outnumbered Christians at the Edmonton event.

Mennonite Church Alberta worker Donna Entz posted on Facebook: "One person shared that he was glad it was a dialogue and not a debate. Me, too." Entz's work in building bridges between these faith groups in Edmonton has resulted in significant respect and cooperation among groups and individuals, enabling understanding, compassion and friendships that have produced practical results. The most obvious example was the good relationships and trust developed prior to the Syrian refugee crisis that enabled efficient cooperation among organizations in responding to refugee needs.

Asked about his hopes for the future, Thiessen wrote: "I dream of one day Mennonites and Muslims learning about each other and sharing faith, in order to help each of us along in our spiritual journeys. Through interfaith relations, we learn as much about ourselves and our own faith as we do [about] the person with whom we talk. I have learned so much about God and my faith in this way, and trust that others will also." ❧

"Muslim faith and practice" and "What Muslims believe about Jesus" are two courses by Wes Thiessen that are available online at lunis.online/courses.



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PHOTO BY TIM WIEBE-NEUFELD

Pictured from left to right: Zaid Al Rawni, CEO of Islamic Relief Canada; Donna Entz of Mennonite Church Alberta's North Edmonton Ministry; Salwa Kadri, a committee member of A Common Word Alberta; and Wes Thiessen, who holds a doctorate in Islamic history.

God at Work in the World Snapshots



PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Christians, Jews and Muslims in Edmonton gathered to pray and walk for peace on the eve of the 100th anniversary of the ending of the First World War. A prayer service at McDougall United Church was followed by a short walk to Churchill Square, Canada Place, and the War Memorial and Peace Plaza overlooking downtown Edmonton. At each stop, one of the faith groups spoke, sang or prayed for peace, offering words of respect for fallen soldiers and civilians, and encouraging the 'welcome of the stranger' that builds toward peace for the future. This was Edmonton's 10th annual peace walk sponsored by the Edmonton Ecumenical Peace Network and Mennonite Central Committee.



PHOTO BY MARIA H. KLASSEN

There are children in this world who do not have access to a library, so Abe and Eleanor Epp of Bethany Mennonite Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., have been doing something about that for many years. Before they retired, the fruit farmers hired workers from Jamaica to work in their orchards for many years. On one of their visits to Jamaica, about 15 years ago, the couple toured one of the local schools, some of whose students had fathers who worked for the Epps. The principal lamented that, while the teachers tried to encourage literacy in their students, they had no books with which to practise their reading skills. Abe enlisted the help of a local library board member, who was able to supply Abe with surplus library books. Over the years, Abe, pictured with a recent shipment, has shipped one or two skids of books per year to Jamaican schools, whose teachers built shelves on which to store them. The Epps have received many letters over the years from happy students who have learned to read and write.

GOD AT WORK IN US

A deep love for the church

Doug Klassen goes from local pastor to executive minister of nationwide church

BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD
Alberta Correspondent

On Nov. 4, tears and well wishes were intermingled at Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary when Pastor Doug Klassen told his congregation that he had accepted Mennonite Church Canada's call to the position of executive minister.



Doug Klassen

"While I grieve the thought of leaving the congregation that I have loved deeply for 20 years, I look forward to the challenge of this new position and serving alongside the faithful staff, volunteers and members of our denomination as we seek together to be witnesses for Christ in the world," Klassen says.

To prepare for his interview and the new role, Klassen read widely.

"I read everything on the Emerging Voices website," he says. "I re-read the Future Directions Task Force report and Being a Faithful Church documents. I studied MC Canada's bylaws. I read all of the minutes from Joint Council meetings. I studied each regional church's website and the initiatives they were undertaking. "I read the *Canadian Mennonite* diligently. . . . I will be attending the missions consultation here in Calgary the end of March and the Joint Council meetings in early April."

He is also working on a paper on ecology and economy as a project for a course in systematic theology at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg, where he is working towards a master of arts degree. "This is a concern that I see surging across the country and wonder if there will be a time where we, as a nationwide body, will need to engage it," he says.

Klassen takes the helm while the new regionally based structure is still in a

formative stage. "One of the challenges, of course, is to not become regionally minded in a way that ignores God's desire for the nationwide church," he says.

