

CANADIAN MENNONITE

April 1, 2019 Volume 23 Number 7



Consider it (re)settled

MCC's 40 years of refugee
resettlement in Canada, pg. 4

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EDITORIAL

No more of this!

Virginia A. Hostetler
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



One morning in the second full week of Lent, I woke up to the first sign of Easter.

It had been a dreary season of violence. In the beginning of March, a shooter injured six people at a Chicago club. On March 15, in New Zealand, a gunman killed 50 worshippers in planned attacks at two mosques. Three days later, a man in the Netherlands shot at people in a tram, killing three and wounding seven.

The Sunday after that shooting, Pastor Renee Sauder referenced Luke 22:47-53 in her sermon. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is struggling with his impending fate. An armed band of people shows up to arrest him. In a panic, one of his disciples grabs a sword and slashes off the ear of one of the arresters. Jesus' immediate rebuke: "No more of this!"

Our normally soft-spoken preacher raised her voice, in a tone of authority that amplified Jesus' command: "No more of this!" No more of this violence, no more steel weapons hurting people. It was a prophetic call to hearts still trying to comprehend yet another brutal act using the "swords" of our day.

Rest of the story: Jesus re-attaches and heals the severed ear. He chooses to absorb the subsequent violence into his own body, suffering ridicule, beatings, pain and, a few days later, death on the cross.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus recalled a prophetic vision, spoken in olden times by both Micah and Isaiah: enemies restored to a common life of peace, swords no longer serving the purpose of destruction but, instead, becoming tools for life-sustaining agriculture. "[The Lord] shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many

peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

That glorious vision continues to inspire today. In our March 8 issue, we profiled Irian Fast-Sittler, a young blacksmith who shaped her grandfather's shotgun into a work of art. She is part of an inspiring movement of Christians attempting to live out, in practical terms, the prophetic vision of weapons transformed. Take, for example, RAWTools, Inc. (rawtools.org), an organization that has been literally re-fashioning guns into hand tools since 2013.

As someone who embraces this counter-cultural message of Jesus, I still hear his voice today challenging the idolatry of gun culture: "no" to "efficient" firearms that destroy human targets in a single bullet spray. "No" to technology that dehumanizes the act of killing. "No" to fortunes made from weapons sales. "*They shall learn war no more.*"

As I went to bed that Wednesday, police in New Zealand were identifying the bodies of victims, and their families were preparing to bury loved ones. Shock and grief filled multiple newsfeeds and news sites. Even thousands of kilometres away, that sorrow had seeped into many peace-loving hearts.

But while our weary hearts still slept, the government of New Zealand instituted a ban on "military-style" semi-automatic weapons. It was an extremely fast response, contrasted with the never-ending contentious gun-control debates that engage North American lawmakers. Sales of this type of weapon would be stopped immediately. Gun owners would have a time of

amnesty in which to return their weapons in a formal buyback scheme. Amazingly, the overall concept of the ban was widely supported in its home country.

Easter peeks through into Lent when a nation says, "No more of this!" While humankind has a long way to go before we experience Isaiah's peaceful vision, this 21st century gun ban becomes a small sign of hope during dark days of mourning. May people of goodwill around the world heed Jesus' call to life. May the resurrected Christ give us all courage and strength to stand against the powerful forces of destruction. May we, with God's help, live into a new Easter reality.

A pilgrim passes

Recently we learned of the death of Tim Wiebe, on March 14 in Altona, Man. Mennonites in various Mennonite communities know him through his contributions to Mennonite education, radio broadcasts, music and more. Some of *CM's* readers will remember his column on our pages. "Pilgrim pieces" ran from January 2000 to August 2004. Tim shared personal anecdotes and stories about friends and family members, reflections, and sometimes even jokes. His tone was friendly and informal, blending humour and insight, sometimes with a touch of self-mockery. Thank you, Tim.

Correction

Marilyn Klassen is not deceased. Incorrect information appeared in "Marpeck scholar dies," an obituary for William (Bill) Klassen, published on page 25 of the March 4 issue of *Canadian Mennonite*. *CM* regrets the error.



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MCC representative Victor Neumann, second from left, in Songkhla, Thailand, with Vietnamese 'boat people.' Mothers of the pictured children were abducted by pirates. In response to the refugee crisis following the end of the Vietnam War, in 1979, MCC was the first agency to sign a private sponsorship agreement with the Government of Canada, leading hundreds of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches to sponsor and resettle thousands of refugees across the country. See feature on page 4.

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FEATURE

Consider it (re)settled

MCC's 40 years of refugee resettlement in Canada

By Jason Dueck
Mennonite Central Committee Canada



MCC PHOTOS

The Lee family poses for a photo taken in Kitchener, Ont., in 1986. In 1979, Ka Lee, front row, in the red dress, and her family were sponsored through MCC's refugee resettlement program by Crosshill (Ont.) Mennonite Church, after they fled Thailand. INSET UPPER RIGHT: Ka Lee (now Lee-Paine), 2, holds a sign with her name on it in a photo taken for immigration purposes in Thailand in 1979.

More than 12,500 refugees have been resettled in Canada by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) since it negotiated an agreement with the government on March 5, 1979. This historic agreement established the framework for private agencies to sponsor more than 327,000 refugees

for resettlement in Canada in the last 40 years.

In the late 1970s, the plight of the “Vietnamese boat people” was highly covered by international media, propelling conversations about refugees and resettlement into public awareness. The end of the Vietnam War in 1975 caused millions of Vietnamese people to flee the country over the next number of years,

seeking refuge anywhere they could find it. During the peak of the refugee crisis in 1978, Canadian Mennonites were growing deeply concerned.

The enormous outflow of refugees from Vietnam and Southeast Asia struck a chord that was all too familiar to Mennonite communities, many of whom were themselves descended from refugees fleeing persecution. From its creation in 1920 to the late '70s, MCC had worked to pay forward that kindness, assisting thousands of European Mennonites seeking resettlement in Canada and the United States after the Second World War and other conflicts and disasters.

The 'master agreement'

Under new legislation in the 1970s, interested groups of as small as five people could sponsor refugees directly. However, the sponsoring group would also have to accept financial responsibility for the first year of expenses for whomever they sponsored—a daunting obligation that many were unable to risk.

"The request at the MCC annual meeting that year was that I arrange a method or mechanism so that Mennonite congregations could bring in refugees," said Bill Janzen, then-director of MCC's



Bill Janzen

Ottawa Office. "The goal was a deal with reasonable clarity as to who would do what, and where the responsibilities of MCC, the churches and government would be clear and manageable."

Janzen and his MCC colleagues began to meet with officials from the immigration department in an attempt to set in place a master agreement that would allow MCC to bear the burden of responsibility institutionally.

"In Mennonite history and theology, there's a precedent of the church acting as a distinct social body, to have an impact on injustices," said Janzen. "Our first instinct isn't to say, 'The government should solve this.' It's to say, 'What can we do?'"

According to *Running on Empty*:



On March 5, 1979, representatives from MCC and the Government of Canada signed Canada's first formal private refugee resettlement agreement, known then as the 'master agreement.' Pictured from left to right: Kirk Bell, director general of recruitment and selection, standing; Ken McMaster, Manitoba minister of labour and manpower; Bud Cullen, minister of employment and immigration; J. M. Klassen, executive secretary of MCC Canada; John Wieler, director of MCC Canada's overseas services; and Art Driedger, associate director of MCC Canada's overseas services.

Canada and the Indochinese Refugees, 1975-1980, by Michael J. Molloy, Peter Duschinsky, Kurt F. Jensen and Robert Shalka, government officials had been told to play hardball and to establish that government supports, like language and job skills training, would be for government refugees only—that MCC would have to create those supports itself, with no assistance.

Shortly after negotiations began, Gordon Barnett, the Department of Immigration's chief negotiator, realized that an aggressive approach was not going to be the solution.

"As negotiations progressed and the goodwill of MCC became evident, this approach changed, and both sides readily accepted to do what each would do best," recalled Barnett, as quoted in *Running on Empty*. "Bill [Janzen] negotiated in such good faith it was embarrassing to play the cards I had been given. . . . Negotiating with MCC demonstrated only their complete commitment to help against our reluctance to give anything up and our meanness. I thought we should adopt a different, more cooperative approach."

The signing of the "master agreement" on March 5, 1979, marked an extraordinary moment in MCC's history. While there had been broad agreements in place to support refugee resettlement between MCC and the Canadian government,

this deal formed the foundation for how modern faith communities directly support those seeking refuge. Shortly after its signing, dozens of national church bodies and dioceses across Canada signed virtually identical agreements.

Over the following 18 months, half of Canada's 600 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches sponsored some 4,000 refugees for resettlement to Canada.

Resettled, but not yet settled

MCC's work with refugees doesn't end when they arrive on Canadian soil. For many newcomers, it means starting an entirely new life in a country where they may not share a language with their neighbours.

Language was not an issue for Jean-Calvin Kitata when he travelled to Burlington, Ont., from his home in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) to attend school. A speaker of 11 languages, including English and French, Kitata only intended to stay in Canada for a year, but a violent coup in his home country meant he couldn't return, and he applied for refugee status as a student to finish his education in Canada.

Since 2005, he has worked for MCC in Quebec, supporting newcomers, refugees and international students as they navigate their new world. He said his work often involves talking through the deep

cultural divides that pervade many areas of the globe.

“I was meeting a newcomer from Burundi for coffee. And the countries in the African Great Lakes Region (Burundi, Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda) have been in conflict for a long time,” he said. “I came back to the table with two cups of coffee, and when I set his down in front of him, he asked if we could switch cups. Even knowing I worked for MCC, he still had fear about being poisoned because of the history between our countries.”

Now, Kitata said, that same man is a close friend and is welcome at his home anytime. It’s that type of transformative peacebuilding that he says drives him to continue his work for MCC.

“When I was a child in Zaire, I went to school with the kids of MCC workers, I ate MCC canned meat, I used MCC comforters,” he said. “Now I’m part of the vision of community and peace of MCC, helping build a family that you can laugh together with or cry with.”

Generational hope

Many refugees coming to Canada are families with young children who may not remember the home they left behind. This, said Kitata, is another aspect to resettlement that is not as simple as some might think.

“Children of immigrants or refugees are often living in two worlds,” said Kitata, whose daughter, the youngest of three, was born in Canada. “They only know life in Canada, but often they’re curious about their parents’ lives before, and have to exist between their parents’ culture and the one around them.”

Ka Lee-Paine arrived in Canada 40 years ago and found herself in a very similar situation. Now 42, she was 2 when her parents left the Nong Khai region of Thailand in September 1979 for a new life in Canada. Thanks to the newly signed resettlement agreement, they were sponsored by members of Crosshill (Ont.) Mennonite Church and they settled in nearby New Hamburg.

“There was a lot of ‘that’s not the way we do things’ growing up,” said Lee-Paine. “I wasn’t born here technically, but I’m the



Jean-Calvin Kitata, centre, peace and justice ministries coordinator for MCC Quebec, responds to questions at an MCC Quebec Peace Festival in Montréal in 2006, with Marianne Passarelli and Nathan Bonneville, volunteers from participating churches.

only one of my siblings who still speaks the language (Hmong) and really still keeps up some of the culture. I still want to hold on to my culture and belief, but you have to assimilate yourself some, too.”

Balancing two different cultures is not the only challenge she faced as a child of refugees. “When I was 10, I remember having to essentially have my own parent-teacher conferences,” she recalled. “I spoke Hmong and English, so there I was translating everything the teacher was saying to my parents myself.”

