

CANADIAN MENNONITE

October 26, 2020 Volume 24 Number 22



Faith forged in disorientation

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EDITORIAL

Before you share

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive Editor



“What is truth?” Pontius Pilate asked Jesus two thousand years ago. Today,

as we read the newspaper, watch YouTube and TV news, listen to the radio, and scroll through social media, we confront that same question. In this time of pandemic, social upheaval and political strife, the distinction between truth and falsehood seems especially nebulous.

We’re living in a time of an “infodemic,” a phenomenon that the Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes as “a rapid and far-reaching spread of both accurate and inaccurate information about something, such as a disease.” It’s difficult to know what to believe when facts, rumours, and fears mix and spread.

Combine that barrage with the smart technologies that target media consumers with specific messages. When you start following a particular source online, the algorithms will feed you even more of the same kind of content. Sitting alone in front of a screen or a printed page, you are susceptible to taking in shady “data,” propaganda and outright lies designed to sell products or ideologies; or to sow confusion and fear.

Some liken it to falling into the cavernous rabbit hole where health authorities are discredited, unfounded “scientific” claims are pushed, and ideologies are used to support conspiracy theories. Laudable efforts like battling sex trafficking are mixed with racist and misogynistic claims.

Then we pass it on. Our intentions are good: We’re trying to make sense of these disorienting times, to find satisfactory answers to why things are as they are. We believe it is vital that others know the important information we have acquired. We want to make a positive difference in the world.

But sharing inaccurate content can cause great harm. It can engender anxiety, misunderstandings and division within individuals and groups. When we share speculation and lies, we help degrade confidence in trusted sources of information. The rumours we help spread can even threaten public health and safety. Passing on hatred can encourage extremism and sometimes even violence.

“Genuine news, and not fake news or hyped news or corrupt news, puts reality first; it does not subordinate honest reporting to ideological consistency or political advocacy,” says Michael Schudson, a journalism professor, in the *Columbia Journalism Review*. “It does not curry favour with advertisers, or with the publisher’s business interests, or even with the tastes of the audience.”

If you search in the Bible for terms like “speech,” “gossip,” “lies” and “the tongue” (broadly meaning how one communicates), you will see that disinformation is as old as biblical times. It was often decried by the prophets and in biblical wisdom literature. Psalm 10, for example, describes the schemes of “the wicked”: “*Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under their tongues are mischief and iniquity*” (verse 7). “*They utter lies to each*

other,” says Psalm 12:2, “*with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.*”

As followers of Jesus, “*the way, the truth and the life*” (John 14:6), we must practise integrity in our communications. In a marketplace of ideas and facts, Christ calls us to practise a kind of discernment that does not perpetuate falsehood but promotes truth and justice. Here are a few things we can do:

- **Share only reliable** information, from reputable sources. Did the source do careful research or point to respected authorities? Is the source accountable to a board of directors, a professional association or expressed journalistic standards? Has the source been proven reliable over time?
- **Check our feelings** and biases: Does this information make us feel confused, fearful or angry? These may be signs to dig deeper before sharing anything. If you’re not sure, use a fact-checker. You can search the internet for “fact-checking tools for journalists.”
- **Read beyond** the headline or the content of the meme. Check the date and the name of the person sharing; avoid anonymous or ambiguous sources. Does the artwork or photo look exaggerated or manipulated in some way? Might the content be satire?
- **Beware of content** that promotes secret knowledge, us-versus-them thinking, apocalyptic timetables, Christian nationalism, distrust of reputable sources, or a blurring between opinion and news.

Let us heed the exhortation in Psalm 34:12-14: “*Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.*” May all our communication follow this high standard. ☸



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PHOTO © ISTOCK.COM / LOLLOJ

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CANADIAN MENNONITE

490 Dutton Drive, Unit C5,
Waterloo, ON, N2L 6H7

Phone: 519-884-3810 Toll-free: 1-800-378-2524 Fax: 519-884-3331

Website: canadianmennonite.org

Facebook.com/Canadian.Mennonite @CanMenno

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Board Chair, Henry Krause, hakrause@telus.net, 604-888-3192

Canadian Mennonite Staff

Publisher, Tobi Thiessen, publisher@canadianmennonite.org

Executive Editor, Virginia A. Hostetler, editor@canadianmennonite.org

Managing Editor, Ross W. Muir, managinged@canadianmennonite.org

Online Media Manager, Aaron Epp, onlinemgr@canadianmennonite.org

Editorial Assistant, Barb Draper, edassist@canadianmennonite.org

Graphic Designer, Betty Avery, designer@canadianmennonite.org

Circulation/Finance, Lisa Jacky, office@canadianmennonite.org

Advertising Manager, D. Michael Hostetler, advert@canadianmennonite.org,
toll-free voice mail: 1-800-378-2524 ext. 224

Senior Writer, Will Braun, seniorwriter@canadianmennonite.org

B.C. Correspondent, Amy Rinner Waddell, bc@canadianmennonite.org

Alberta Correspondent, Joanne De Jong, ab@canadianmennonite.org

Saskatchewan Correspondent, Donna Schulz, sk@canadianmennonite.org

Manitoba Correspondent, Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe, mb@canadianmennonite.org

Eastern Canada Correspondent, Janet Bauman, ec@canadianmennonite.org

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(e-mail) office@canadianmennonite.org

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FEATURE

Faith forged in disorientation

By Derek Suderman
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

This is an unprecedented time. Unprecedented—it's a word we're hearing a lot in the last few months. The sense of disorientation has been palpable, from eerily empty streets to new protocols at the grocery store, an ever-increasing number of masks and people performing acrobatic feats to maintain a two-metre buffer. Somehow, this feels like a watershed moment when things have fundamentally shifted. No one knows what a "return to normal" will look like. We are experiencing an era that seems so odd, so unique, so unprecedented.

How can we find our bearings in this strange new world? Where do we turn?

While Christians often think of the Bible as a source of comfort or guidance for life—which it can be—in recent months I have been reflecting on our current situation in light of a motif that also underlies all of Christian Scripture: disorientation. When you think about it, profound disorientation may well be the most significant driving force behind the creation of the Bible in the first place—and, indeed, in the formation of the Jewish and Christian traditions themselves.

Disorientation of exile

The ancient Israelites were centred in a specific place, living a tumultuous religious life as the voice of the prophets raised repeated concerns over Baal worship and "high places." The sacking of Jerusalem, destruction of the temple and devastation of exile shook everything up. While we may be horrified by the vitriol expressed "*by the rivers of Babylon*," Psalm 137 expresses the agony and potential post-traumatic stress disorder of displaced war refugees who experienced such atrocities. The psalm also reflects profound theological disorientation, since the "*songs of Zion*" their captors requested from them include poetry insisting that God's presence in Jerusalem would save it from any adversity.

Jeremiah's call to settle in for the long haul and "*seek the shalom of the city*" in Babylon (Jeremiah 29) provides a direct contrast to this conviction about Jerusalem's invincibility. In other words: don't expect a quick rescue.