Another challenge is to consider how the church relates to its "arms." "Fitness instructors will say that the

key to overall health and longevity is core strength," he says. "I am looking to work collaboratively with our educational, and relief, development and peace organizations in ways that enhance these ministries, and in ways that strengthen and inspire the local congregations as well."

"We're thrilled to have Doug join us in the role of executive minister," says Calvin Quan, chair of MC Canada's Joint Council. "The combination of his experience, drive and love for the church makes him an ideal fit. His passion for working with people, along with a strong history of building highly engaged teams, is a wonderful gift that he brings as we seek new ways to collaborate across our nationwide community of faith."

Before taking on his new role, which begins next June, Klassen pastored the Foothills congregation since 1998. He was instrumental in establishing the Foothills Mennonite Guesthouse, a home for out-of-town guests visiting friends or family in Calgary hospitals. He formed a *Buffalo Shout*, *Salmon Cry* book study group that brought together First Nations people and settlers, and he is chair of the Palestine/Israel Resolution Working Group in Alberta. He has written feature articles for *Canadian Mennonite*, volunteered as chaplain at MC Alberta's Camp Valaqua, and served on the board of directors of Menno Simons Christian School in

Calgary.

Born near Vineland, Ont., Klassen completed a two-year diploma in agribusiness management, and worked with livestock and the dairy industry in his home province for two-and-a-half years before attending Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg.

His pastoral ministry began in 1992 at St. Catharines (Ont.) United Mennonite Church as an associate pastor. He moved to Winnipeg in 1995 and served as director of young-adult ministries with MC Manitoba, pastored at Sterling Mennonite Fellowship and co-taught at CMU. He has also served on MC Canada's Faith and Life Committee for five years.

So how will he become further acquainted with Saskatchewan and B.C., the two regional churches where he has not served in?

"I know a good number of people in both of those provinces already through my time with General Board and through other church connections," he says. "Each region has its own unique history, DNA. I intend to study the histories of these, as I have done with the provinces where I have served."

Klassen expresses an interest in billeting in homes to get to know people as he thinks about his future cross-country travel. It was the many connections he has had with the larger church, shoulder-tapping by colleagues and a growing sense of inner call, that informed his decision to apply for the executive minister position, he says.

"In pastoral ministry, I bring a lot of hope, energy and passion to the work, and I see that continuing in this new role," he says. "I highly value building relationships with people far and wide, and look forward to meeting many more people across the country that live out of a desire to serve the church as it witnesses to the kingdom of God."

Klassen and his wife Rose currently live in Calgary near a ranch where they spend time with their horses and bees. Their three young-adult children and one son-in-law live in Winnipeg, where they will join them next June. ❧

—With files from Mennonite Church Canada.

Mennonite Church Canada thanks Willard Metzger

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER

Executive Editor
WINNIPEG

A farewell celebration was on the agenda for the Mennonite Church Canada Joint Council and Executive Staff Group, that were both meeting over the weekend of Oct 21. Along with other friends and well-wishers, they gathered at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg to thank Willard Metzger for his years of service as executive minister of MC Canada.

Calvin Quan, moderator of MC Canada, reflected on the time he served alongside Metzger, working on behalf of Mennonites across the country: "I became impressed with the deep love you had and continue to have for the church and the hope that fuels your leadership at MC Canada."

Serving in this role for eight years, Metzger is the longest serving leader in MC Canada.

He is deeply respected for his ecumenical work, representing MC Canada in the Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, in addition to nurturing strong relationships with MC U.S.A. and Mennonite World Conference. As part of an ongoing process of reconciliation between Lutherans and Anabaptists, he cultivated connections with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. He also participated in initial conversations between MC Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada. Alongside other Canadian faith leaders, he represented Mennonite concerns around climate justice, poverty and the crises in the Middle East.