She now works as a teacher in Waterloo, Ont., and said she has seen the same situation from the other side of the teacher’s desk.

“I’ve had a lot of students from Syrian families who are in the same situation I was,” she said. “That experience means I can empathize with these kids in a way not a lot of other people can. I’ve had some incredible conversations with young children who I can see are bearing a lot more responsibility than most children are expected to. Children in those situations really need mental health supports and, unfortunately, those can be hard to get for them.”

Lee-Paine said she was immensely thankful for the support her family received when they arrived in Canada, adding that her family is still close with two of the couples who sponsored their journey 40 years ago. They were even invited to Lee-Paine’s wedding in 2009.

“I want people to know that supporting refugees is not something to be afraid of, that they’re only going to add to our society,” she said. ☸

For discussion

1. What experiences have you or your congregation had in resettling refugees in Canada? What was the biggest challenge? What were the rewards of this experience? How long did it take for trust to develop? What would it take for your congregation to do another sponsorship?
2. Did any long-term relationships develop between sponsors and resettled refugees? Do you think close relationships are the norm? What factors can make a sustained relationship challenging?
3. Jason Dueck writes that in the late 1970s the plight of “boat people” from Southeast Asia was widely covered by the international media. Why do you think this tragedy got such widespread coverage? How much are we influenced by what the media chooses to pay attention to?
4. What was so significant about Mennonite Central Committee Canada signing the “master agreement” with the government of Canada in 1979? Why do you think so many churches were willing to participate? Did this change the role of MCC?

—By Barb Draper

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www.commonword.ca/go/1762

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/// Readers write

✉ Thoughts for the Easter season

The season of Lent and Easter is a time of mystery and power.

God is much bigger and more than a warm security blanket wrapping the Earth, and bigger than the whole solar system.

In fact, it is not like God lives in some corner of the universe. Rather, reality as we know it may be living in some part of the heart and mind of the Creator. All this may be a small thing in the hands of the Creator. Remember the song, “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.”

So many people and cultures have lived and are living now. There is evidence of faith and spirituality in many different centuries and in many places. Jews, Christians and Muslims say there is only one God. Many Indigenous teachings also say there is only One, the Creator.

Here we are, the Christian stream in the middle of all this. The Bible is our guide in faith and life, especially the gospels in the New Testament. Gatherings of believers and discerning the times are important. We can know what we are to be and do:

- **Love the Lord** your God, love your neighbour as yourself.
- **Be still and know** that I am God.
- **Be a shepherd**, bring people to green pasture and quiet waters, walk with those in the shadows, prepare tables for enemies, love kindness and mercy.
- **Praise the Lord** . . . justice for the oppressed, food to the hungry, set prisoners free, open the eyes of the blind, raise up those who are bowed down, protect strangers, support the fatherless and the widow.
- **Beat swords** into ploughshares, learn war no more.
- **Do justice**, love mercy, walk humbly with God.

Those are all from the Old Testament. We say the New Testament calls us to more. Incarnation, salvation, resurrection, discipleship and reconciliation are powerful words. And, amazingly, Jesus invites us to address the Creator, the Lord God Almighty, as Father.

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.

The mysteries of what we remember and celebrate on Good Friday and Easter are beyond our reason and understanding. Listen, learn, share these things with gentleness.

There are questions, problems—here and now, about “wheat and weeds,” and also about life beyond time—God will take care of all that. Occasionally in our societies, we need lawyers, but God does not need prosecutors or defence lawyers.

We already have more than enough teachings and examples to fill and use all of our hearts, minds and strength, as we try to follow the Jesus of the gospels.

RAY HAMM, NEUBERGTHAL, MAN.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Albrecht—Lucas Christopher (b. March 9, 2019), to Chris and Nikketa Albrecht, Maple View Mennonite, Wellesley, Ont.

Brubacher—Elizabeth Viva (Liesl)(b. Feb. 8, 2019), to Josiah and Christa Brubacher, Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Neufeld—Rowan Bruce (b. Feb. 27, 2019), to Aaron and Alyson Neufeld, Toronto United Mennonite.

Ropp—Paisley Jean (b. Jan. 27, 2019), to Sarah and Nathan Ropp, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Warkentin—Bo Henry (b. Feb. 7, 2019), to Brad and Ashley Warkentin, Nordheim Mennonite, Winnipegosis, Man.

Deaths

Epp—Egon, 89 (b. Dec. 9, 1929; d. Feb. 4, 2019), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Fieguth—Hansulrich, 83 (b. Feb. 11, 1935; d. Feb. 3, 2019), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Hamm—Katherine, 97 (b. Oct. 30, 1921; d. Jan. 20, 2019), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Nordemann—Edna, 85 (b. June 20, 1933; d. Feb. 22, 2019), Petitcodiac Mennonite, N.B.

Schwartzentruber—Gerald Jacob, 85 (b. Aug. 1, 1933; d. Jan. 27, 2019), Wilmot Mennonite, Ont.

Wallman—David, 90 (b. May 21, 1928; d. Jan. 31, 2019), Sargent Avenue Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones announcements within four months of the event. Please send Milestones announcements by e-mail 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.

FROM OUR LEADERS

Interdependence

Jason Martin

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12, NIV).

Most likely, you have heard these words during a wedding ceremony. Although they are fitting for the marriage context, I would suggest that this verse also speaks to our need for each other.

In our western society we pride ourselves by saying that we have accomplished tasks on our own. If we do realize our need for another, we prefer to offer help rather than to receive assistance.

Within the body of Christ, though, interdependence is valued and celebrated. As the writer of Ecclesiastes counsels, alone one can be overcome. Two are better than one, but three woven together like a thick rope are stronger still.

This describes Mennonite Church Canada’s transition to relational funding and the implementation of Witness Support Teams. The spirit of the team concept is interdependence and commitment to work together to build a stronger connection between international ministry and Canadian congregations.

Currently, each Witness worker is identifying volunteers from one or more congregations who will form the key roles of his/her Witness Support Team.

Identifying the right volunteers is critical to form and nurture those relationships that Witness workers have already cultivated with ministry supporters.

Each Witness Support Team will:

- **Generate** financial support for the Witness worker.
- **Form and nurture** relationships between the worker and supporters.
- **Support and care** for the worker.
- **Create** opportunities for congregational engagement.
- **Nurture** international-partner relationships.

Each Witness Support Team collaborates with its Witness worker and regional church engagement staff to ensure the full funding support required for each ministry. This collaborative fundraising effort enables workers to raise a minimum of 50 percent in relational funding. The remainder will be incorporated into the MC Canada budget to ensure full funding.

Each team creates and maintains relationships between the worker and supporters through prayer, advocacy and

communication of opportunities for relationships and involvement with international partners. The team is a caring and supportive community that enhances the worker’s experience internationally through regular prayer and willingly participates in specific fundraising projects and events as needs arise.

The team also creates opportunities for congregations to engage with a worker and family through exchange visits, learning tours, and by inviting the worker and international partners to participate in congregational gatherings. The team also seeks to build long-term relationships with international partners, enabling the relationship to develop and flourish on behalf of the larger church.

Congregations will be inspired to participate in God’s mission across the street and around the world because of the deeper relational connections encouraged through the collaboration of Witness Support Teams, Witness workers and regional churches.

The three-strand cord referred to by the writer of Ecclesiastes represents my understanding of this interdependent relationship between workers, Witness Support Teams and regional churches, intertwined together and forming a strong community committed to a common purpose and vision. ❧



Jason Martin is Mennonite Church Canada’s director of International Witness.

— A moment from yesterday —



This adorable, and very formal, group is the “graduating class” of the Steinmann Mennonite Church Kindergarten in Baden, Ont., in 1964. The Kindergarten was started in 1962 by the married couples fellowship at Steinmann. Enrolment in the first year was 23; by 1964, it was 58. Groups for young couples, youth and children flourished in the post-war years as larger Mennonite congregations shaped their programs around the baby boom generation. What role has demographics played in your congregation’s history?

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing
Photo: Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

FAMILY TIES

Can we talk about ageism?

Melissa Miller

A Winnipeg winter has many pleasures: plentiful sunshine, thick river ice for skating, cozy cafés and a wealth of artistic treasures. A Winnipeg winter is also long and challenging, hard on body and spirit.

One of the ways I cope with winter is a trip to the spa, to soak in the hot mineral pool, sweat in the sauna and de-stress under the soothing hands of a massage therapist. My most recent trip there included a couple of interactions that have me pondering aging and attitudes toward aging.

While in the sauna, a man conversationally engaged me in topics of weather, neighbourhoods and family. When he asked about my age, with no trace of self-consciousness, I was more than a little surprised. I have no problem with “claiming my age,” so I answered his question, simultaneously thinking, “You definitely have different cultural rules than I do!” And, “If your wife were here [she was outside the sauna by the pool], she would shush you.” He treated my answer the same matter-of-fact way he did other responses.

Later, I told the story to the massage therapist and, after we laughed a bit, she wondered if I minded discussing age, and then offered to guess mine and tell me

hers. When I corrected her guesstimate, which was off by 15 years, she expressed astonishment—a version of “I can’t believe it! You look so young!” She also said I made her day, which I think related to her looking down the road—she was 20 years younger than me—and imagining what 64 might look like.

I don’t mind being a positive role model. I have benefitted enormously from those who have gone before me, and I am willing to offer what I can to younger generations. At the same time, I am bothered by the ongoing negative messages about aging. Even more so, I am bothered that I share them in some ways. I am pleased the massage therapist praised my youthfulness, even as I squirm with discomfort.

My appearance is only partially related to the care that I take with health and diet. The way I look is largely due to factors over which I have no or little control: the excellent genes passed on by my parents, our country’s healthcare, a secure income, and the privileges that come with being white. Through conversations with my mother and other elderly seniors, I’ve learned how quickly the security based on such factors can crumble.

Our dominant culture fears aging

and devalues the aged. Look and listen and you will notice that negativity in many forms. By way of contrast, I hold up an aspect of Indigenous culture. In each Indigenous-led gathering I attend, the first words are always given to the elders or include an acknowledgement of honour toward elders. How would I carry my aging differently if that was my culture?

Catholic theologian and wise elder Jean Vanier describes the aging process as wired into our beings. It is God’s design as we age, Vanier suggests, for our muscles to become less resilient, hearing and vision to decrease, and bones to become more brittle.

Vanier’s observation led me to wonder if such wiring in our bodies is God’s way of preparing us to release life on earth as we move towards dying. We begin life completely dependent on others, and require significant care for some years before we stand on our own. We cherish independence and self-sufficiency, and then we age and become more frail and dependent on others. Might those steps of letting go be steps carrying us into deeper trust in, and reliance on, God? ✎



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

Et cetera

Churchgoers are happier and busier

“People who are active in religious congregations tend to be happier and more civically engaged than either religiously unaffiliated adults or inactive members of religious groups,” says a recent report from the Pew Research Center after surveying the United States and more than two dozen other countries.

Source: pewforum.org/2019/01/31/religions-relationship-to-happiness-civic-engagement-and-health-around-the-world/

PHOTO © ISTOCK.COM/HIGHWAYSTARZ-PHOTOGRAPHY



THIRD WAY FAMILY

Equally welcome

Christina Bartel Barkman

The other day I hosted a diverse group of women from church: some single, some widowed, some married with kids, some married without kids, some in their 20s and some in their 80s. While sharing our joys and our struggles, we each honoured the unique life stories around the room and created a space for all to feel cared for and valued.