CREATIVE COMMONS CC0 1.0 UNIVERSAL PUBLIC DOMAIN DEDICATION
'*By the Rivers of Babylon (Dalziel's Bible Gallery)*,' wood engraving on India paper, by Sir Edward John Poynter, circa 1865-81. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

But it was precisely the experience of exile that formed Judaism. Rather than consulting prophets, after exile the community gathered their traditions and sought divine guidance by interpreting scrolls (Nehemiah 8; Daniel 9). It was their exile experience that prompted the formation of synagogues, which allowed religious communities to flourish in Babylon, Rome and Spain without a

temple. And what allowed for this mobility? Synagogues centred their worship on prayer and the study of the Torah.

We Christians would do well to learn from the Jewish conviction that sees engaged Bible study, including debate and disagreement, as a form of worship.

In short, it was the disorientation and dislocation of exile that prompted a reimagined and reorganized tradition, transforming pre-exilic Israelites into post-exilic Jews.

Puzzled Jesus followers

Disruption was key for the New Testament and the development of the Christian tradition, too. During the monarchy, the term “anointed” referred to the king on the throne, but it was only after exile that the people awaited an ideal Anointed One to come (“Messiah” in Hebrew, “Christ” in Greek). Since Jerusalem was under the thumb of foreign empires, and not Davidic kings, it was only in this period of disorientation that they awaited “the return of the king.”

While we habitually read the gospels in light of an ending that we already know and expect, if we slow down we will see evidence of catastrophic disorientation throughout the New Testament itself.

How exciting it would have been to walk after the One you believed to be the legitimate heir to the throne of David, expecting him to create a kingdom of justice and peace “*on earth as it is in heaven!*” And how depressing it must have been to see him brutalized, tortured and killed in the most shameful way by the hated Romans. Look at the confusion and fear at the end of Mark, when people are confronted with women declaring Jesus’ tomb to be empty (Mark 16), or the initial hopelessness of those walking on the Road to Emmaus who “*had hoped*” (past tense) that Jesus “*was the one to redeem Israel*” (Luke 24:21).

Even once convinced about Jesus’ resurrection, the early church struggled when fellow followers began to die. Why is this happening when Jesus said

A pandemic reading list

• The Bible, in particular the Psalms, Job or Mark. For those especially adventurous, read Revelation. Read these as attempts to deal with profound disorientation and loss, not as intellectual treatises or an end-times calendar. Ease into the discomfort and struggle of these books. Ask: What kinds of disorientation does this material reflect? What other, or former, perspectives does it challenge? Where does hope lie? How does this pain resonate with today? Who experiences such disorientation? How do we respond? How should we? I highly recommend doing this reading in a group, making use of Herald Press’s Believers Church Bible Commentaries on these books.

- *The Spirituality of the Psalms*, or another book on the Psalms by Walter Brueggemann.
- *Mark: The Way for All Nations*, Willard Swartley.
- *Binding the Strong Man*, Ched Myers.
- *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, Gustavo Gutierrez.
- *At the Scent of Water: The Ground of Hope in the Book of Job*, J. Gerald Janzen.
- *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, Loren Johns.

he was coming right back (I Thessalonians)? As if this wasn’t enough, the Romans quashed the Jewish rebellion by sacking Jerusalem, destroying the temple again and scattering Jesus’ followers everywhere.

As my former advisor used to provocatively quip, “The New Testament was a huge disappointment for the early followers of Jesus, second only to his crucifixion.” Jesus’ disciples wanted a kingdom of justice and peace, but what did they get? A collection of books, a mysterious Spirit to help them understand and the encouragement to hang in there while more followers of Jesus were to be killed (Revelation 6:11). “*Take up your cross and follow me*” was not just a metaphor but an all-too-real possibility.

Any one of these moments could have been enough to cut off the whole tradition—the exile, a crucified Messiah, the Roman conquest of Jerusalem. But, against all odds, it survived and thrived. And it was in these darkest moments, in the midst of seemingly earth-shattering and paralyzing disorientation, that the Bible—and both Judaism and Christianity—were born.

Today

I find it painfully ironic today how often we use this Bible, born in, and a witness to, profound disorientation, to reinforce

views that cannot be questioned and from which we then metaphorically throw stones at others who don’t agree with us. While some insist on the Bible’s inerrancy and historical accuracy, others use it to prompt a commitment to social justice and inclusion, which at times become a set of convictions that leave the text itself behind. Some see the Bible primarily as a resource for deeply personal, devotional faith, and are sceptical of intellectual exploration; others treat it as an analytical puzzle, kept miles away from our own context, experience or emotions.

In each case, people then tend to shy away from difficult questions or passages, even as what is deemed problematic differs. For “inerrancy folks,” recognizing diversity in the Bible can be a no-no, while those prioritizing “inclusion” often overlook Jesus’ judgment parables. In light of communal non-negotiables, people can feel unfaithful for voicing doubts, and so they keep silent, so as not to be found out or to show that they may not be as knowledgeable as the person next to them in the pew.

In other words, although specifics differ from community to community and person to person, the function of such assumptions for limiting acceptable discourse and creating relatively

homogenous communities seem strikingly similar.

Right now, we stand at a pivotal moment as we are rethinking our assumptions on many fronts and adopting new practices. In this context, I encourage us to do the same with the Bible, being willing to give it another look. Rather than engaging in a perpetual tug-of-war over seeing Scripture one way or another, now may be a moment to reread it together, as a collection of documents seeking to find God working in the world in the midst of almost unimaginable disorientation.

Perhaps we have a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity before us, when our current disorientation could move us to understand better the messy Scripture we have.

The Bible provides the church with a vast network of memory and reflection, a journey with many twists and turns, and so it represents an invaluable resource for living in uncertain times. Indeed, perhaps seeing our own disorientation as unprecedented says as much about a loss of our collective memory as the utter uniqueness of this particular moment. Maybe, just maybe, we have a Bible particularly suited for just such a time as this.

Now is the time to re-engage this resource uniquely equipped to help us face the unknown. My own practice includes reading a daily psalm and walking through the Book of Job. I am reading material forged in disorientation from my own unsettled place.

The Bible is a kindred spirit in the struggle to wrestle something beautiful, something meaningful, something true in the midst of trying circumstances. Lo and behold, it delivers—time and time again. ✎



Derek Suderman is associate professor of religious studies and theological studies at Conrad Grebel University College and the University of Waterloo, Ont.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS
(PUBLIC DOMAIN)

'Ezra Reads the Law to the People (Doré's English Bible),'
by Gustave Doré, 1866.

We Christians would do well to learn from the Jewish conviction that sees engaged Bible study, including debate and disagreement, as a form of worship.