Closer to home, in his role as executive minister (previously executive director and general secretary), Metzger led the church during the seven-year process of Being a Faithful Church (BFC), which examined how the church interprets Scripture, particularly in relation to same-sex marriage. In the Future Directions conversations, he helped MC Canada envision a new



PHOTO BY D. MICHAEL HOSTETLER

At a farewell celebration on Oct 21, Ken Warkentin, left, the executive director of Mennonite Church Manitoba, presents outgoing executive minister Willard Metzger with a gift from the Executive Staff Group of MC Canada.

direction for the nationwide church and led the denomination through a challenging structural change.

Hilda Hildebrand, who previously served as moderator of MC Canada and on the BFC and Future Directions task forces, recalled that "Willard worked tirelessly, engaging in challenging conversations and transitions . . . and ultimately walking with us toward re-imagining and re-birthing."

Speaking on behalf of the Executive Staff Group, Ken Warkentin said, "Willard, you have led Mennonite Church Canada with passion and with faith and with foresight and courage over these past eight-plus years, and your gifts of encouragement, particularly to young people, have been a blessing."

"Willard has an undeniable love for God's church," reflected Joint Council member Alicia Good. "We've been blessed as a faith community to have had his leadership through this dynamic period of change. It has helped to create a firm foundation for the excellent leaders that will now take up the task"

In his response, Metzger reminded listeners that God gives gifts to all, for the good of all. "Today is a celebration of the work of the Spirit in equipping the church to fulfill the purpose and passion of God," he said. "Gifts are given by the Spirit for the purposes of God's will. Gifts are entwined with your unique personality, so that when you are exercising your gifts you are doing what you love to do. That was my case. The church called my gifts into action and I loved what I did."

He acknowledged the dedicated work of the volunteers and staff members who worked alongside him: "It is a beautiful thing to witness God's people exercising the gifts supplied by the Spirit. It is an expression of worship."

Looking forward, he said, "I also have a joyful confidence in our youth, our

young adults and the children following them. The Spirit of God is active right now in their midst: inspiring new thoughts and dreams in their hearts and minds. God is busy equipping them for their turn to shape the church. They will understand what we cannot. They will take the church to where it needs to go."

Henry Paetkau is currently serving as MC Canada's interim executive minister. Doug Klassen has been appointed to serve long term as executive minister, starting in June 2019. ✎

—With files from MC Canada.

ARTBEAT

Walking humbly with God and artists

Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery celebrates 20 years of art and relationships

STORY AND PHOTOS BY GLADYS TERICHOW

Special to Canadian Mennonite
WINNIPEG

A nativity painting by Winnipeg artist Lynda Toews brings attention to Joseph's commitment to God, and to the bond between farm animals and people. The donkey's dorsal strip forms a cross pointing to Baby Jesus.

Her 2014 painting, "The commitment," is part of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery's 20th anniversary exhibition that featured 76 artists who have been involved in one or more of the gallery's 160 exhibitions.

"This gallery gives me, as a female Mennonite artist, opportunity to display my work," said Toews at the gallery's fundraising event on Oct. 12. "It is an affirming and encouraging place. This gallery

is much more than art for art's sake. It is about art for justice, art for community, art for life."

Speaking at the event, Ray Dirks, the gallery's founder and curator, received a standing ovation when he concluded his talk about the many multi-faith and multicultural relationships that have been developed and nurtured through art exhibitions, books, school presentations and other interactions.

"I pray my wavering direction has been ultimately pointing towards God and following what I should be doing," said Dirks. It is his prayer that both he and the gallery reflect justice, kindness and humility, as stated in Micah 6:8: "And what does the

Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

The gallery, formerly owned by Mennonite Church Canada, is now owned by Canadian Mennonite University. It relies almost entirely on donations from gallery supporters.

In the 1990s, Dirks was a freelance curator who provided opportunities for African artists to show their work at exhibitions in Canada. When the education grants for these exhibitions ended in the late 1990s, he asked Ken Reddig, the heritage centre's director, if he could develop an art gallery in an underutilized space in the building.

Dirks was given permission to develop the space into a self-supporting gallery. A few months later, he secured a three-year funding commitment from three donors: the DeFehr Foundation, the P.W. Enns Family Foundation and Arthur Block.

"With that promised \$35,000 a year and a dream shared by Ken Reddig, I became Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery curator in August 1998," Dirks told the crowd. "The first several years, the gallery hung on by a financial thread. I would often be planning up to two years ahead, knowing we had next to no money, maybe enough to cover expenses for a month or two, praying and hoping donations could be found to carry on."