One of the women later told me how thankful she was for this welcoming and caring community, and how hard it had been to find this in other churches. As a single woman in her 20s, she has felt that churches often value families more than single people. She was surprised how many people talked to her parents when they visited a church she used to attend, as she had been there for six months and no one had ever talked to her!

My own daughter is still only 4, but it was quite entertaining the other day when she told her best friend she was going to marry him. He, at 3, told her that he couldn't marry her because he was playing with his "twuck!"

We had a good laugh at the cuteness of their friendship, but it also made me think how in a quick 20 years this could

play out in a real way. And I sure hope that my strong, independent and sensitive daughter feels valued, important and confident regardless of any relational status.

into a family is a beautiful way to be part of the family of Christ!

When we started working at our church I often heard people say that they

In the body of Christ, all parts are needed and all are equally important. Yet it seems the church doesn't always convey this message.

In the body of Christ, all parts are needed and all are equally important. Yet it seems the church doesn't always convey this message. I'm very thankful for our church community and how my friend felt very welcomed when she walked through our doors.

She may be one of the only "young adults" in our church, but being surrounded by people her own age isn't her main priority; having people who welcome her as family, however, certainly is! She has joined us for many meals, afternoon walks or baking marathons, and knows she can stop in anytime, although it may mean she ends up watching my kids while I'm on the phone or washing dishes!

I think that being welcomed naturally

hoped we, as a new young family, would attract other families. While it is nice to have more kids join our Sunday school, I wonder if this language contributes to a subconscious hierarchy of value in our culture.

Married people are by no means more valuable than single people; every person seeks community, and perhaps even more so for single people. I pray that the church will wholeheartedly welcome every individual with open, gracious and caring arms and show the love of Jesus to each. ✎



Christina, with her four little ones and her pastor husband, seeks to live out Jesus' creative and loving "third way" options.

— Et cetera —

Blue toques out in force on the 'coldest night of the year'

In 133 communities across Canada, Coldest Night of the Year walks were held on Feb. 23 to raise money for local charities that serve hungry, homeless and hurting people. The total number of walkers across the country was 21,512, raising \$5.27 million.

From the Coldest Night of the Year website (cnoy.org)

CNOY.ORG PHOTO



LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Confession as a personal spiritual practice

Troy Watson

This Lenten season I find myself reflecting on the spiritual discipline of confession. What does a healthy practice of confession look like both individually and collectively?

Confession played a huge part in my childhood faith. I was taught that you couldn't pray or be right with God if you had unconfessed sin in your life, so I spent the majority of my prayer time confessing my sins. I would name every sin I committed each day to God, starting by listing my sins of commission (things I did but shouldn't have done) followed by sins of omission (things I didn't do but should have done). I then asked God to forgive all the sinful things I'd done and forgotten about or didn't know were sins. I concluded with a desperate plea for God to cleanse me from any other iniquity, transgression, impurity or trespass God might still be holding against me.

As a child, I confessed as if my eternal soul depended on it. This intensity only increased once I hit puberty. I had been taught that God only forgives a genuinely contrite heart. This meant God would only forgive me if I demonstrated enough remorse and sorrow for sinning. If I didn't feel bad enough, for long enough, there was no forgiveness. Confession without appropriate penance was inadequate and rejected by God. In essence, I believed God granted forgiveness in equal measure to the quality of my confession. This was heresy, of course.

Divine forgiveness is not dependent on how we confess. God forgives because it is God's nature to forgive, not because we enter a rare forgivable state after an impressive confession session. God forgives us because God is good, compassionate, merciful and gracious, not because we are sorry, scared or sorrowful. God doesn't need us to grovel for forgiveness. God's forgiveness is freely and fully given. Always.

When you don't feel or sense God's

forgiveness, it isn't that God is withholding forgiveness until you become sufficiently penitent. It is most likely your beliefs about God's forgiveness that prevent you from experiencing God's unconditional love and acceptance. God's

God forgives because it is God's nature to forgive, not because we enter a rare forgivable state after an impressive confession session.

forgiveness is like a river that flows into the world. You don't need to beg God or feel bad for the river to flow. The river is already flowing. All you need to do is step into the river. Confession is stepping into that river and letting it cleanse you.

We step into the river of God's forgiveness by being aware of, and responsive to, God's presence in our lives. Confession is essentially returning to the awareness that God's Spirit is right here, right now. As you become present with Divine Spirit, freedom and forgiveness are instantaneously yours. Freedom is your reality when you're in the Spirit. *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"* (II Corinthians 3:17).

However, it is still important to acknowledge your selfish and hurtful deeds with God. This aspect of confession is essential not because God needs us to do this in order to forgive us. It's essential because this is how we consciously experience and psychologically accept the truth that we are forgiven. Confession is not for God's benefit, it's for ours. Acknowledging and taking responsibility for my moral and ethical failures enables me to consciously experience the forgiveness and freedom of God and move forward with dignity, liberated from the soul-crushing shackles of guilt and shame.

The practice of confession has three primary purposes:

- **To take responsibility** for our actions, attitudes and words.
- **To be set free** from the shame, unworthiness and indebtedness that accumulate whenever we make foolish, selfish and harmful choices,

- **To open our lives** to the healing presence of God and invite God's transformative power into our acknowledged areas of imperfection, struggle and weakness.

I've learned that confession isn't about convincing God to forgive me. It's letting God shine a light on everything that hinders me from becoming the person God created me to be, the person I truly want to be. Confession is focused on my present and future, more than my past. It's a conscious reconnection with God that inspires and motivates me to set my standards higher as it stokes the desire to become the best version of myself possible, trusting that God will complete the good work God started in me. For me, that is the value and importance of personal confession.

So what role does communal confession have in our lives? That will be the subject of my next column. ☿



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

EARTH DAY VIEWPOINT

Global church needs to CHANGE on climate

Makadunyiswe Ngulube

Climate change: These two words often generate anxiety concerning the future of not only humanity, but the entire planet.

The effects of climate change have undoubtedly become more evident. Scientific studies in the last hundred years show that if global temperatures increase beyond 1.5 degrees C, there will be negative impacts on ecosystems all over the world.

This small change causes rainfall patterns to shift, temperatures to change, and a higher risk of heatwaves, flooding, melting ice sheets and glaciers, resulting in sea-level rise.

Climate change poses a risk to human societies and natural ecosystems. A disruption in the ecosystem equilibrium is already measured in plant and animal species that are changing physiologically. With effects such as decreased crop yield, climate change will cause higher rates of poverty.

While scientific evidence presents many negatives, the church can highlight positives. As a Christian who is currently studying environmental science, I believe we can look to science for solutions and still exalt God for his greatness because he created the world and bestowed us with the desire to understand it.

The engagement of the church is vital. I offer action points using the acronym CHANGE:

C is for 'change'

Many of us need to change our mindset, perspective and attitude about climate change. This is not a problem solely for politicians, scientists and experts. It is everyone's problem, including the global church.

Although we hope for eternal life through Jesus Christ, while we walk on the Earth we are its custodians. Genesis 2:15 says: *"The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till*



PHOTO BY HENK STENVERS

'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers' (Psalm 24:1-2).

it and keep it." God instructed people to look after creation.

H is for 'how to'

The issue is not whether climate change is a true phenomenon or not, but how we, as members of the global church, are involved in adapting our communities to the changes. It is a global issue, one that should be tackled by joint effort rather than individually.

The global church, fostering a spirit of togetherness and community engagement, can help bring people closer to Christ, and can steer their communities in a positive direction.

A is for 'action and awareness'

As the global church, we can be a place that people look to for accurate information on what climate change is, who it impacts, and how to adapt and mitigate its effects.

The global church can help not only financially but also spiritually to understand the dynamic between developed and developing countries. Inhabitants of developing countries will suffer the impacts of climate change more than those of developed nations. As a global

body, we could be a conduit for region-specific information.

Local congregations could promote conservation strategies that start at the community level. The church could offer resources on improving efficiency in both energy and food systems, building green infrastructure and nurturing green spaces in urban and rural areas.

N is for nature

Take time to appreciate nature and see God's greatness in it. Remember that as the climate changes, so will certain aspects of it.

G is for God

We must keep God as the centre. Where scientific evidence disappoints us, God's Word remains a true guide. Prayer is a powerful tool that connects us to God and each other.

E is for 'expect anything'

We are living in a world full of turmoil. Scientists rely on evidence and projections to predict future scenarios, but it can never be 100 percent accurate. However, as believers, our consolation resides in God as our peace in a time of chaos and uncertainty.

Our lives are rooted in Christ. Whatever happens, God is always with us. This is not an excuse to sit back and watch the chaos unfold; rather, it is a time to CHANGE.

As the global church, we can embrace this opportunity to reach out to those who are lost. ❧

Makadunyiswe Ngulube is the Young AnaBaptists representative for Africa with Mennonite World Conference. She is a member of Mount Pleasant BIC Church in Zimbabwe, and is studying environmental science at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, N.S.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Sometimes love is half a sandwich

Darren Pries-Klassen

I never would have thought it, but one of the best lessons of love I ever learned was taught by a man with half a sandwich.

More than 30 years ago, I spent a few summers on a construction crew. The work was hard, and the days were long. The pay was okay, but, like all the students on our crew, I aspired to a career that would be a little less physically demanding. However, mixed in amongst us students were men for whom this job was a livelihood. Jim* was one of these men.

As I got to know him over the summer, I learned that he had survived an extremely tough upbringing, with little love to be found. No child should have to experience the trauma he endured, but somehow he had managed to come out on the other side with a smile. He lived alone, had no family (at least none with whom he wanted to spend time), and very few friends.

One day, our crew was working a job in downtown Winnipeg. As midday approached, we settled in for lunch just off to the side of the street. Within a few minutes of starting our break, a man who was most likely homeless shuffled up to

us. As he asked for food, my workmates and I suddenly found the ground at our feet extremely interesting and pretended we hadn't heard the guy. But not Jim. Without blinking, he took one half of the sandwich he was holding and offered it to the man.

That sandwich was all the food that Jim had with him that day. An awkward silence came over our crew as the man took the sandwich with a simple "thank you" and walked off. Sensing our collective unspoken, "What did you do that for?" Jim just said, "He was hungry."

To this day, those three words might be the simplest, yet strongest, indictment of my behaviour towards people living in poverty I have ever felt. Financially, Jim was barely managing to stay afloat himself, and yet, when asked, he gave without fear or hesitation. He gave with love. Jim was the compassionate Good Samaritan that day, which meant my colleagues and I were priests and Levites.

That afternoon was another long, hot slog under the sun. Jim survived on water and half a sandwich, yet he never complained. He wasn't smug. He didn't do it to teach the rest of us a lesson or make us look bad. He simply acted with love in

the moment.

Maybe he knew hunger—true hunger, not the short-lived pang many of us have felt. Whatever the case, Jim had decided long before that day that he was going to share what he had with others. Period.

I lost touch with Jim after I moved on from the construction crew, but I have never forgotten what he taught me that day. Truly generous people adhere to the choice to live generously, so that when the moment comes, they are ready and willing to give regardless of the specific opportunity that presents itself. I like to think that over the years I have learned to live more generously, but I know I still don't meet the standard that Jim set that day.