/// For discussion

1. How has life changed for you since February 2020? What makes you feel disoriented and off-kilter as you abide by the protocols necessary to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? Do you think children are affected more than older adults?
2. Derek Suderman proposes that a major theme of the Bible is disorientation. What are some examples of biblical characters who felt bewildered or confused? What helped them move beyond this feeling of disorientation? What role did God play in the stories?
3. Does your family or community have stories of perseverance in the face of adversity? What role do these stories play in keeping us from being overwhelmed when life is difficult? Do you believe that facing hardships in our younger years builds resilience? At what point does suffering result in post-traumatic stress disorder?
4. Suderman suggests that we view the Bible as “a collection of documents seeking to find God working in the world in the midst of almost unimaginable disorientation.” Does this view of Scripture encourage us to express our own fears and doubts? In what ways does it deepen our hope?

—By Barb Draper

See related Biblical Hermeneutics resources at
www.commonword.ca/go/1373

CommonWord
Bookstore and Resource Centre

/// Readers write

✉ Voluntary service important in cross-border interaction

Re: “Cross-border interaction in decline since integration” letter, Sept. 14, page 9.

I appreciated Fred Martin’s letter listing some of the lost relations between Mennonite Church Canada and MC U.S.A. One area that was missed is a long history of cross-border service work. Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS) was the main organization that provided an avenue for Canadian and American young people to serve on both sides of the border. An MVS unit provided an environment to learn about similarities and differences. This would often include cultural, theological and practical learning about “the other.” Many of these relationships were lifelong and provided the groundwork for cross-border relations in the future when many MVS alumni found themselves in leadership roles in the church.

BRAD REIMER, FANNYSTELLE, MAN.

✉ Long-ago nuclear protest brings back strong memories

Re: “Defeating Goliath.” Sept. 14, page 26.

I remember this very well. I was in high school at the time and I remember getting up and speaking at the hearing. Sam and Gert Rempel were my parents, and Dad was so upset about the lies we were told about the purpose for the land.

When the lie was discovered, the Saskatchewan Economic Development Corporation told us that the nuclear refinery was completely safe. But if it was so safe, why did they lie?

Dad was generally a quieter person and not a public speaker, but this matter really galvanized him.

I also remember Eldorado wooing the town and municipality. There were a lot of hard feelings all round.

THERESA REMPEL (ONLINE COMMENT)

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.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Albrecht—Lincoln William (b. June 8, 2020) to Ashley and Jake Albrecht, Floradale Mennonite, Ont.

Banda—Ruby (b. Sept. 21, 2020) to Stephen and Mercy Banda, North Star Mennonite, Drake, Sask.

Bauman—Sawyer Thomas (b. Aug. 21, 2020) to Kaleigh and Eddie Bauman, Floradale Mennonite, Ont.

Brooks—Zion Edison (b. Aug. 9, 2020), to Drew and Hannah (Jones) Brooks, Rosthern Mennonite, Sask.

Bruinsma—Isla Louise Snider (b. Sept. 2, 2020), to Scott Bruinsma and Hannah Snider, Breslau Mennonite, Ont.

Kirkaldy—Georgia Elizabeth Taylor (b. March 4, 2020), to Jennifer and Owen Kirkaldy, First Mennonite, Edmonton.

Klassen—Aaron Jacob Thaddeus (b. Sept. 23, 2020), to Andrew and Stephanie Klassen, Fort Garry Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Shantz—Hudson David (b. July 20, 2020) to Calvin and Jenn Shantz, Floradale Mennonite, Ont.

Vincent—Eva Rae (b. Sept. 30, 2020), to Jamie and Malcolm Vincent, Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Baptisms

Matthew Bailey—Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont., Sept. 27, 2020.

Marriages

Fitzgerald/Funk—Jamieson Fitzgerald (Rosthern Mennonite, Sask.) and Macaila Funk (Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon), at the Roth ranch near Rosthern, Sept. 19, 2020.

Holst/Martin—Taylor Holst and Jeff Martin, Floradale Mennonite, Ont., July 11, 2020, at the groom’s family farm.

Leis/Martin—Brandon Leis and Mandy Martin (Floradale Mennonite, Ont.), June 27, 2020 at the bride’s family farm.

Martin/Shantz—Jocelyn Martin and Brett Shantz, Floradale Mennonite, Ont., May 23, 2020 at the home of the bride’s parents.

Paterson/Penner—Niall Paterson and Austin Penner (Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.), Sept. 13, 2020.

Deaths

Braun—Esther (nee Friesen), 81 (b. May 20, 1939; d. Aug. 24, 2020), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

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

Reaping what you sow

Lisa Martens Bartel

As I finish off another growing season on the farm, I reflect on how things grew, what went well, and what to tweak for next year. Aside from our various pastured livestock, I also grow a market garden and, after nine years, I still feel that I have so much to learn.

With each season, I learn a few new tricks, like ways to get bigger onions, for instance, and, at the same time, things that have worked in the past didn't work this year because of too much or not enough moisture or too much wind. I imagine I will continue to tweak things and keep learning for the rest of my life with this.

Being closely connected to seeding, tending, growing, pruning, harvesting and all the unpredictable variables that come with farming, I see why Jesus used so many farming metaphors throughout his teachings.

Galatians 6:7-9 speaks of reaping what you sow, which comes to mind at this time of year. It's easy to connect it to the garden. I know that if I plant carrot seeds, I'll get carrots later, but only if I plant them in good soil, weed them, thin them and make sure they have enough water all season long.

The same goes for our life in the church. Most of us took a break from church this summer, as most of our churches were forced to close their doors for public safety. We continued to worship as best we could through YouTube or Zoom, but it's not the same. I allowed myself to take a bit of a break from church involvement. It was easy to just let it slip away and be absorbed by the business of the farm. I reflect now on what I have to harvest in my life in the church and my life in faith, but there is little to speak of.

If nothing else, this is a pep talk to

myself—a reminder to do and be the church in order to reap any harvest.

The amount of continued effort just to grow a carrot is a reminder to me that fulfilment, meaning and community in the church, if that is what I want to reap, needs continued effort beyond watching a YouTube video once a week or even showing up to church Sunday morning. If that's all I can give to the church, then I can't expect much of a harvest.

If we want the church to be a welcoming place where friends gather, then we need to be that friend. If we want the church to be a place that looks out for the marginalized in our communities, then we need to do that together. If we want the church to be a place of discerning the way of Jesus in our world, then we need to do the work of discerning.

There's a saying that the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, but the second-best time is today. Go plant new seeds, nurture those you may have neglected, and let God fertilize with mercy and grace what is good. ☿



Lisa Martens Bartel is a member of the Mennonite Church Saskatchewan Pastoral Leadership Commission and a lay leader of North Star Mennonite Church, Drake, Sask.

If we want the church to be a place that looks out for the marginalized in our communities, then we need to do that together.

A moment from yesterday



Within this Mennonite hearth, we can read an environmental history. By 1850, when John E. and Magdalena Brubacher built this house, the forest stands of southwestern Ontario were well on their way to being transformed into farmland. The harvesting and sale of wood and its products was the engine of the economy. Settlers, used to centuries of wood scarcity in Europe, built bigger hearths and enormous barns. Where you live, how do pioneer homes reflect their environment? How might a museum visitor of the future view one of our present-day "hearths"?