He explored the possibility of getting financial assistance from the Winnipeg Foundation to furnish an office, improve lighting and develop the space into a gallery. The initial response was that the foundation does not fund religious institutions.

At a meeting with the foundation, he had explained that the gallery's mandate was to develop a place where artists from all churches and faiths can express themselves in an openly Christian institution, where diversity can be celebrated and embraced, and where artists can bring attention to issues that touch the lives of marginalized, ignored and forgotten communities.

He received the funding to develop the space into a gallery. The foundation also helped fund "In the spirit of humanity" and "Leap in faith" projects. Both of these multicultural and multi-faith projects were undertaken by Dirks and Manju Lodha,



Eleanor and Al Hamm of Steinbach, left, are pictured with Winnipeg artist Lynda Toews at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery's 20th anniversary fundraising event. Toews painted the nativity scene from her photograph of people from Grace Mennonite Church in Steinbach: Al is the shepherd on the left, Eleanor Hamm is one of the wise men whose face has been changed, John Peters is Joseph, Alyssa Lord is Mary, and Gary Brown is the faceless shepherd on the right.



Ray Dirks, centre, is pictured with Teresita Chiarella, left, and Winnipeg artist Anthony Chiarella at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery's 20th anniversary fundraising event.

Award for Advancement of Interreligious Understanding. A tree has been planted at The Forks in their honour, as part of the Lieutenant Governor's Tree Project.

The gallery has also promoted work from artists from Sudan, Cuba, Indonesia and Iraqi Kurdistan.

One of Dirks's early exhibitions, "In God's image: A global Anabaptist family," not only toured in Canada and the U.S. but also in Europe and Africa.

Winnipeg artist Anthony Chiarella said that it is important for him to display his artworks that reflect his Catholic faith in a Christian gallery. His artwork on themes such as the crucifixion, saints, crosses and church sacraments have been part of about eight or nine exhibitions at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery. "There is nothing in Winnipeg that is comparable to this gallery," he says. "It would be a big loss to Winnipeg if this gallery wasn't here."

a Winnipeg artist and author who is also a member of the city's Hindu and Jain communities.

Their collaborative and creative

approach to promoting understanding, respect and acceptance was recognized in January, when Dirks and Lodha received the 2017 Lieutenant Governor's

A video of the 20th-anniversary program can be viewed at bit.ly/mhc-gallery-fundraiser.



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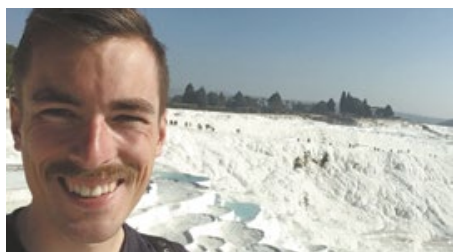


PHOTOS COURTESY OF GAVYN STROH

Gavyn Stroh spent 370 days travelling through 34 countries by bike.



Gavyn Stroh spent more than 150 nights camping during his trip.



'To connect more intimately with the place where you are is a good thing' Gavyn Stroh says.

Soaking it in

B.C. native Gavyn Stroh reflects on a year spent exploring Europe by bike

BY AARON EPP
Young Voices Editor

When Gavyn Stroh decided to spend a year exploring Europe, he wanted to do it in a way that aligned with his values.

"I chose a bicycle . . . to minimize the [environmental] impact, the carbon emissions of travelling," the 26-year-old says.

Over the course of a 370-day adventure that ended in September, Stroh visited more than 30 countries. He spent 191 days on his bike, cycling a total of 20,323 kilometres—more than halfway around the Earth's equator.

No stranger to exploring other parts of the world, he previously travelled to South Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. He began planning his European cycling trip while finishing his undergraduate degree in international development at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg.

While procrastinating one day, he discovered a series of videos on YouTube by a Bulgarian-Canadian traveller named Iohan Gueorguiev (bikewanderer.com), which chronicled his journey from the Arctic Ocean to Ushuaia at the southern tip of South America. Gueorguiev's dedication to travelling by bike inspired Stroh to do the same.