Thanks for the lesson, my friend. ☺

**Jim is a pseudonym to protect the privacy of the individual.*



Darren Pries-Klassen is the chief executive officer of Abundance Canada. Originally published in Abundance Canada's "Generosity Matters e-News."

Et cetera

Being poor . . . by the numbers

- Indigenous peoples in Canada experience the highest levels of poverty: A shocking 1 in 4 Indigenous peoples (Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit) are living in poverty, and 40 percent of Canada's Indigenous children live in poverty.
- Close to 15 percent of people with disabilities are living in poverty, 59 percent of whom are women.
- Female lone-parent families are significantly poorer than all other household types in Canada: 21 percent of all single mothers are low-income compared to just 5.5 percent of married couples. Women are also more likely to be poor and generally earn less than men.



From the Canadian Poverty Institute website (www.povertyinstitute.ca/poverty-canada)

NEWS

Considering bylaws and budgets

Delegates discuss changes to MC Saskatchewan bylaws

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DONNA SCHULZ
Saskatchewan Correspondent
WALDHEIM, SASK.

“We looked at the bylaws and asked, ‘Is this what we’re actually doing?’” said Tim Wiens. “Usually the answer was ‘No.’”

Wiens was reporting to Mennonite Church Saskatchewan’s annual delegate sessions, held March 8 and 9 at Waldheim’s Zoar Mennonite Church. He and Kirsten Hamm-Epp, regional church minister, were appointed to form an ad hoc bylaws committee with a mandate to update MC Saskatchewan’s bylaws following the restructuring of MC Canada in 2017.

One of the changes Wiens and Hamm-Epp are proposing is that congregations be allowed to elect non-members as delegates to the annual sessions. By implication, this would also allow non-members to serve on MC Saskatchewan’s various committees and commissions.

“People don’t necessarily want to become members [of a congregation] even though they are actively involved,” said Wiens. “If a congregation wants to send someone who is not a member, we should respect their request.”

With regard to the work of MC Saskatchewan, the proposed bylaws will

change to reflect only those organizations that are active. The Youth Farm Complex and each of the regional church’s three camps operate independently of the regional church, although each has MC Saskatchewan-appointed board members. Previously, board chairs of these organizations had to be members of MC Saskatchewan congregations. Wiens and Hamm-Epp are proposing that this be changed to allow non-members to serve in these roles.

However, said Wiens, the proposed bylaws stipulate that each of these boards “now have to demonstrate that they can financially keep their obligations.”

Wiens and Hamm-Epp said they feel these changes will help to foster relationships between MC Saskatchewan and their partner organizations.

“We’re giving congregations a year to consider the rewrites before voting,” said Wiens. “That’s different than what some of the other regional churches are doing.”

The proposed changes represent a first draft. A final draft will be ready sometime this fall, so the MC Saskatchewan council can approve it prior to the delegate vote at

the 2020 assembly.

The reason for this rather lengthy process is that the proposed bylaws will be presented as a special resolution. Special resolutions require a two-thirds majority vote and cannot be amended at the assembly.

“You don’t do this every year,” said moderator Terry Stefaniuk, “but you want to do it the best you can when you do it.”

From the floor, Peter Peters of Peace Mennonite in Regina said, “I appreciate the door that has been opened to invite people to choose to be participants without becoming members.”

Ike Epp of Fields of Hope Mennonite in Glenbush expressed concern about a proposed change that would make it unnecessary for the delegate body to ratify the annual council report. “Who are the owners [of MC Saskatchewan]?” he asked. “If they are those represented here, then they have to take ownership. [MC Saskatchewan council] are doing what they’re doing on our behalf,” he continued. “That needs to be ratified at this body.”

“Only this delegate body can authorize council to do anything,” Wiens agreed, but he suggested, “Words like ‘affirm’ or ‘uphold’ will actually do same job.”

Other business

MC Saskatchewan’s bylaws were not the only thing on the agenda. Finance committee chair Gordon Peters reported that the regional church enjoyed a surplus of \$33,131 in 2018. “This may be due to some congregations sending MC Canada contributions directly to MC Saskatchewan,” he said, “but it’s also partly due to generous donations.”

The only item of controversy in the proposed 2019 budget was the omission of funding for Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind. Funding



Delegates cluster for small-group discussions at MC Saskatchewan’s annual delegate sessions, held at Zoar Mennonite Church in Waldheim.



Richard Janzen leads congregational singing at MC Saskatchewan's annual delegate sessions, held March 8 and 9 at Zoar Mennonite Church in Waldheim.

for AMBS had only been included in the last few years, said Peters, and it was done because somebody lobbied for it.

Rose Graber of Grace Mennonite in Regina expressed her disappointment with this decision. "I would like to propose that we not limit ourselves to Canadian

institutions," she said. "AMBS has been a resource for us for many years. I would like to keep that school on our radar."

Christy Martens Funk of Osler Mennonite echoed Graber's thoughts, noting that the \$10,000 that would have been given to AMBS does not represent a large portion

of the budget. "I think AMBS is a school that we value and I would like to see it in the budget in the future."

In the end, delegates approved the budget of just under \$645,000 as presented. ☘

Finding your 'guesthood'

Saskatchewan pastors learn about incarnational way of sharing Christ

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DONNA SCHULZ
Saskatchewan Correspondent
WALDHEIM, SASK.

How do people engage a culture that has dramatically shifted? With this question David Fitch engaged Mennonite Church Saskatchewan pastors and lay leaders at the regional church's spring pastors gathering.

The March 8 event took place at Zoar Mennonite Church in Waldheim, in conjunction with the regional church's annual delegate sessions.

Fitch, who grew up in Hamilton, Ont., is professor of theology, culture and ethics at Northern Seminary in Lombard, Ill. He is also a pastor and church planter. He identified three changes that have happened in North America that the church needs to acknowledge and address:

- **The first is a sociological shift.**

"There was a day when we expected people to come to church," said Fitch. "In Canada now, only 12 percent [of the population] attends church." He added, "We used to assume if someone was struggling

(Continued on page 16)



In addition to speaking at the spring pastors gathering, David Fitch addresses the annual delegate sessions of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan.



Pastors and lay leaders at MC Saskatchewan's spring pastors gathering listen as David Fitch, right, describes an incarnational response to societal changes.

(Continued from page 15)

with spiritual things, they would come to church." This is no longer the case, he said.

- **The second shift is cultural.**

Where once the church commanded respect, today it is more likely to be resented. "The church's cultural authority has been completely undercut," he said.

- **The third shift is linguistic.**

At one time, he said, "the Christian story was well-known, even if you didn't go to church." Now there is no single understanding or narrative. As followers of Christ, "we no longer can assume people will understand what we're talking about," he said.

Reaction to this new reality has typically been either defensive or accommodative. Those who hold a defensive posture readily cite the Bible as their ultimate authority and see everything in the surrounding culture as negative. But this stance, said Fitch, "assumes we have authority in people's lives, which we don't."

On the other hand, those who take an accommodative posture affirm everything as God's. They see judgment as bad and the world as good. This stance "tries to be relevant to someone who doesn't really care," said Fitch. "Both responses," he added, "assume people know what we're talking about."

Fitch suggested a third approach, which he called an incarnational response. Based on Luke 10, where Jesus sends his disciples out to preach the gospel, "This is the response of someone who is not in power," said Fitch. In this response, he

added, "we do not assume we know what they're talking about." Rather, "we learn the language."

One audience member commented that members of his congregation are uncomfortable talking about their faith with one another, let alone with people outside the church. Fitch responded with a story from his own congregation. "We start the service with what we call stories of wonder," he said. It is a time for the congregation to hear what God has been doing in the congregants' lives. "For a long time nobody wanted to say anything; now we can't get people to shut up," said Fitch. "We need to start nurturing people to tell their stories," he added.

Often people are unprepared to talk about what God is doing in their lives because they "do not have awareness of God's presence in the world," he said. People are busy and don't take time for God. "We have architected God out of

existence," said Fitch, and, "God will not come uninvited."

Fitch depicted the church as three circles. The first circle holds the Lord's Table, and is enclosed by a solid line. In this circle Jesus is host. It is a close, but not a closed circle. "There is always an invitation to peace and reconciliation [in this circle]," he said. "When we come into the very presence of Christ, we cannot come holding something against someone else."

The second circle features a house and is encompassed by a dotted line. In this circle, said Fitch, "others are welcome in our home and at our table." This is where discipleship takes place.

The third circle shows a Tim Hortons logo and is only partially enclosed by a half-circle. "This is where we go as a guest," said Fitch. "This changes everything and opens up space for God to work." He added, "Going into guest posture says I'm going to trust and let God work."

Fitch talked about the importance of "locating your half-circle" or "finding your 'guesthood.'" He encouraged those in attendance to trace their weekly rhythms and consider where they normally spend time. "We don't want people to go where they wouldn't go ordinarily."

Inviting people into one's home and being a guest in the other's space is the work of building relationships, said Fitch, admitting, though, that this isn't easy work. But, he said, "If each person has 10 relationships that they cultivate, the kingdom will grow." ❧

PHOTO BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER

At the 2019 annual delegate sessions of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, Joel Ens explains a graphic he designed for his congregation, Eigenheim Mennonite Church, in Rosthern. As congregants explored questions around their church's outreach, they had challenged themselves to list the various connections they have in their community and beyond, which are represented by interconnected circles. This illustrated a point made by guest speaker David Fitch, who encouraged listeners to seize opportunities for building relationships in the community in which they live and work.



MC Alberta embraces new life, hope and possibilities

BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Alberta Correspondent

DIDSBURY, ALTA.

It was an unusual delegate session, with the bulk of the time dedicated to discussion rather than business. “Discerning God’s call,” Phase 3 of Mennonite Church Alberta’s Vision 20/20 process, engaged participants in reflection on what was heard in congregations during the previous phase, “Season of prayer.”

The reflections were then used to guide discernment for the regional church as it lives into the new nationwide and regional church structures.

On March 15, a service of remembrance and celebration included more than a naming of deaths and baptisms from the past year. Executive minister Tim Wiebe-Neufeld and Heather Klassen led a service of “release and embrace,” naming losses and gains, to acknowledge the entirety of MC Alberta’s experiences of recent change. With lament and gratitude, congregations that have closed or left the regional church, and historic gatherings such as Songfest, a youth sports weekend and curling bonspiels were remembered

and released into God’s care. Names that limit the church, such as “small” and “old,” and unnamed griefs were also released. With joy and hope, the group named congregations that have joined MC Alberta in recent years, new programs such as the women’s retreat, the Camp Valaqua garden party, and the interfaith work of the North Edmonton Ministry.

Reports from leadership and committees were briefly presented on the morning of March 16, with no resultant issues requiring discussion.

Camp Valaqua reported a good year, with a 9 percent increase in camper numbers and a clear vision of outreach. The number of campers reporting no church background has grown to the point that, in 2018, it was 75 percent of campers. Director Jon Olfert wrote in his report: “Our summer camp program introduced the kids to the stories of Jesus and the power he can have in their lives.” He went on to comment that camp staff make no assumptions that children have

Bible knowledge. “We tell the story from the beginning,” he said.

The North Edmonton Ministry, with outreach worker Donna Entz, is pleased with the success of ongoing Muslim-Christian dialogue events. In addition to the annual Edmonton dialogue, Calgary hosted a well-received first event. The bridge-building between faiths has even spread outside of the province. A Catholic Father in Pakistan saw the Edmonton initiative online and was inspired to invite imams to his church for dialogue on the same day as the Edmonton event.