Text: Lauren Harder-Gissing

Photo: Brubacher House Museum, Waterloo, Ont. / Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

THIRD WAY FAMILY

The neighbourhood community

Christina Bartel Barkman

Since living in a pandemic that has suddenly limited indoor socializing, I have been particularly thankful for the neighbourhood friendships we've created. In March and April, when we were all isolating, we actually got to know our neighbours far better. Since everyone was home and working on their yards, and our kids were always outside playing together on the street, we spent hours chatting with our neighbours while physical distancing.

Our neighbours across the street were building a front-yard fence for their dog, and our very friendly and chatty kids watched the whole project unfold, asking question upon question along the way. The couple was incredibly kind and welcoming to the kids, and a very special friendship between us evolved.

Our kids started to affectionately call it *The John Show*, and we joked about the various seasons: "John builds a fence," "John changes his tires," "John fixes a wheelbarrow." We soon discovered that John is also a very good skateboarder and, when our town's skatepark re-opened, he showed us his tricks. My kids' favourite season quickly became "John can skate!" These neighbours have become like family to us; we've even exchanged keys to our houses!

We love building community in this organic, natural way. Sometimes care groups and curated support feels unnatural, but when we grow together in community, and are drawn together out of a mutual desire to connect, it just feels right. We love that we know the people on our street and can really trust them, and feel accepted and cared for also.

My parents recently moved from the home I grew up in, and their neighbours threw a wonderful farewell block party for them in their cul-de-sac. They were showered with gifts and cards of appreciation. My parents really cared about their neighbours and had built meaningful relationships with them, old and young; their presence was well felt in the neighbourhood. One neighbour, a 12-year-old girl, went door-to-door on the street to have all the neighbours sign a huge card for them, which was quickly filled with warm wishes and appreciation. The impact they had on their street, and the trust and safety that was created in their community because of their presence, is invaluable.

I once wrote about living a front-yard life and the beautiful community that we can create when we are vulnerable and open with others instead of hiding in our backyards, literally and figuratively. We

continue to live that kind of life, and it seems that it has encouraged others on our street to do so also. One recent morning, when I was at baseball with my kids, my husband was working and dropped in at home to grab something he forgot. When he arrived, our neighbour from down the street was sitting in one of our front-yard chairs while his toddler searched for snails in our front garden. His kids often make their way to our yard, knowing there are kids to play with and hockey sticks to share. They had a good laugh that morning, but we sure felt thankful knowing that our neighbours feel this comfortable with us. Living a front-yard life may just mean that others live in your front yard, too!

In this strange season of keeping more distance from many of our loved ones, it's also so important that we connect with those who live right around us. With fewer social interactions this year, I love that much of my close community is the neighbours I see daily. ❧



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

Et cetera

Parliament reintroduces bills to extend euthanasia, ban conversion therapy

The federal government has recently reintroduced two bills in Parliament. Bill C-6 (formerly Bill C-8) would ban conversion therapy, but it has a broad definition of conversion therapy that could criminalize religious instruction on sexuality. Bill C-7 proposes major changes to the law on euthanasia and assisted suicide, by extending medical assistance in dying to people who are not dying. To learn more about C-6, visit bit.ly/3noKIVn; to learn more about C7, visit bit.ly/2GM8EB8.

Source: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada



 THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

'You must be a Mennonite!'

Arli Klassen

As a young adult I entered a Mennonite college knowing little about Mennonites. I grew up (mostly) Baptist. I was astonished to hear people say over and over again, "You must be a Mennonite!" I sputtered that just because my last name is Klassen does not make me Mennonite, and that, in fact, I was a Christian who happened to be a member of a Baptist congregation.

"You can't be a Mennonite!" That is what Ly Vang and her daughter have been told as they move in Mennonite circles in Ontario. Ly is an active member of First Hmong Mennonite Church in Kitchener, a member of the Joint Council of Mennonite Church Canada, and has been a Mennonite church member for about 40 years. She has been a Mennonite longer than I have been a Mennonite.

Ly has a generous spirit and does not hold bitterness towards those who make these statements. It is harder when her children and grandchildren, who were born into the Mennonite church community, are told the same thing.

How can this be in our MC Canada faith community today? Don't we know that choosing to be a Mennonite is not about skin colour or names, but a

specific part of the Christian faith tradition?

That is one layer of racism and prejudice that saddens and angers me, and it is very real.

There is another layer that is subtler. Who gets to be listened to as an authority on what it means to be a Mennonite Christian? Who gets to define and teach about our ecclesiological and theological understandings of our Mennonite faith? Why don't we know more Mennonite theologians who do not carry Russian or Swiss surnames?

Ernie Harris is a member of the MC Eastern Canada Executive Council who happens to be Black. He wonders why we so often look to the Global South for stories about Mennonites of colour. Why don't we have more stories about us, all of us, instead of about people in some other country?

I am trying to get my head and heart around what I might do about these barriers within our church. The MC Canada Joint Council is thinking about this. More anti-racism training? More benchmarks and accountability? More news and stories by, and about, the people of colour who are integral to the church? Will these have an impact on

congregations across Canada?

Some days I am encouraged when I see more churches of colour in our regional churches. That is a start. But I know about, and worry about, glass ceilings. How do we build an intercultural church that welcomes all of its members as "real Mennonites"? That is what I yearn for, that our church would act like Acts 2, Ephesians 2 or Revelation 7.

Canada welcomes migrants from countries around the world. Unless you are Indigenous, your family entered this country as refugees or immigrants, as settlers. I am the second-generation born in Canada, so that history is known in my extended family. How many of our families brought exclusionist worldviews into this country? How many of our families brought a supremacist colonial view about the Indigenous people on whose land we settled?

My hope is that the church leads the way in building the Kingdom of God here on earth, specifically here in Canada. We come from many different places to live on treaty lands in Canada. We carry much responsibility to build a church that is responsive to the needs and challenges of this country in these times. ☿



Arli Klassen is now a Mennonite, the moderator of MC Eastern Canada and a member of the MC Canada Joint Council.

 Et cetera



MCC provides relief buckets in Iraq

In 2007, Kawthar Abed holds the contents of a Mennonite Central Committee relief bucket in the community of Gwer, in Iraq's Kurdistan region, where she and her family fled during the Iraq War. Her family was displaced from Bakuba, a town outside Baghdad, during the protracted conflict, which internally displaced 2.4 million Iraqis and led another two million to seek shelter in neighbouring countries. Abed's family received MCC blankets and a relief kit.

Source: MCC / Photo by Melissa Engle



LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Finding the 'growth edge' in our lives

Troy Watson

My focus on growth may seem strange during this difficult season we're in, but I believe that the best way to get through this pandemic is by growing.

My understanding of growth is simple. It's the process of becoming who someone (or something) was created and designed to be.

There are many ways for us to grow during even the most-challenging times. We can grow by:

- **Practising assertiveness and standing up for ourselves.**
- **Learning how to better manage our worries and stress.**
- **Taking risks, such as asking others for help and assistance when we need it.**
- **Developing skills and attitudes to help us live with uncertainty and change.**
- **Dying. That's right.** Sometimes death is the only way to grow. Jesus teaches us this paradoxical way of growth, meaning sometimes the best way to grow is by letting our sense of self, our assumptions, attachments, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices and self-identifications die, creating space for something new and life-giving to grow in their place.