Stroh spent the 16 months after graduation planning and saving for his trip while working at a coffee shop in downtown Winnipeg. He planned to move back to his native Squamish, B.C., and figured a year-long bike trip would be good way to transition from Winnipeg to life back home.

Highlights of his trip included pedalling through the mountains in Switzerland,

exploring the archaeological sites throughout the western coast of Turkey and cycling through the hinterland of Scandinavia.

Attending a FIFA World Cup match in Kaliningrad, Russia, was also a special experience for him.

As a former barista, coffee played a role in his travels.

"After being in the industry for several years, I wasn't ready to quit cold turkey and go cycling, so I brought [coffee-making] equipment with me and used the trip as an excuse to see how people around the world consume coffee," he says. "It was nice to keep that little bit of semblance of routine from my regular Canadian life."

The weather proved to be one of the biggest challenges that he faced. "I had my fair share of miserable days cycling in the rain," he says. Still, he tried to keep those experiences in perspective, reminding himself that he was in a unique position.

He even called the blog he maintained during his trip "Tour de Privilège," as a nod to the privilege he enjoys, finishing university debt free and then taking a year to travel.

In his first blog entry, Stroh listed six goals for his trip. These included experiencing new places, experiencing what lies in between major cities, deciding where to live after returning to Canada, deciding on a career path, being aware of his privilege and connecting with others.

"They weren't at the forefront of my mind day-to-day, but I think I largely accomplished them," he says. "Except for deciding on a career path. I'm as lost and confused about that as when I left, but that's okay."

Stroh adds that studying international development in university impacted the way he travelled. Not only did it influence his decision to travel by bike, but it sparked his interest in exploring life between cities.

"In many parts of the world, agriculture makes up people's livelihoods," he says. "I wanted to actually see how people live rather than taking a flight overtop to the next urban centre."

By the end of his trip, he had visited the United Kingdom, France, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Italy, Vatican City, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and Ireland.

He hopes to travel to South America next, although he isn't actively planning a trip. For now, after spending most of the past seven years living away from where he grew up, he's enjoying reacquainting himself with life in Squamish.

His advice for young people who are planning to travel is straightforward: "Soak it in."

"Be fully present in the place that you are," he says. "I find it very tempting, especially in the connected society we're in, to live vicariously through people back home [via social media] . . . but to disconnect is okay, and to connect more intimately with the place where you are is a good thing." ❧

Visit gavynstroh.wixsite.com/tourdeprivilege to read more about Stroh's travels.



Gavyn Stroh explored Sarajevo's abandoned 1984 Olympic bobsled and luge track.



Gavyn Stroh watches hot air balloons take off at sunrise in Göreme, Turkey.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

A most excellent Christmas

Lessons gleaned from a homemade gift exchange

BY AARON EPP

YOUNG VOICES EDITOR

I love Christmas. The tree, the lights, the music, the food, gathering with family and friends, special church

services. I look forward to all of it.

I still go with my siblings to the mall so

(Continued on page 34)



PHOTO BY AARON EPP

'My brother gave me a pillow inspired by my favourite movie, Ghostbusters, that he sewed himself.'



PHOTO BY TIMOTHY DYCK

Santa Aaron, in 2006.



PHOTO BY AARON EPP

'I presented my brother Thomas with a jar filled with 150 encouraging notes.'

(Continued from page 33)

that we can have our picture taken with Santa, and I've even dressed up as the jolly old elf a time or two (or three) myself.

Another thing I enjoy about Christmas is the presents. I get a kick out of choosing just the right gifts for loved ones, and I enjoy receiving gifts, too.

That said, like many other people, I'm not completely comfortable with the consumerism of Christmas.

According to Statistics Canada, the value of toys, games and hobby supplies, including electronic games, purchased at large retailers in Canada in December 2016 was \$417.8 million. The value of televisions and audio and video equipment purchased was \$459.9 million, and the value of food and beverages purchased was \$5.1 billion.

Last year, many Canadians responding to a CIBC survey believed their holiday spending was out of control, with more than half saying they would spend more than they budgeted.