Treasurer Wayne Janz noted that budgeting for 2018 had been marked with uncertainty, as it was the first year of a reorganized nationwide church, and MC Alberta had approved an \$8,000 deficit. Heading into the end of the fiscal year, it appeared there would be a significant shortfall. A late fall appeal, however, resulted in generosity and a modest surplus of \$6,352.

One of the causes for concern was that



PHOTO BY TIM WIEBE-NEUFELD

During a litany of release and embrace, MC Alberta delegates lighted candles to remember and release individuals who have passed away, churches that have left MC Alberta, and programs no longer present in the regional church. Candles also celebrated and embraced the new and hopeful events, such as baptisms, churches that have joined MC Alberta and vibrant programs.

Camp Valaqua's budget had been overspent by approximately \$15,300. A variety of unforeseen equipment breakdowns, increased grocery prices and staffing costs caused the problem.

For 2019, an \$11,000 deficit budget for MC Alberta was passed without challenge.

In discussion of what God is calling the regional church to release and embrace, several comments rose to the surface and resonated. There was appreciation for the good communication work happening between regional churches and affirmation for the outreach of Camp Valaqua. There was challenge for people to speak openly about faith, perhaps looking toward the newest churches to help teach the established ones.

Comments about re-grounding in core principles and a desire for rootedness were balanced with encouragement to do these things in new ways. "[We can] separate more clearly what is needed and what is culture. The way that has always been done

is not essential," Tany Warkentin said.

Donna Entz remarked that one thing the church could release is "the power of the 'clans' in our Mennonite churches. Those who aren't part of [founding families] can feel left out."

Pastor Anna-Lisa Salo of Bergthal Mennonite Church pulled on the strength of families to embrace others, suggesting, "Perhaps a spirit of adoption into your family system, instead of trying to break up established [family] systems."

Tracy Brown-Ewert spoke to the adoption image: "As an adoptive parent, I remind us all that adoption is forever and it is not easy and isn't all convenient."

Living into a new structure and hope for the church is not easy or convenient, but, like a loving adoptive family, MC Alberta is committed to the work of Vision 20/20, which is "prayerful listening for God's voice as we discern what it means to be the church in the 21st century," said Tim Wiebe-Neufeld and June Miller's report. ❧



PHOTO BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

Tim Wiebe-Neufeld, MC Alberta's executive minister, left, prays for Doug Klassen as Klassen prepares to leave pastoral ministry at Calgary's Foothills Mennonite Church to become executive minister of MC Canada. The prayer was part of the blessing and commissioning of staff and volunteers at the MC Alberta annual delegate session at Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, on March 15 and 16.

Peace by piece

A ministry of sewing

Mennonite World Conference

The church must do its job, offering people charity and spiritual teaching, so that a person may be transformed," says Safari Mutabesha Bahati.

The Mennonite Association for Peace and Development in Malawi, a member of Mennonite World Conference's Anabaptist Service Network, supports both through a women's sewing ministry that includes trauma healing for residents of the Dzaleka refugee camp, mainly from Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The ministry promotes a peaceful and inclusive society for sustainable development, and effective, accountable institutions that offer justice for all. The association's goal is to reduce violent crime and sex trafficking, and to improve literacy, especially among women. It also has an agricultural program to end

hunger, improve nutrition and achieve food security.

There are more than 30,000 people in the camp, says Safari, the association's director and a pastor. Women have little means to earn money, so the association has built a centre with the capacity to train 25 students for six months in sewing bags and pot holders and creating jewelry. The centre supplies both the materials and the market for these products. The women receive 60 percent of the proceeds; the rest is reinvested in the centre.

The women have often been severely traumatized by their displacement, so many complete a program of trauma healing before sewing training begins.

The association has a vision for collective impact; after graduation from the program, the women are encouraged to continue to work together.



PHOTO BY KARLA BRAUN

Safari Mutabesha Bahati, right, speaks to Peace Commission secretary Andrew Suderman about the products from the women's sewing collective at the Mennonite World Conference meetings last year.

Limited by the tools available, this cooperation is nearly guaranteed. However, Safari wishes for more sewing machines to be able to train more women. "This shows the love of God," he says.

Originally from Congo, Safari himself lives under refugee status. His message of forgiveness and Holy Spirit transformation

is well-earned. His congregation in Dzaleka offered hospitality when Safari's father's killer came to the same camp and sought fellowship. The church now has 18 congregations and 600 members from Burundi,

Rwanda, Ethiopia, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Congo and Malawi. ❧

Safari Mutabesha Bahati shared his story at the triennial meeting

of the Global Mission Fellowship and Global Anabaptist Service Network in Kenya last year.

Impacting the universe with the sounds we make

Former Sweet Honey in the Rock singer delivers Sawatsky Lecture with words and music

BY JANET BAUMAN
Eastern Canada Correspondent
WATERLOO, ONT.

With her powerful, resonant voice, Ysaÿe Barnwell, composer, vocalist, speaker and former member of the African-American female a cappella ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock, began to sing "Amazing Grace," stretching out the length of each phrase. Members of the audience started to hum along. Soon she invited everyone to sing in full voice.

The crowd of some 200 people, gathered for Barnwell's presentation at the 2019 Rodney and Lorna Sawatsky Lecture, filled the Great Hall at Conrad Grebel University College with rich harmonies. It was an audible demonstration of the "The power of music to create inclusive communities," the title of her presentation, which was sprinkled with musical demonstrations and opportunities for audience members to interact with her.

She enthused that the "force of the human voice is unmatched." She noted that singing can change the molecules and cells in our bodies and "can impact the universe with the sounds that we make." Beyond biology, she stated that music can change personality, spirituality and relationships. Because music speaks to so many things people feel, or things they want to change, it can be a powerful and "profound force." It can help to "heal some pieces in all of us," she said.

She gave examples of moving experiences that happened many, many times while singing with Sweet Honey in the

Rock. While "we rehearsed everything," she said, "a song was never sung twice [the same way]." Something would happen on stage. The singers changed from moment to moment internally, emotionally and spiritually. "Sometimes you're singing and you just get overcome—a word or phrase hits you in a way you never experienced before—something in your voice is different."

She noted that how people sing can be more powerful than the lyrics or the melody. A song has the power to alter people's moods. To demonstrate this, she led a very different style of "Amazing Grace." This time each line was repeated to an energetic rhythm, creating a celebratory,

upbeat mood.

She praised the Grebel and Mennonite communities for their appreciation of the power of music and an ability to sing in harmony, reminding the group that the tradition of singing together is a huge blessing. But she did generate some self-deprecating laughter from the audience when she tried to teach them to clap to the "Charleston," a syncopated jazz rhythm. "This is where the breakdown occurs," she said with a laugh as she tried several times to keep the group on beat. It seemed that the cells in some Mennonite bodies are still learning how to swing!

She noted that music is culturally based. When people share it, they help define and articulate who they are through the melody, the lyrics and how they are singing. Even if there are language differences, music opens up doors, translating something that is otherwise not understood. There is a shared vulnerability that can reduce the level of fear people have of each other. She described the opportunity to make music together as "one of the best ways to begin to develop communities that are inclusive of everybody."

Part way through the evening, Barnwell demonstrated the quodlibet, a medley of



PHOTOS BY JENNIFER KONKLE

Ysaÿe Barnwell, visiting scholar for the Sawatsky Lecture, teaches a clapping rhythm to her audience at Conrad Grebel University College during an interactive presentation filled with demonstrations of the power of music to create inclusive communities.

different tunes put together. In this case, she taught three African-American spirituals to the audience and then had people choose one of the three to sing, all at the same time. It was an audible example of the power of music to celebrate differences while creating a rich, unique experience.

Drawing on examples from the history of music among African Americans, and the monthly, community singing events she leads in Washington D.C., Barnwell insisted that the “power of music to be inclusive has no limits.” She described the way Sweet Honey in the Rock concerts were signed for the deaf community. To see people who were deaf signing the lyrics with their hands and moving to



Ysaje Barnwell, centre, visiting scholar for the Sawatsky Lecture, interacts with audience members during the reception after her presentation at Conrad Grebel University College on the power of music to create inclusive communities.

the rhythms they saw in the bodies of the singers was a profound experience of

the power of music to include and create community. She said that when people put their voices together, “things happen that [they] can’t even articulate,” because the gift of music is larger than any one person can really know. “We don’t know how far the molecules are affected,” she said.

In addition to offering the Sawatsky Lecture, Barnwell participated in a faculty forum, some Grebel classes and a worship service at a local Mennonite church. She also led a community singing event at Knox Presbyterian Church in Waterloo, entitled “Building a vocal community: The power of song in community.” ☞

Two countries, one mission

MCC supports all people on the Korean Peninsula

BY JASON DUECK
Mennonite Central Committee

It has been more than 60 years since a ceasefire ended the Korean War, but to this day North Korea and South Korea do not have an official peace, and the divide remains great.

In the last months of 2018, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada executive director Rick Cober Bauman and MCC U.S. executive director Ron Byler visited North Korea and South Korea, respectively, as part of MCC’s ongoing work in the region.

According to Cober Bauman, it was when he returned to Canada that he realized the deep importance of the ongoing peacemaking work being done there. “There’s a consistent response I get,” he says. “You mean they let you out of North Korea? And I have to stop and remind myself that we get almost daily messages in the West about why we shouldn’t like and shouldn’t trust the people of North Korea.”

False messages like this are damaging to MCC’s objective of peace and reconciliation in the two countries. Current projects

in North Korea include providing relief in the form of canned meat and clean water to three children’s hospitals, working with agricultural science experts on conservation agriculture, and advocacy to the U.S. government for policies that address the concerns of both parties through dialogue, diplomacy and mutual respect.

“A wise colleague at MCC said that, like all walls, eventually the wall that divides North Korea from South Korea will come down,” Cober Bauman says. “And when it does, MCC wants to have friends on both sides.”

MCC’s initial involvement in South Korea began in 1951, after the beginning of the Korean War, and concluded in 1971. It wasn’t until 2002 that the Korea Anabaptist Center invited MCC back into the area to provide global exchange opportunities for young adults.

“Today, MCC is back in South Korea, and its ministry focuses on providing peace education in the northeast Asia region, being a reconciliatory presence within



MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE PHOTO

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)
Canada executive director Rick Cober Bauman poses with one of the cooks at Sariwon Hospital, a pediatric facility in North Korea. In 2018, MCC shipped nearly 49,000 kilograms of canned meat to North Korea.

the two Koreas, and providing exchange opportunities for young adults from Korea, northeast Asia and North America to learn more about what it means to follow Jesus,” Byler writes in a blog post about his trip.

In 2018, Moon Jae-in, South Korea’s president and Kim Jong-un, North Korea’s leader, held a series of summits to discuss how to move their nations forward into peace, stability and reconciliation. As citizens of both countries await the finalization and implementation of such agreements, MCC will continue its program and advocacy efforts that support the people of North Korea and South Korea. ☞

A unique challenge

Hope Mennonite Church navigates growing numbers

BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE
Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

At Thomson Funeral Home on Sunday morning, you won't find a hearse, or the building filled with mourners. Instead, it is bursting with life.

The space is home to Winnipeg's Hope Mennonite Church, a thriving community of around 200 active participants and members. The congregation moved into the funeral home last September because it faced a unique problem. It was growing.