Another way to grow is by learning how to rest. Really rest. Resting and growing are not opposites. In fact, resting is an essential part of the growth process. For example, the more quickly my teenage son's body grows, the more rest he needs every night.

Resting isn't taking a break from growing; no, resting is an essential aspect of the growth process. Just as exhaling is as important as inhaling to the breathing process, rest is as important as activity to

the growth process.

When someone says they need a break or that they're not getting enough down time, that doesn't mean they need to stop trying to grow. What that usually means is that they are identifying

an area in which they need to grow. For that person, learning how to rest and relax is their current "growth edge," and that growth will not magically happen on its own. They'll need to intentionally practise rest and relaxation.

It may sound silly, but many people don't know how to rest and relax. I know more than a few. It will require discipline and hard work for them to stop producing and performing in order to rejuvenate and recharge. For others, it might be learning that binge watching Netflix, sports or the news every night is not the best way to rejuvenate and recharge their energetic reservoirs.

Many of us need to unlearn and relearn what healthy rest and relaxation looks like for the mind, heart, body and soul.

The truth is, you can't grow without some down time, and sometimes that down time isn't just a weekend off or a two-week holiday. Sometimes it's a season. In winter, trees enter a state called dormancy. Where I live, this lasts for months. This season of dormancy is not an anti-growth state; it's part of the growth process. Trees need these states of dormancy. Without them, their lifespan is dramatically reduced.

Sometimes we humans need a season of dormancy. Yet, our default response tends to be resistance. Resisting regular

cycles of dormancy is detrimental to our growth and health in the long run. Learning how to enter and navigate a season of dormancy is not something many of us naturally understand and appreciate, and it will take intentionality

The truth is, you can't grow without some down time, and sometimes that down time isn't just a weekend off or a two-week holiday. Sometimes it's a season.

and effort on our part.

In other words, it will take growth. Of course, dormancy is a season, not a lifestyle. The growth edge for so many people who've been hibernating emotionally, intellectually, spiritually or psychologically for years, is to wake up from autopilot and do something. Anything.

There are many ways to grow during this pandemic. Discerning where our current growth edge is might require counsel and assistance from others. But it doesn't matter who we are, or what circumstance we find ourselves in, growth is always an option.

In the gospels Jesus routinely meets people going through far more difficult circumstances than many of us right now, and he always invites them to grow. His invitation to grow looks different for each person, but Jesus always invites people to become the people they were created and designed to be. And that is growth.

So where is your growth edge right now? ❧



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

VIEWPOINT

Are Christians becoming greener?

Anthony Siegrist

Is Christianity becoming a more environmentally sensitive faith? In 2016, a scholar named Bron Taylor, along with colleagues Gretel Van Wieren and Bernard Daley Zaleha, published a paper in the *Conservation Biology* journal, suggesting that there is no evidence that the world's religions are becoming greener. Earlier this year, Nigerian scholar George Nche published a paper that surveyed more than 100 empirical studies and came to a similar conclusion. There is scant, if any, empirical evidence to suggest that religions in general, or Christianity specifically, are becoming greener.

Faith could make a difference

I find this terribly frustrating, particularly so because communities of faith have great potential to make a difference in environmental matters. In some parts of the world, faith communities have large property holdings, significant endowments and genuine political sway. They could make a difference. Even in places where that isn't the case, faith communities still influence the way their members see the world and navigate the everyday stuff of life.

And then there's this: The geography of faith matches the geography of our environmental crisis. Religious communities transcend national boundaries and connect continents. They have members upstream and down. Yet, for all this potential, many scholars are not convinced that progress is being made.

It is important to note that not everyone is so pessimistic. After all, measuring this stuff is difficult. The relationship of faith and environmental ethics is quite complex. For instance, Amy Smith and Robin Veldman have documented how members of the same evangelical denomination hold very different convictions about care for creation, depending on whether those

members live in Brazil or in the United States. There is no simple link between the official theology of a community and its environmental practices.

It's also true that there are quite a few new, or relatively new, faith-based environmental organizations. In that sense, this is a growing movement. Joanne Moyer, a key voice in the Mennonite Creation Care Network, has developed a profile of this reality in Canada. Many denominations and faith leaders have also issued statements about the importance of the ecosystems in which we live and the great bio-physical systems that support them. These are good, if limited, developments.

We need to make sure pastors grasp the biblical vision for creation care.

As a pastor, I know that measurable progress isn't everything. Oftentimes, being part of a church feels like being in a pharmacy. We deal more with chronic aches and pains than with grand plans and large-scale change. Yet even with this pastoral conditioning, I admit to being disheartened by the findings of Taylor, Nche and other researchers. I'm grateful for all those who have worked for decades trying to create recognizable change, but I would like to see more. My hope is for a clear, unmistakable witness to God's love for the world.

Things that might help

There are a few things that I think would help:

- **We need to** do a better job of helping people within our churches understand the connections between the health of

the environment and human flourishing. Christians of all stripes know that God loves people. They should also know that the destruction of creation harms those whom God loves. Schools certainly work at this, but churches can, too.

- **We need to** make sure pastors grasp the biblical vision for creation care. There are many channels for the formation of people's faith and values, but trusted and wise pastors are a source that shouldn't be overlooked. If pastors think that creation care is a niche concern, or if they don't see it as part of every Christian's calling, then it's hard to imagine creation care will find an abiding place in our churches.

- **Mission and relief** organizations need to add creation-care initiatives to their portfolio of programs. These organizations both shape and show the values of their constituents. The choices they make about which projects they take on, and which stories they tell, are more significant than we might think.

A lot of what communities of faith do will not, and cannot, be measured. But some things can be. My hope is that the next round of studies by social scientists will show concrete evidence of change. My hope is that more of our Christian sisters and brothers will make it clear that the gospel is, as we read in Mark 16:15, for the "whole creation." ❧



Anthony Siegrist is pastor of Ottawa Mennonite Church. This blog first appeared on the Mennonite Creation Care Network website (bit.ly/3nnVScZ). Reprinted with permission of the author.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

The land of my belonging

Heather Block

I sit in my backyard watching my dog as he rolls in the grass, pressing his back as deeply into the ground as he can. He moves freely, alternating his rolling with digging into patches of the earth that intrigue him.

My dog's fascination with the earth calls to mind recent discussions about our relationship with earth and our connection to the land. They prompt me to consider my connection to the land as a place of belonging.

I was honoured recently to sit in an Indigenous sharing circle during which participants identified themselves by sharing their name and where they were from. By identifying the place of their origin, they shared something significant about where they belong and to whom. One member identified herself as a survivor of the 60s Scoop, communicating that she was ripped not only from her family but also from her place of origin and belonging.

I wondered what I might say when they got to me. Our family moved around a fair amount and so it's not a question I can answer easily. In one-on-one settings, I'll say that home is where my pillow is. But that doesn't answer the deeper question that asks where I belong, who my people are and where my place of origin is.