According to a CBC report, survey respondents complained about the craziness of holiday shopping, the time crunch and feeling pressure to give gifts.

"People are spending more over the holidays than they have in the past and they're telling us they can't really afford it," David Nicholson, vice-president of CIBC Imperial Service, told the CBC.

Coming from a people who have traditionally prided themselves on doing "more with less"—and whose confession of faith states that God "calls us as the church to live as faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us"—I wonder what to do with these reports of overconsumption.

As I ponder the statistics, I think about my family's gift exchange last year. Typically, I, along with my parents, brothers and our partners, pick names and buy a gift for one person in the family. Last year, instead of deciding on a spending limit we would each adhere to and then hitting the malls, we chose to make a gift for the person whose name we picked.

My father, a life-long music fanatic, made my wife Mandy, a film scholar, a mix CD comprised of famous theme songs from cinematic history. Mandy knit my brother Daniel a pair of mittens.

Daniel gave me a pillow inspired by my

all-time favourite movie, *Ghostbusters*, that he sewed himself.

I presented my brother Thomas, who was going through a rough patch at the time, with a jar filled with 150 notes I had written to him. They included 50 memories of good times we'd shared, 50 things I appreciated about him and 50 things that I hoped for his future. The idea was that he could pick a note or two out of the jar each day, read it and be encouraged.

Thomas, a cribbage enthusiast, cut, drilled, sanded and stained a cribbage board for my father.

My mother gave my sister-in-law, Anna-Marie, a dish from a local pottery shop that she had decorated herself.

Anna-Marie presented my mother with a framed picture she had cross-stitched bearing the words "Most excellent," a phrase my mother is famous in our family for using when she approves of something.

My family has always had a lot of fun opening gifts at Christmas, but we were especially ecstatic as we gave our handmade gifts to one another that morning.

Making gifts for one another caused us to be more thoughtful in our gift-giving than we might otherwise have been. Significant time was spent on the gifts and, in some cases, people stepped outside of their comfort zone while creating them.

My mother, for example, doesn't consider herself artistic and had never painted a plate before. The pillow Daniel gave me, meanwhile, was his first-ever sewing project.

I'm sure that, for some people, making gifts at Christmas time would only contribute to the time crunch and pressure they feel during the holidays. Buying something in a store is easier, and I'm not knocking it. I was still happy to receive my share of books, CDs, movies and gift certificates last year.

At the same time, my family's experiment with a homemade gift exchange was a reminder that I don't have to spend more than I can afford.

It also reminded me that stepping out of my comfort zone to make something with my own two hands can result in a pretty great gift. ☺



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Christmas: Let it be, let it go

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Palestinian and Israeli share dreams for peace

Two activists for peace share the stage at CMU, as part of a four-province tour to promote their vision for reconciliation.

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Celebrating its rich history, an aging congregation confronts its dwindling numbers and decides to close.

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Rural church celebrates 70 years of God's presence

A Manitoba congregation shares stories and memories around the theme "In God's Hands."

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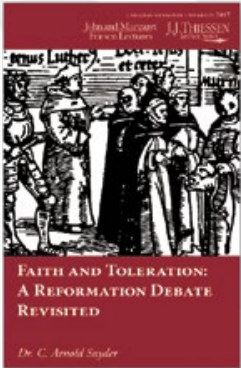


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Calendar

British Columbia

Feb. 22, 2019: LEAD conference, at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond.
Feb. 23, 2019: MC B.C. annual general meeting, at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond.
June 28-July 1, 2019: "Igniting the imagination of the church" MC Canada delegate assembly, at the Quality Hotel and Conference Centre, Abbotsford: (28) leaders assembly; (29) business/ delegate meeting; (29-1) inspirational conference.

Alberta

March 15-16, 2019: MC Alberta annual delegate sessions, at Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury. Theme: "Vision 2020: God's leading."
June 7-9, 2019: MC Alberta women's retreat, at Sylvan Lake.
June 15, 2019: Camp Valaqua hike-a-thon.
June 16, 2019: Camp Valaqua garden party.