When Hope began in 1987, only about 25 people met regularly on Sunday mornings. The group grew in the first few decades of its life, but very slowly. Pastor Lynell Bergen says the church's flourishing numbers became most noticeable about a decade ago, when more children were being born into the congregation, and young adults, particularly from Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), began flocking to the church.

Soon Hope's services became cramped and it no longer had enough space to have potlucks. The expansion became significant enough that, about three years ago, the congregation created a visioning group

to help navigate this new reality. It was agreed that more staff was needed, and the church hired a second pastor in the summer of 2016.

But what about the church's physical space? Options came flooding in, among them to hold multiple services or split in two to create a new church.

Eric Stutzman, who co-chaired the group with Bergen, says the committee had to begin with the basics. "We felt that in order to make a good decision about what to do with church growth, we had to anchor that in our values," he says. "So that's what we decided to start with: Who we are as a church and what matters most to us."

Through a series of congregational meetings and surveys, "Hopers" shared stories about what makes their church unique and what it looks like at its best. The congregation eventually chose to move its worship services out of its longtime home

at Crossways in Common, a space it shared with several other groups, including Young United Church.

"It was a hard decision," Bergen says. "Many people loved the intimacy of a small congregation, but they also loved the benefits of a larger group: enough children for age-appropriate Sunday school classes and sharing the load of maintaining all the programs and ministry of a church."

Although people were anxious about losing the small community, people also valued the relationships they had with new people joining the congregation, and there wasn't enough energy to start another church from scratch. In the midst of the discussion, Young United changed the time of its service, making it difficult for Hope to find a worship time that worked for everyone. The decision was made.

It wasn't without its challenges though. "When you have a couple hundred people, how do you hear everybody, how do you bring everybody together to have a conversation?" Stutzman says.

The church handled things in a unique way: decisions were made by consensus, meaning everyone had to be in agreement before moving forward. "We weren't leaving people behind in our decision-making process and we didn't have a large dissatisfied minority," he says. "That

(Continued on page 22)



PHOTOS BY HEIDI NIGHSWANDER-REMPEL

Lynell Bergen, pastor at Hope Mennonite Church, says the decision to move was hard, but congregants are enjoying the new space they can call their own on Sunday mornings.



Hope Mennonite Church worships in its new space that is rented from Thomson Funeral Home.

(Continued from page 21)

inclusive approach to decision-making kept us strong and healthy throughout the process, and that was amazing. That doesn't always happen in churches."

Bergen says Hope loves having its own space. "There's a level of freedom we are enjoying, to use and care for the space as if it is our own during the hours we are there," she says. "The children of Hope have claimed the space in ways they were never able to . . . and we can linger in the sanctuary to visit as long as we wish, not having to get out of the space to make room for another congregation."

But what makes this flourishing church beat the odds?

'So that's what we decided to start with: Who we are as a church and what matters most to us.' (Eric Stutzman)

"When I ask new people why they choose to come to Hope, they often tell me they've heard there is a theological openness, room for people with doubts and questions, or people who are on the margins of the church," Bergen says. "Hope was also the first Mennonite church in Manitoba to adopt an officially welcoming position for LGBTQ+ people."

"Definitely part of it has to do with being an LGBTQ+-inclusive congregation, but that's not the whole picture," Stutzman says. Situated close to affordable housing and not far from CMU, Hope benefits from its convenient location. Part of it, too, is the diverse content that comes from the pulpit each Sunday. "It was never our intention to grow, but I think it was a by-product of both who we are and where we are," he says. ❧



News brief

'Remember that you are dust'



RJC teacher David Epp, right, traces the sign of a cross on student Micah Wood's forehead as part of the community Ash Wednesday service held recently at the school.

ROSTHERN, SASK.—It may not be unusual for communities to hold Ash Wednesday services, but it may be somewhat unusual for an Ash Wednesday service to be hosted by a Mennonite high school. On March 6, Rosthern Junior College (RJC) opened its doors to the community for just such a service. Principal Ryan Wood welcomed visitors from a number of congregations to the ecumenical service, held during the school's regular chapel period. Teacher Richard Janzen led the school's concert choir in a hymn of praise. Students who are part of the school's Faith and Life Committee shared Scripture readings and read a number of questions for reflection. Greg Bobbitt, a deacon at Rosthern's St. Odilon Roman Catholic Church, presented a meditation on the meaning of sin and repentance. Bobbitt and teacher David Epp then invited participants forward to receive the ashes, in the form of a cross traced on their foreheads, and to hear the words, "Remember, man [woman], that you are dust and to dust you shall return."

—STORY AND PHOTO
BY DONNA SCHULZ

News brief

Vintage hockey card auction nets more than \$13,000 for MCC



Gary Jantzi, left, from Jantzi Auctions Ltd., calls for bids on a vintage Darryl Sittler rookie card, held by volunteer John Snider, right.

ELMIRA, ONT.—It was standing room only in the community room at the Woolwich Memorial Centre in Elmira for an auction of vintage hockey cards, hosted by the local Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Thrift and Gift store on March 16. Potential buyers lined up early to view the cards and other memorabilia, including rookie cards for Tony Esposito, Darryl Sittler and Bobby Orr. The card collection was donated by retired local businessman Lloyd Martin, who had just turned 90 and had moved into a retirement home. During downsizing, the family found his boys' hockey card collection from the 1960s and '70s, and he chose to donate it to the MCC Thrift and Gift store in Elmira, where generations of the Martin family have participated in what store manager Betty Marshall described as "a legacy of volunteering." Gary Jantzi of Jantzi Auctions Ltd. volunteered his time to keep the bids coming in. Serious collectors, as well as the nostalgic and the curious, gathered to trade bids on the cards, many of which had been professionally graded. The auction culminated with the sale of two Bobby Orr rookie cards from the 1966-67 season. One fetched \$900 while the final card went for \$2,575 to appreciative applause from the gathered crowd. The final total of \$13,845 was far beyond what organizers had hoped for. All of the proceeds will support the relief, development and peace work of MCC.

—STORY AND PHOTO
BY JANET BAUMAN

'Caring for the dead is holy work'

More than a hundred pastors gather to discuss death, funerals and Christian hope

Canadian Mennonite University
WINNIPEG

Thomas Long, a well-known speaker, addressed death, funerals and Christian hope at the fifth annual ReNew conference for pastors and people working in spiritual care at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) over two days in mid-February.

Gerald Gerbrandt, organizer of ReNew, says the planners chose to focus on death partly because of its relevance for those working in ministry, but also because of their desire to have Long as a speaker.

"Tom has developed a very strong reputation both for being a dynamic presenter and for being a helpful person on this topic," Gerbrandt says. "He really brings biblical studies, theology and preaching together to bear on the question of funerals."

Long certainly drew a crowd. Roughly 115 pastors attended this year's gathering, including almost 20 from non-Mennonite denominations and more than 20 from outside Manitoba.

"Death is a very interesting topic because it's got a lot of existential weight to it," says Ryan Dueck, pastor of Lethbridge (Alta.) Mennonite Church. "It's not just something that I have to do as part of my job, it's something that we all face personally."

Participants were equipped with resources through sessions with Long, discussion, worship, fellowship over food, and workshops led by pastors, professors and funeral directors.

"When you've done something for a long time, it's good to interact with other people who do it in similar but different contexts," says Lois Litz, the spiritual care director at Lindenwood Assisted Living in Winnipeg. "You rethink things, you ask yourself why you do things a certain



CMU PHOTO

Thomas Long was a keynote speaker at CMU's fifth annual ReNew conference for pastors and people working in spiritual care.

way, you find something you can add. It's enriching."

The average age of the population Litz works with is 88, so funerals and end-of-life discussions are common. "Part of what drew me here is my observation that people are doing [fewer funerals]," she says. "Especially older people, they're telling their family, 'We don't want anything.'" She was curious about whether other people were experiencing the same thing.

Long spoke to this during one of his sessions, saying, "The first thing we need to do in terms of a good funeral is to banish from people's vocabulary this sentence: 'I don't want to be a burden on my family.' . . . By taking care of the dead, we also increase our wisdom about death. The work of caring for the dead is holy work."

"Even as pastors, we can kind of get in the rhythm of just putting one foot in front of the other and not taking time to reflect on these deep theological questions about the meaning of life and death. [ReNew] is a good space to do that, I think," says Dueck.

ReNew is co-sponsored by CMU, Mennonite Church Manitoba, MC

Saskatchewan, MC Alberta and the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba. It is planned by a committee of CMU faculty and the ministers of the supporting churches. ¶

To view Long's three sessions, visit cmu.ca/renew until April 30.



News brief

Camp Assiniboia offers new +55 events



Brad Reimer, Ruth Epp, Hedy Wiebe and Emmy Wiebe play crokinole at Camp Assiniboia.

Day Away +55 is a new venture for early retirees and seniors at the Assiniboia Camp and Retreat Centre, a ministry of Mennonite Church Manitoba's Camps with Meaning, located 17 kilometres west of Winnipeg. On March 5, people from all over southern Manitoba and Winnipeg came to enjoy the beauty and wonder of God's creation. The day began with crokinole, puzzling, visiting and music by camp staff. While some attendees went for hikes or skiing, others visited and drank coffee by the fireplace. A meal of homemade soup, buns and pies was enjoyed around tables, where good conversations took place. The afternoon included tours of the camp and the new maintenance shop, where a core group of people volunteer. The next Day Away +55 event is on May 7, when a new dike project might be tested by the river. For more information and to reserve a spot, call the Camps with Meaning office at 204-895-2267.

—STORY AND PHOTO
BY LINDA DUECK

PEOPLE

Meet the speaker for Gathering 2019

BY KATIE DOKE SAWATZKY
Mennonite Church Canada

Gathering 2019 guest speaker Elaine Heath says the greatest challenge for the western church today is to “regain a gospel-centric imagination.”



Elaine Heath

“For the church in the post-Christendom West, this means intentionally and persistently moving away from notions and practices of church as a consumer or a colonizing activity,” she says in an email, “in order to embrace church in the collectively self-emptying posture of Christ found in Philippians 2.”

Heath will speak at Mennonite Church Canada’s nationwide church event in Abbotsford, B.C., from June 28 to July 1, on the gathering theme, “Igniting the imagination of the church.”

A former dean of Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C., Heath is passionate about emergent forms of Christianity and alternative theological education for the church in today’s fast-paced world. She founded the Missional Wisdom Foundation in 2008, an organization that experiments with forms of Christian community and currently has four “hubs” of intentional communities in Texas, Oregon, North Carolina and Kansas.

Heath says that pastors and lay leaders “struggle to imagine how to move with God in what God is doing, because of institutional structures that prevent agility. Ordination systems and finances are the two biggest areas in which people get stuck.”

According to the United Methodist organization A Foundation for Theological Education, Heath had a Paul-like conversion at the age of 31, when God called her to become a pastor. She attended Ashland Seminary in Ohio and

joined the United Methodist Church. In her graduate studies she focused her research on Methodism’s 19th-century mystic and evangelist, Phoebe Palmer.

Heath was particularly interested in how Christian mysticism could inform evangelism and the practice of missional community. Her book *The Mystic Way of Evangelism* (2017) explores this topic.

Heath is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church and served in pastoral ministry before her academic work. She lives with her husband at Spring Forest, an intentional Christian community in rural North Carolina. Her other publications include *Five Means of Grace: Experience God’s Love the Wesleyan Way* (2017), *God Unbound: Wisdom from Galatians for the Anxious Church* (2016), and *Missional. Monastic. Mainline: A Guide to Starting Missional Micro-Communities in Historically Mainline Traditions* (2014), which she co-authored with Larry Duggins.