I know who my people are, but my brand of Mennonites—of European/Caucasian origin—don't have a rootedness to one place. I might say we are intergenerationally nomadic. Two of my grandparents came to Canada to escape the Russian Revolution and subsequent civil war. The families of my other grandparents came earlier, having been invited by the government to farm what was considered to be the empty prairies, land that had been depopulated of the original inhabitants. They were promised that they could maintain their culture, language and religion, and that



PHOTO BY VIVIANA RISHE / UNSPLASH

they could isolate themselves from others on the land.

A couple of centuries before that, Mennonites had been invited to farm what was considered to be the empty steppes of Russia, land that had also been depopulated of the original inhabitants. They were promised that they could keep their culture, language and religion, and that they could isolate themselves from others on the land.

Before Russia, there was Prussia, the Netherlands and, I've recently learned, Belgium. While we would settle down and often create prosperous communities, we have not been the original peoples and have lived separate from those indigenous to the land.

That intergenerational pattern of moving around is echoed on a micro-level in my personal life. I grew up in the mountains of northern British Columbia, in the temperate climates of rural Jamaica and in a prairie city. While most of my adulthood has been in Winnipeg, I spent a couple of years in Cincinnati, Ohio, a city where I saw no evidence of original peoples, but rather the legacy of being a first stop for escaping slaves from the South seeking freedom.

With so much transition in my life, it

is difficult for me to say where I'm from, to what land I belong.

My dog rolls dangerously close to a vulnerable new bush, interrupting my thoughts. Looking out over my backyard, I ask myself the question in a different way: What is the landscape that feels like home?

My answer is immediate: the mountains with their forests, snow and freshwater streams. In Kitimat, B.C., I grew up surrounded by mountains, able to see the majesty of their rugged, snow-covered strength no matter where I looked. In Kitimat, the gullies, filled with old forest firs, streams and rotting logs, were our playground. The lakes were so clear that they appeared to be bottomless. It is also beneath those mountains that my mother's remains rest.

Whenever I see mountains, I breathe deeply. A smile takes over my face. I feel surrounded by majesty, beauty and strength. I feel at home. My spirit feels that it is where it belongs.

As my dog continues exploring my backyard, I realize that this small plot of unruly greenery has also become a landscape of my heart. I come out here to read, write and meditate, surrounded by the lilac bush, apple tree and miniature berry bushes that I've planted. When I'm here, I feel hidden from obligations and expectations, free to listen to my heart as I feel the gentle breeze.

It comes to me that, while I don't have one place of rootedness, I've been given the gift of finding my sense of belonging wherever I am. I've been given the gift of taking my nurture from many soils. Rather than deep, embedded roots, I've been given roots that are broad and far-reaching.

For this, I am grateful. ❧



Heather Block is a member of Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. This piece was recommended to Canadian Mennonite by former national correspondent Leona Dueck Penner.

NEWS

Anabaptist health network responds to COVID-19

Mennonite World Conference

“We are bound together as a community not only through this global pandemic, but through our faith,” says Rick Stiffney, steering committee member of the Global Anabaptist Health Network.

The global network held its first webinar on Sept. 16, which was attended by two dozen Anabaptist-related health professionals from Asia, Africa, North America and the Caribbean.

Mothers in Mathare

“Change is a process. It is important to give people a chance to embrace it,” said Judith Siambe Opiyo, a program officer for Kenya Mennonite Church’s Centre for Peace and Nationhood (CPN) and a webinar presenter.



CENTRE FOR PEACE AND NATIONHOOD PHOTOS
A care group volunteer uses the handwashing stations provided by CPN in Mathare, Kenya.

In March, everything changed for the centre’s maternal child health and nutrition program in the Mathare slums of Nairobi, Kenya, when the government announced Kenya’s first COVID-19 case.

Care-group activities halted and the centre pivoted to infection prevention, installing 50 handwashing stations in Mathare Village (approximately one station for 20 households) and teaching the community how to use and care for them.

“The community had resistance [to severity of the virus], but through CPN’s persistent work with them, people were able to embrace the health recommendations,” reported Siambe Opiyo.

To date, there are few reported COVID-19 deaths in Mathare Village despite the difficulty of isolation due to large, crowded households and dependence on daily wage earners in the marketplace.

The maternal- and child-health-care activities have been maintained by household visits, and the handwashing stations will serve the hygiene needs of the community over the long term.

“Doing these interventions will go a long way in preventing other water-washed diseases, like cholera and diarrhea,” Siambe Opiyo said.

Protecting the patients

“The hospital must lead,” said Dr. Luis C. Torrellas Ruíz, a specialist in internal medicine with Sistema de Salud Menonita, a Mennonite hospital network in Puerto Rico, and a member of the government task force addressing COVID-19 on the island. “Don’t stay in the hospital waiting for patients. Go into the community and provide education.”

Puerto Rico’s initially low number of cases enabled the network to prepare its



CPN promoter Rosneka Mulalyah, right, hands over a handwashing station to Paul Karuiki and Mike Musyoki in Mathare 3B community, Kenya.

staff and systems with protective equipment and education about the virus. To date, there have been no hospital-acquired infections among staff and faculty.

“Everyone has to protect themselves and take proper measures,” said Torrellas Ruíz. The endless emergency takes an emotional toll on doctors and nurses working with this highly contagious, largely untreatable virus. “Be patient. Keep God on your side, and keep up hope,” he said.

Daily prayers at the hospital provide support as the network fulfils its mission to “serve with love of Christ to provide integrated and excellent health in [an] environment of human warmth without discrimination against anyone.”

The Global Anabaptist Health Network’s next webinar is Nov. 18, featuring Dr. Virgo Handojo on the implications of spirituality for dealing with COVID-19; Dr. Chiang-Liang Wu on the ministry of Mennonite Christian Hospital in Hualien, Taiwan; and Paul Shetler Fast on Mennonite Central Committee’s health programming.

“Distance is no longer an obstacle to build connection with people that have common values and faith in sharing Christ’s love in this world,” said Dr. Virgo Handojo, a webinar participant. ❧

Dishonoured treaties are 'the ghost of our history'

By Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada correspondent

Myeengun Henry, an Indigenous elder, says treaty relationships should be tended: “We need to shine those up every year so we don’t forget how important they are.” Henry was the first speaker in a seven-month online storytelling series called “Treaty as sacred covenant: Stories of Indigenous-Mennonite relations,” that centres on covenants made, broken and renewed.

A former chief of the Chippewas of the Thames, Henry teaches and provides Indigenous services at Conestoga College, Kitchener, Ont., through a program called Be-Dah-Bin Gamik.

As part of the storytelling series sponsored by the Truth and Reconciliation Working Group of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, this session explored what happened to treaties made generations ago between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. He insisted that “those treaties still exist,” and “we can honour those treaties today.” Both sides can find ways to “live jointly on the land in ways that [don’t] infringe on each other. . . . We can co-exist and live side by side.”