Saskatchewan

Dec. 19: RJC Christmas concert, at Knox United Church, Saskatoon.
Dec. 21: RJC Christmas concert, at RJC gymnasium, at 7 p.m.
Jan. 18, 2019: RJC open house and Friday Night Live youth event.
March 8-9, 2019: MC Saskatchewan annual delegate sessions, at Zoar Mennonite Church, Waldheim.
March 22-23, 2019: Women's retreat at Shekinah.
July 28-Aug. 1, 2019: Prairie Youth Gathering, at Shekinah Summer Camp. Theme: "Shake: Rattled by the Radical (Jesus)." Open to students from across Canada entering grades 6 to 12 in the 2018-19 school year. Hosted by MC Saskatchewan and MC Manitoba. Information coming soon to prairieyouth.ca. Follow on Instagram @prairieyouth.ca for the latest updates.

Manitoba

Dec. 15: First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, hosts an evening of music featuring "Handmaid of the Lord," an

original musical telling of the Christmas story by Monika Wall.

Dec. 15,16: Faith and Life Choirs' Christmas concerts: (15) at Springfield Heights Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m.; (16) at Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, at 3 p.m.
Jan. 17, 2019: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate open house, at 7 p.m.
Jan. 25, 2019: Exhibitions by Winnipeg artists Anita Kroeger and Michael Boss open at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg. Runs until March 9.
Jan. 31-Feb. 1, 2019: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate presents three one-act plays by its junior-high students; at Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre, Winnipeg.
Feb. 1, 2019: CMU campus visit day begins at 9 a.m.
Feb. 7, 2019: Opera workshop, at CMU's Laudamus Auditorium, at 7 p.m.
Feb. 9, 2019: Discover Outtatown, at CMU, at 9 a.m.
Feb. 11, 2019: "A matter of life and death," a Face2Face discussion at CMU's Marpeck Commons, at 7 p.m.

Feb. 12-13, 2019: ReNew 2019: Resourcing pastors for ministry (Death, funerals and the Christian Hope), at CMU, Winnipeg. Keynote speaker: Thomas Long.
Feb. 13, 2019: Verna Mae Janzen Music Competition, at CMU's Laudamus Auditorium, at 7 p.m.
March 1, 2019: Music Therapy coffeehouse, at CMU's Marpeck Commons, at 7 p.m.
March 10, 2019: Mennonite Community Orchestra, performs at CMU, Winnipeg, at 3 p.m. Featuring CMU student pianist Emma Heinrichs.
March 15, 2019: Exhibitions by Melissa Coyle and Sandra Campbell open at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg. Runs until April 27.
March 15, 2019: CMU Festival Chorus and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra perform Verdi's "Requiem," at Winnipeg's Centennial Concert Hall, at 8 p.m.
March 26, 2019: CMU spring open house, begins at 10 a.m.
March 30, 2019: Jazz at CMU, at 7 p.m.

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March 31, 2019: Handbell and guitar ensembles perform at CMU, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m.

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.

Dec. 1: Pax Christi Chorale presents "Children's Messiah," at Church of the Redeemer, Toronto, at 4 p.m.

Dec. 8: The Grand Philharmonic Choir, Kitchener Waterloo Symphony, and soloists perform Handel's "Messiah," at the Centre in the Square in Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, email info@grandphilchoir.com.

Dec. 12: Menno Singers present "Incarnation," a concert celebrating the birth of Christ, at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, at 3 p.m.

Dec. 16: Menno Singers present "Sing-a-long Messiah," at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, at 3 p.m.

Dec. 16: Pax Christi Chorale presents England's Golden Age, featuring a capella works from the reigns of

Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, at Grace Church on-the-Hill, Toronto, at 3 p.m.

Jan. 30, 2019: MennoHomes' annual general meeting, at 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, at 2 p.m. For more information, call 226-476-2535.

Jan. 31-Feb. 2, 2019: Breslau Mennonite Church presents "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat"; (31 and 1) at 7:30 p.m., (2) at 2 and 7:30 p.m. For tickets online, visit breslaumc.ca.

Feb. 1-3, 2019: Senior youth winter retreat. Theme: "Music: Voices together." Join youth from across MC Eastern Canada to learn some new songs, talk about worship and create worship materials.

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



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