At Gathering 2019, Heath will consider how the emergence of new expressions of church “can open our collective imagination.”

“I am also deeply interested in how the church can . . . become a conduit of God’s healing of many forms of trauma in the world, some of which have been caused by toxic religion,” she says.

Other questions and topics Heath will consider over the weekend include:

- **What in the world is happening to the church?**
- **What is required for leaders during system change?**

- **Future church:** bio-diversity and the work of people.
- **Neighbouring in a post-Christendom world.**

Heath will speak during the Leadership Day on June 28, and during worship throughout the weekend. She looks forward to helping “spark missional imagination” at Gathering 2019. ✎

For more information about Gathering 2019, visit ignitegathering2019.ca.



Staff changes

Pastoral transitions in Ontario

• Jonathan Brubacher

was ordained at Elmira Mennonite Church on Nov. 25, 2018. He began his ministry at Elmira in 2012 as a part-time youth worker. Since then, the role has grown to the current full-time associate-pastor position with a focus on youth, young adults, faith formation and outreach. He completed his master of theological studies degree at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., in 2016, including a two-semester ministry internship at Parkwood Mennonite Home in Waterloo.



• Stephanie Ball

began a position as youth worker at Community Mennonite Fellowship, Drayton, in January. She previously worked as a camp administrator at Conestoga Bible Camp near Moorefield, Ont., from 2014 to 2018, and volunteered as a youth worker at the Listowel, Ont., youth drop-in centre through Youth For Christ. She also worked as a pool supervisor and lifeguard in Elmira, and a kennel assistant at Country Paws Boarding. She plans to attend college to study social work.



—BY JANET BAUMAN



'Everything is possible'

Syrian refugees thankful to MCC, two Winnipeg congregations for their sponsorship assistance

BY RACHEL BERGEN
Contributing Editor

For Reem Younes and Brian Darweesh, everything seems possible now that they're citizens of Canada.

Originally from Syria, Younes and Darweesh moved to Winnipeg in 2015 as privately sponsored refugees, welcomed by a Mennonite community there.

Douglas Mennonite Church and Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg came together to sponsor the couple through Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada's private sponsorship agreement with the federal government. (See "Consider it (re)settled" on page 4, for a history of MCC's 40 years of refugee sponsorship involvement.)

On Feb. 27, Younes and Darweesh officially became Canadian citizens after seven months of filling out paperwork, studying, interviewing and a lot of waiting.

"Since we sent the application by mail, we waited until they sent us an email to see what day is going to be a test," Younes says. "We studied in the book. We had to know about the history, the election, everything! The test wasn't hard, but the studying—you have to know the history, the years. You have to know about First Nations, Métis, something about every province.

It's a lot."

The momentous occasion was marked alongside nine of their friends from Douglas.

"Having our citizenship means home, freedom, rights, responsibilities, safety and security," she adds. "For all those reasons, we are very blessed and happy to live in this country. It's a country where everything is possible if you work on it."

Syria to Lebanon to Canada

Many things didn't seem possible before coming to Canada, Younes says, not even having a child.

In Syria, the couple faced danger and poverty. They fled to Lebanon when Darweesh's life was threatened, but their situation was still very uncertain. They say they wouldn't have had their nearly three-year-old daughter, Alma Darweesh, if they hadn't moved to Canada. Their lives were too volatile in Lebanon and Syria due to economic instability and conflict in the region.

Everything changed when they were sponsored by MCC and the two churches. They still attend Douglas quite regularly and have strong friendships with many of

the people there.

"We have a bunch of friends and family members here, and all of them are Canadian, by the way. We are lucky," Darweesh says.

Douglas also sponsored Darweesh's sister, brother-in-law and their two daughters, as well as Younes's brother and sister-in-law.

Still, the bulk of both Younes's and Darweesh's families are still in Syria.

"I feel like I'm in a safe place, but every day I remember my family. They're in a bad situation and they could die anytime," Younes says.

She says she feels like she has to press on for her family: "A piece of my heart will always remain in Syria, but from the day I arrived here I have learned many values and the importance of acceptance of cultural differences and diversities. Besides the pleasure to be able to sleep peacefully at night, not worrying that my home will be gone in the morning, we have our precious daughter and lovely friends and many more things."

Paying it forward

Younes also says she feels like she's making a difference for Syrians and other newcomers in Canada.

She works as an employment facilitator with the Immigrant Centre of Manitoba, helping newcomers find work to help transition into life in Canada.

"It's important for me to work with [a] newcomer organization because I'm one of these newcomers," she says. "I came as a refugee and I really know, not all the challenge, but many of the challenges or the difficulties the refugees are facing. If you understand the situations, maybe you can know more and do more."

Darweesh works at the Newcomers Employment and Education Development Services (NEEDS) Centre in Winnipeg as a community connection facilitator.

"For me, the first step was to thank the Canadian government and Winnipeg society to help these [newcomers]," he says.

He hopes his family will serve as a model so other churches will reach out to support other refugees. "I hope every church can sponsor a Syrian family. We're an example," he says. ☞



PHOTO COURTESY OF REEM YOUNES

Alma Darweesh, left, Reem Younes, Krista Neustaedter Barg and Brian Darweesh at Younes and Darweesh's citizenship ceremony.

Bringing diverse voices together

BY RACHEL BERGEN
Contributing Editor

Mennonites are stereotyped as people who love singing and forming committees.

Anneli Loepp Thiessen fulfills both of these stereotypes. The 23-year-old is one of 12 people from Canada and the United States who make up the *Voices Together* committee charged with making a new Mennonite hymnal planned for release in 2020.

Voices Together is a response to a need, according to the new hymnal's website: "We need a new collection that has our favourites, both old and new. We need a new collection that is compatible with the technology used in our churches, in our many ways of gathering together. We need a new worship and song collection that unites us and brings our voices together."

Loepp Thiessen is a master's student at the University of Ottawa studying piano performance. She says it was a "no brainer" to become involved with *Voices Together*.

"I love singing and I love congregational singing. I think what I can contribute to the committee is my experience with a variety of types of music," she says.

Raised with hymns

Growing up, she attended a number of Mennonite churches with her family that were both hymn-focused and contemporary music-focused. She went on to pursue a bachelor of music degree at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, focusing on music ministry and performance.

She thinks the varieties of music in *Voices Together* serve different spiritual purposes, which she appreciates.

"They all offer something different," she says. "With contemporary worship music, it might be repetitive, and the lyrics are more simple, but it allows me to get into a different reflective space. A hymn, with its really rich and . . . more academic text,

often pushes me to think more critically in a really wonderful way"

Youthful exuberance about music

Loepp Thiessen is among the youngest on the committee, and the youngest of her Canadian counterparts.

Bradley Kauffman, the general editor for *Voices Together*, says the generational diversity of the committee is a strength. "We have members whose worship experiences were formed by *Mennonite Hymnal*, 1969, *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, 1992, the supplements, and others formed significantly by contemporary worship movements. Holding these voices in respectful and curious conversation has forged close bonds among the committee," he says.

Kauffman adds that Loepp Thiessen brings a lot to her role on the committee: "From the beginning, Anneli has brought insightful and paradigm-challenging questions. She has embraced the significant workload and learning curves inherent in this rewarding project."

Some of those paradigm-challenging questions are a result of her age, experience and values that are common among her peers. For them, she says, it matters less what kind of music is sung in church. What matters are what words are sung and who wrote them.

"The bigger push I have from people in my generation relates to inclusive language and diversity in whose works we're using," she says.

Loepp Thiessen is supportive of the committee's work to feature more contributors who are women and people of colour, changing some of the texts to reflect the

diversity of Mennonites, and changing texts to reflect different understandings of God, including more feminine interpretations.

A hymnal for everyone

The new hymnal will still include some of the classics that are beloved from the previous iterations but it will also include newer favourites.

Loepp Thiessen says she hopes that young people will find it spiritually nourishing. "The 1992 hymnal was amazing and so well respected. It served us so well for so long, but there's been so much that's happened in the last 30 years. Now there's a push for inclusive language, including Indigenous voices, for representing the broad spectrum of music that Mennonites sing. It's an opportunity for us to listen to what Mennonites in Canada and the U.S. are singing and reflect that in the book," she says, adding, "We're trying to make a book where everyone from a Mennonite congregation can open it up and feel like they're represented on the pages." ❧

The full print version of Voices Together is set to be released in September 2020; however, a number of song and liturgical resources are available online at voicestogetherhymnal.org.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNELI LOEPP THIESSEN

Anneli Loepp Thiessen is pictured playing piano for worship at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg.

GATHERING AROUND THE TABLE

Everyone loves Wacky cake

BY SUSAN J. CREER
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

I love to bake and cook. Some years ago, while I was studying at Redeemer University College in Hamilton, Ont., money and time were in short supply, but there was a free television channel called WNED Buffalo/Toronto.

When WNED announced it was putting together a potluck cookbook as a fundraiser, I submitted my Wacky cake recipe. This is my favourite cake recipe. It has no dairy or eggs, which is important since I am lactose intolerant. The recipe comes from the time of the Great Depression, when eggs and milk were hard to come by.

Shortly after submitting the recipe, I received a call asking if I would be a “guest chef” on a cooking show. I was thrilled! Some of my friends wondered why I would drive to Buffalo, N.Y., but I considered it a great adventure.

Participating in the cooking show was a blast. I was required to bring one completely finished cake, one that just needed to be iced and the ingredients to make the cake

My cake was enjoyed ‘live,’ and it went over well. My church friends teased me about my new ‘celebrity’ status!

during the show.

Getting through customs at the border was interesting. I had a letter from the television producer inviting me to be a guest on the show and providing details of what to bring, what to wear and when to arrive. Among the items with me were baking soda and vinegar, which made the American border guard suspicious. He was concerned that I was planning to work in the U.S. I explained that WNED is a public television station, so guests had to bring their own ingredients. He asked a lot of questions, but eventually I was able to proceed.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN CREER

Susan Creer at the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Australia.

When I watched the show later, I had to chuckle when I heard myself laugh. Many people have said they would like to bottle my laugh so they could sell it. I am not always quiet! My cake was enjoyed “live,” and it went over well. My church friends teased me about my new “celebrity” status!

One of the guests who attended my graduation from Redeemer was my father’s Australian cousin, Sally. In turn, I desperately wanted to visit her and her family in Australia. After a lot of praying, planning and saving of shekels, I was able to realize that dream.

During my visit I had the opportunity to share my favourite cake. Sally is a good but plain cook.

When we went to visit her son and his family, I offered to make the “pudding” for “tea”—we would say make the “dessert” for “supper.” Sally’s best friend is a great cook and did not believe that I could have baked the cake without a written recipe. Sally’s son was sceptical that something so tasty came out of his mom’s kitchen! We had a great laugh about that.

Wacky cake is always a favourite; it is good to bake it for family and friends. ❧

Susan J. Creer attends Hamilton Mennonite Church. She is a community

Staff changes

Pastoral transitions in Alberta

• **Tany Warkentin**, a member of Springridge Mennonite Church, Pincher Creek, was licensed toward ordination and installed as pastoral leader of the congregation on a 0.2 full-time-equivalent basis, on March 17. She had some courses toward a bachelor of theology degree when she and her late husband, Jeff, served in Burkina Faso with Mennonite Church Canada Witness from 2006 to 2011. Springridge, a congregation of approximately 45 members, is creatively facing the challenges of being a small, rural congregation. Warkentin will coordinate worship services and provide pastoral support to the congregation while preaching duties will be handled through a combination of guest speakers, the use of Common Word Resource Centre resources, lay preaching, and recorded sermons from sister churches.