The working group was formed in response to the final report and calls to action, some of which were addressed to churches and faith groups by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015. This online storytelling series will include Indigenous and Mennonite non-Indigenous voices, “shining light on the history of broken covenants [and] illuminating pathways of hope to a more just future for all nations on this land.” According to the description of the series on MC Eastern Canada’s website, “Broken treaties with Indigenous peoples will continue to fuel Indigenous-Settler conflict unless we learn from history.”

The first event was facilitated by Josie Winterfeld, who is part of the working group. More than 100 people joined to hear

Henry’s presentation. He described how, over the past 500 years, the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples swung “from partnership to paternalism,” driven by a government-directed



SCREENSHOT BY JANET BAUMAN

Myeengun Henry, an Indigenous elder, speaks during the first in a seven-month-long storytelling series called ‘Treaty as sacred covenant.’

process of assimilation. He traced several stages in that relationship.

The relationship began with Indigenous partners assisting early settlers with survival skills, such as how to build shelters, and to find food and medicine. Alliances formed and nation-to-nation treaties were signed for “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows.” But there were fundamental differences in how people perceived the land and the treaty-making process. Henry said that, for Indigenous people, treaty-making was done in a “spiritual manner.” Treaties were depicted in wampum belts—visual representations of the story of that sacred covenant.

Caring for the land was also “a spiritual activity.” Indigenous people used the land but kept it pristine, Henry said. By contrast, settlers saw the land as empty and unused. For them, land and its resources were there to be claimed, designated and used. Indigenous people “were getting in the way” of those aims, so governments

established reserves and residential schools to deal with the “problem.” This “act of displacing” Indigenous people caused leaders such as Pontiac and Tecumseh to try to protect their way of life, but the “power tilted” to non-Indigenous people. “We were not dying fast enough,” Henry said.

He described the residential school system as “the worst thing that could happen.” Losing language, culture and ceremonies “devastated the population,” leaving a legacy of anger, poverty and hurt that is still “moving through generations,”

he says.

“We don’t look back far enough to see how or why” Indigenous resistance and confrontations are happening today, he said. He described broken relationships and treaties as “the ghost of our history.” It was vital that everyone live up to those treaties. When that gets neglected, “we are willing to stand up.” He sees the present relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as one of “recovery, reconciliation, renewal and renegotiation.”

After Henry’s presentation there was an opportunity for questions and interactions. One person asked about the church’s response to climate change. Henry’s reply was, “The land is our mother. We need to protect her.” ❧

People can register at mcec.ca/events for individual sessions or take in all of them. Each storytelling event will be recorded and can be viewed at bit.ly/2GNwY5D.



'Peace is for everyone'

Saskatoon congregation launches Peace Club for children

By Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON

These days, with many congregations searching for ways to carry on with existing children's programming, Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon has launched a brand new peace club for children aged seven to 11.

"We've been working at this club for a long time," says Susanne Guenther Loewen, the church's co-pastor. Knowing that the church had a number of children approaching this age range, parents expressed a desire for something similar to the Venture Club the church once enjoyed.

Guenther Loewen says the idea for the peace club came from Lendrum Mennonite in Edmonton, which had a peace club of its own, but also from parents at Nutana Park.

"Parents have talked about wanting Anabaptist Mennonite values taught to their kids," she says. They also saw the club as a way for their children to build community with their peers.

What was intended to be a weekly in-person gathering turned into a monthly Zoom meeting, as the group adapted plans to follow COVID-19 protocols. But because meetings are taking place virtually, the church is inviting children from other Mennonite Church Saskatchewan congregations to participate as well.

Marlie Leis, Sarah Unrau and Valerie Epp worked together with Guenther Loewen to bring plans for the peace club to fruition. Unrau created a poster and logo for the club, and Guenther Loewen drafted the curriculum.

At their first online meeting, children worked together to create the following club pledge, which they plan to recite at each meeting: "Peace is nice, peace is kind, peace is what is right. Making peace makes me sleep well at night. Peace is for



The logo for Nutana Park Mennonite's new Peace Club, designed by Sarah Unrau.

everyone, ourselves and others, too. God and Jesus have a recipe for peace to follow."

"They really got into creating [the pledge] themselves," says Guenther Loewen.

Each month's club meeting will be tied in some way to other things that are going on that month, says Guenther Loewen. For instance, the October meeting used Orange Shirt Day as a springboard to talk about making peace with Indigenous neighbours.

In November, the red buttons Mennonite Central Committee provides around Remembrance Day, which feature the words, "To remember is to work for peace," will be the focal point of a discussion about conscientious objection.

December's meeting will focus on Jesus as the Prince of Peace and the angels' message that Jesus' birth brings peace on earth.

Each gathering will include a Bible story and a picture storybook related to the month's theme, a game, a craft, a Bible memory verse and a closing song or prayer.

"For some of the activities and crafts,

we're mailing out supplies ahead of time," says Guenther Loewen. "It got a little more complicated with COVID-19."

Originally, organizers planned to incorporate service projects into the curriculum. This, too, has been complicated by the pandemic. They are still hoping to somehow collect supplies for a food bank or a learning centre as part of December's meeting.

Using Bettye Stroud's book *The Patchwork Path*, in February 2021, the children will learn about the Underground Railroad and how escaped slaves used coded messages in quilt designs to help them know where to go. The children's craft that day will be to create a quilt pattern out of tissue paper.

March's meeting will feature a discussion about peace and food. In response, the children will have an opportunity to plant a seed and watch it grow.

Guenther Loewen says the response to the peace club has been positive so far. Children, she says, are excited to have something new to do, as well as an opportunity to see their church friends.

Nutana Park plans to keep the peace club going as long as there are children in the church in the age range. Guenther Loewen says the organizers would like to increase the frequency of meetings next year, building up to weekly meetings, although she admits that a weekly Zoom gathering might be too much for some families. Everyone eventually hopes to be able to meet in person. ❧

MC Saskatchewan parents whose children are interested in the Peace Club can contact Guenther Loewen at 306-374-2144 for more information.

News brief

Foodgrains Bank secures additional COVID-19 funding



TEREPEZA DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION PHOTO

Canadian Foodgrains Bank has secured additional funding from the Canadian government and is committing \$3 million to support farmers across Africa, like Asnakech Zema, whose food security is threatened due to efforts to contain the novel coronavirus.

A new fund of \$2.3 million from the Canadian government will be used to support small-scale farmers in Africa and benefit approximately 100,000 people. The fund is being made available on a 3:1 matching basis, with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank contributing more than \$700,000, for a total response of \$3 million. The additional funding comes at a time when the World Food Programme warns that the planet may face the worst humanitarian food crisis since the Second World War, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The new grant will be used for projects in five African countries: Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Kenya. Program activities will begin this year and continue into 2021 as part of a long-term response. The new grant will enable Foodgrains Bank members to reduce the increasing risk of hunger for small-scale farmers by protecting their livelihoods and guarding against threats to their farms. "With this additional support from Global Affairs Canada, we have an opportunity to make sure small-scale farmers, and communities in Africa who depend on them, have access to food throughout this pandemic and beyond," says Jim Cornelius, the Foodgrains Bank's outgoing executive director.