• **Craig Neufeld** was officially welcomed as Edmonton First Mennonite Church’s new pastor on March 3.



He obtained a bachelor of arts degree in computer science from Brock University, in St. Catharines, Ont., in 2005, and a master of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., in 2008. In 2010, he participated in a chaplaincy residency program at Toronto General Hospital. He has served in two MC Canada congregations, most recently completing nine years at Rosthern Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan; he was ordained by the Rosthern congregation in 2014.

—BY DONITA WIEBE-NEUFELD

advocate with a focus on disability, poverty and accessibility issues. The recipe is available online at canadianmennonite.org/wacky-cake.





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at canadianmennonite.org



'Vice' director Adam McKay talks about Mennonites on popular podcast

Vice and Anchorman writer-director Adam McKay recently revealed that while growing up, he attended a Mennonite church for a time. Find out what he had to say about the experience.

canadianmennonite.org/mckay-menno



MWC general secretary relocates

Get the details on why Mennonite World Conference general secretary César García relocated from Bogotá, Colombia, to Kitchener, Ont., in February.

canadianmennonite.org/garcia-relocates



Why I advocate for human rights

On the CM blog, MCC Ottawa staffer Leona Lortie reflects on the tensions that formed her interest in history and human rights.

canadianmennonite.org/why-advocate



Ten years after 'Points of View'

Southern Manitoba's the Other Brothers reflect on their debut album, *Points of View*, upon the 10th anniversary of its release.

canadianmennonite.org/pov-ten

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Schools Directory featuring Conrad Grebel University College

Grebel students think globally and critically

By Katrina Steckle
Centre for Peace Advancement

Last November, a team of students from Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont., competed in the MEDAx pitch competition with an idea for a product called SheCycle, an antimicrobial reusable sanitary pad that can be locally sourced and distributed in Uganda. Mentored by the Kindred Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement, the team competed as one of four finalists chosen from applicants from across Canada and the United States. While the team did not win at MEDAx, it built on this experience to strengthen its product and pitch.

On Feb. 27, three students from the MEDAx team competed in the World's Challenge Challenge. This pitch competition is based on the United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals and focuses on proposing solutions for social and environmental issues.

Anna Kuepfer, Leah Wouda and Abby Loewen won first place at the University of Waterloo final with SheCycle and will head to the global finals in London, Ont., in June. Nestled within Waterloo's innovation ecosystem, this kind of pitch competition encourages critical thinking around important global issues.

"We were searching for solutions to menstrual health management in developing



CENTRE FOR PEACE ADVANCEMENT PHOTO
Abby Loewen, Leah Wouda and Anna Kuepfer won \$3,000 with SheCycle at the World's Challenge Challenge at the University of Waterloo in February.

countries," the team shared. "In Uganda, one out of every 10 girls stops going to school because of their periods. Infection rates for women in Uganda are skyrocketing as a result of poor menstrual health management. Our solution opens a world of possible opportunities for women."

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UpComing

Squeah paddle-a-thon switches to fall

For the first time in more than two decades, participants in the annual Camp Squeah paddle-a-thon will be navigating the Fraser River in the fall instead of the spring. "Whereas, traditionally the paddle-a-thon has been a pre-summer event, typically taking place in early spring, when the weather is often wet and cold, and the river temperatures are always very cold, in 2019 we will shift to a post-summer event," says camp director Rob Tiessen. "Plans are to line up paddle-a-thon with B.C.'s River's Day weekend. . . . [T]his means Saturday, Sept. 21." Participants paddle from Hope to Ft. Langley over two days, raising money for the camp bursary fund, which allows Squeah to recruit excellent summer staff who are in college or university and rely on the fund to continue their studies. A very successful 2018 event, the 20th anniversary of the annual fundraiser, meant that Squeah was able to disburse \$40,000 of bursary money to 16 post-secondary students.



Paddlers enjoy canoeing down the Fraser River to raise money for the Camp Squeah bursary fund.

—STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY DUECKMAN

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Igniting the Imagination of the Church

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Guest Speaker: Dr. Elaine Heath

- Worship and workshops
- Youth events, including an overnight stay at Camp Squeah
- Programs for children
- Leadership Day for pastors and lay leaders
- MC Canada AGM for delegates
- Field trips to local communities and ministries



REGISTER NOW!
www.ignitegathering2019.ca

Calendar

British Columbia

May 4: Women's Inspirational Day, at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Speaker: Sarah Bessey.

June 28-July 1: "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. Special events for youth and children.

Alberta

May 4: Camp Valaqua spring work day. Call 403-637-2510 for details.

May 13-15: Faith studies conference, at Lethbridge Mennonite Church. Theme: "Biblical storytelling: The transformation power of sacred story." Speaker: Pastor Ken Quiring. For more information, email tim@mennonitechurch.ab.ca

May 31-June 1: MCC Relief Sale, in Coaldale.

June 7-9: MC Alberta women's retreat, at the Sunnyside Retreat Centre, Sylvan Lake. Speaker: Irma Fast Dueck. Theme: "The many faces of Mary: A companion for the journey." For more information, visit mcawomen.com.

June 12: Annual heritage retreat, at Camp Valaqua. For more information, email ruthannagetsmail@gmail.com.

June 15: Camp Valaqua hike-a-thon fundraiser. For more information or to sponsor a hiker, call 403-637-2510.

Saskatchewan

May 24-26: Junior-high retreat, at Elim.

July 28-Aug. 1: "Shake: Rattled by the Radical," a gathering for Mennonite youth in grades 6 to 12, at Shekinah Retreat Centre. For more information, visit prairieyouth.ca. Early deadline for travel subsidies and sponsor discounts is April 26.

Manitoba

April 19: Winnipeg's First Mennonite Church, accompanied by an orchestra, presents Bruckner's "Requiem in D

Minor and Mendelssohn's "Christus" oratorio, at the church, at 7 p.m. Offering will be taken.

April 26: Mennonite Heritage Village Auxiliary fashion show, including dessert and door prizes, at the MHV Auditorium, at 7 p.m.

April 26: Spring concert, at CMU, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m.

May 4: Exhibitions by Yisa Akinbolaji and Gabriela Aguero open at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg. Runs until June 22.

May 13: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate bursary banquet, at the Canad Inns Polo Park, Winnipeg. For more information, or to purchase tickets, visit westgatemennonite.ca.

May 15: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate work day.

May 29: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate junior-high spring concert, at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m.

May 30: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate senior-high spring concert, at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 7 p.m.

May 31-June 1: "#ChurchToo conference, responding to professional sexual misconduct in the church, at CMU. Planned jointly by CMU, MC Manitoba, MB Manitoba and MCC.

July 25-28: "Towards a just peace," the annual Bridgefolk conference for Mennonites and Roman Catholics, at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg. The focus will be on church and social relationships with First Nations peoples. For more information, visit Bridgefolk.net.

Ontario

April 6: "Following Jesus together as Anglicans and Mennonites, Pt. 1," at Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite, Waterloo, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Instructor: Pablo Hyung Jin Kim Sun.

April 6,7: Menno Singers present "Lamentation," a Lenten service: (6) at Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m., (7) at Knox Presbyterian Church, Elora, at 3 p.m.

April 13: Women of MC Eastern Canada Enrichment Day, at Floradale Mennonite Church. Resource person: Marilyn Rudy-Froese. Theme: "Travelling companions: Staying

centred and attuned to God's voice through the uncertainties of life."

April 15,16: Spring seniors retreat, at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg. Theme: "The many faces of Africa. Speakers: Dave and Mary Lou Klassen. (Same program each day.) For more information, visit hiddenacres.ca. (Register by April 8.)

April 19: Grand Philharmonic Choir, Children's Choir and Youth Choir, with the K-W Symphony, present J.S. Bach's "St. Matthew Passion," at Centre in the Square, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m.

April 22-26: MCC Ontario meat canning, in Elmira.

April 26-27: MC Eastern Canada annual church gathering, "Deepening our relationship with God," at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden. Keynote speaker: April Yamasaki.

April 29-May 2: MCC Ontario meat canning, in Leamington.

May 4: Mennonite Mass Choir presents "Celebration," hymns of praise by Mendelssohn, at St. Peter's Lutheran

Church, Kitchener, at 7:30 p.m.

May 4,5: Soli Deo Gloria Singers present "A time for everything under heaven"; (4) at UMEI Christian High School, Leamington, at 7:30 p.m., (5) at Leamington United Mennonite Church, at 3 p.m. For tickets, call UMEI at 519-326-7448.

May 10-12: Junior youth retreat, at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp, Sauble Beach. 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.



Classifieds

Announcement

Seeking male students for shared semi in London, Ont., close to Western University for 2019-2020 school year. Near bus routes to Western. Contact: adwagler@outlook.com

Employment Opportunities



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Please direct inquiries to: office@foothillsmennonite.ca, Attention of the Chair, Search Committee.

Gaining confidence to promote peace in Laos

Mennonite Central Committee

Just 10 years ago, Khamssa Homsombath was quiet, reserved and didn't really speak to people outside of his cultural group.

That was before he became involved with a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) project in Laos called Mittaphab: Youth Solidarity and Peacebuilding Project.

"I'm not a city person, so I was really quiet and very shy to talk to different people," he says. "I only talked to my friends in the same village. I didn't have an opportunity to talk to people in different areas of different ethnic groups."

That became a challenge when he moved to the capital city, Vientiane, to go to school, where he began to meet people from all over the country representing different ethnic and religious groups.

In 2008, a friend invited him to participate in Mittaphab as a volunteer. Over the next two years, he learned about peacebuilding, compassion, active listening and challenging stereotypes. He also had the opportunity to lead training sessions for younger students.

"I was very focused on my studies, graduating and finding a job," he says. But by taking part in Mittaphab, he redefined his values to focus more on building peace in Laos.

Mittaphab, which means friendship, involves 24 young adult volunteers who take part in 12 training sessions per year, participate in interfaith dialogues and go on study tours led by MCC staff. The goal is for the volunteers to become leaders for peace in Laos.

A year ago, those volunteers started peace camps, which bring youth from various cultural and religious groups together for a weekend of activities geared toward growth in leadership and peacebuilding skills.

Learning to relate peacefully with each other is important for youth in Laos, says Wendy Martin, a recent MCC representative



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALOUNY SOUVOLAVONG

A group of peace camp participants in Thalat Village in Laos act out a Buddhist wedding procession during culture night. Participants were divided into groups based on their cultures and then were encouraged to intermingle with other groups.

in Laos, because the country has 49 different ethnic groups and several religious groups that have historically had very little interaction with one another.

As the groups move to urban centres for job opportunities, they're forced to interact and they bring with them certain stereotypes and prejudices. Mittaphab gives young adults the opportunity to challenge those misconceptions, she says.

That's true for Phoudthida Soukaloun, a 20-year-old volunteer. "Instead of just being a program that Lao youth can join to improve themselves, we also have a chance to live together [during the peace camp], understand each other and accept each other too," she says.

For her, education was paramount. "I've learned more about religions which Lao people believe in and their background and their lifestyle as well," she says. "Because of Mittaphab, my life has changed so much. I can say that I'm now the one who understands more about other people and who won't judge other people without knowing them well enough." ❧