—CANADIAN FOODGRAINS BANK

News brief

Herald Press, MC U.S.A., and MC Canada partner for 'Common Read'



With isolation and Zoom fatigue setting in, Mennonite Church Canada, MC U.S.A. and Herald Press are partnering to encourage Mennonites to engage in a "Common Read," a shared reading experience focused on specific books written to nurture Christian faith in this cultural moment. *Signs of Life: Resurrecting Hope Out of Ordinary Losses* by Stephanie Lobdell is the "Common Read" book chosen for the fall. Whether it's the demise of a relationship, career plans or personal images, people all experience loss. Lobdell leads readers to the power of the resurrection to heal daily hurts. In *Signs of Life*, she shares stories of her own depression, loss of confidence and disillusionment with the church. "My ordinary losses are probably no bigger than yours, and are maybe even smaller," she says. "My ordinary losses are just that: ordinary and plain, maybe even dull. But they are real. And their smallness does not negate their power or their importance in shaping me. Such ordinary losses in your life—and maybe some extraordinary ones—have likely wounded and shaped you." The "Common Read" for *Signs of Life* kicked off with a Zoom event on Sept. 3 with the author (watch online bit.ly/2ZZZdJwR). It will continue with *I Am Not Your Enemy: Stories to Transform a Divided World* by Michael T. McRay in January, and *Raising Disciples: How to Make Faith Matter for our Kids* by Natalie Frisk in April. Free downloadable study guides are available for these books on the Herald Press website. Copies of the books are available from CommonWord.ca.

—MENNOMEDIA

News brief

Making a difference for creation



Scott Morton Ninomiya stands on the banks of the Grand River in southwestern Ontario. He encourages MC Eastern Canada junior youth to make a difference on climate change through a video he created as an online resource for Make a Difference Day.

Organizers of the junior youth Make a Difference Day for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregations created and posted content online this year so that individuals, families or youth groups could do their own "retreat," instead of gathering all together during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theme was "Making a difference for creation: Stories for your great-great-great-great-great-grandchildren," and activities were designed to be done outdoors with physical distancing. They included going on a prayer walk, making a chalk mural and creating a web of life. The full retreat was designed to take two to three hours. Scott Morton Ninomiya, a doctoral candidate in environmental studies, prepared a video session to encourage youth to make a difference on climate change. He acknowledged that climate change can be frightening, feeling like it is beyond control, but he challenged his listeners to use their breath as a superpower—to notice how breath connects humans to everything, to tell the story of God's love for creation, to speak truth to power, and to join with others to make their voices louder and stronger. The video and activities can be found online at mcec.ca/makeadifferencedayonline.



—BY JANET BAUMAN

'A good witness to the community'

MDS builds first house in Canada under new COVID-19 protocols

By John Longhurst
Mennonite Disaster Service

“We told ourselves, before we started, we don’t want to be doing anything we wouldn’t want the media to see if they dropped in unannounced.”

That’s how Peter Thiessen, co-director of the Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada project in 70 Mile House, B.C., described the crew’s approach at the organization’s first housebuilding project in Canada during COVID-19.

“When the project was over, we wanted to be able to tell a safe, simple and clean story,” said Thiessen of Okotoks, Alta.

By all accounts, that’s exactly what happened at the project, which began in early August and ended with a home dedication on Sept. 24.

A combined effort of the MDS B.C. and Alberta units, the project—located in a remote area 154 kilometres northwest of Kamloops, B.C.—found volunteers rebuilding a house destroyed by a wildfire in 2017.

To adhere to COVID-19 guidelines and to keep everyone safe, a modified RV project model was used, explained co-director Henry Warkentin. For Warkentin of Coaldale, Alta., this meant volunteers had their own accommodations and everyone had to practise physical distancing—or wear a mask when that wasn’t possible. The exception was for couples working together in their own bubble.

Volunteers were also told to use their own tools, he said. When tools had to be shared, they were sanitized after each

for contact-tracing purposes.

Along with the different rules for safe working, mealtimes were different from usual MDS projects, too. All the food was served by the cooks—no buffet-style line-ups—and volunteers sat to eat at separate tables two metres apart outdoors under an awning, said Susan Thiessen, who served as a cook. “Those were their tables for the week,” she said, noting the new rules meant the cooks had more work than usual since volunteers weren’t allowed in the kitchen. “They couldn’t touch anything,” she said.

Another change from normal practice at MDS projects was no group singing. “We still had a devotional each morning,” Warkentin said, adding that, despite all the new rules, the project went very well. “It was hard at first, but as time went on it got easier, as we got used to the protocols.”

Abe and Shirley Goetzke of Abbotsford, B.C., served at the project for a week. “We felt so safe there,” said Shirley. “It was run carefully and efficiently.”

Before the couple went to 70 Mile House, some family members were worried about the retired couple doing service with MDS

and the project was so well run,” Shirley said.

“It was clear MDS didn’t want to be in the news for causing a COVID outbreak,” added Abe.



PHOTO BY ROSS PENNER

Homeowner Jim Brown, left, receives a Bible from MDS volunteer Shirley Goetzke.

Abe and Shirley Goetzke of Abbotsford, B.C., served at the project for a week. ‘We felt so safe there,’ said Shirley. ‘It was run carefully and efficiently.’

use. Everyone who visited the site had to register their names and phone numbers

during a pandemic. “We were so glad to come back and say MDS was so careful

At 46 days from start to finish, the house was completed in record time for MDS, said Peter Thiessen. “We wanted to get in and out fast,” he said, noting that they wanted to limit the amount of time volunteers would be together.

For Warkentin, the project not only met the goal of providing the homeowner with a new house, but it “gave a good witness to the community. We wanted them to know we wanted to work safely, and that we wanted to keep them safe,” he said, adding that safety “is always a priority at every project. Today, COVID is just one more aspect of being safe for MDS.” ❧

A willingness to listen

Victims and FARC in dialogue

Mennonite World Conference

“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet . . . righteousness will go before him” (Psalm 85:10,13).

The people of Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia believe in this biblical vision of justice and reconciliation, even when it is hard.

Back in July, Carlos Sanchez of the Colombian Mennonite Church co-facilitated a meeting between five local residents who were survivors of war-related violence and persecution, and eight former FARC guerilla members who signed the 2017 peace accord in the San Rafael region of Colombia. Yalile Caballero, president of the Colombian Mennonite Church; Peter Stucky, a Mennonite pastor; and Ricardo Esquivia, director of Sembrandopaz, a social justice organization in

Colombia, brought greetings of support to the initiative.

The meeting was not only an opportunity for the groups to listen to each other, but also to sign a document of intention for truth and reconciliation.

“There was a willingness to listen to both sides,” says Sanchez.

Supported with press clippings, the survivors presented their stories. One lost her father in a “dump-truck massacre” in the Tesorito rural community. Another was denied basic rights and had his freedom of movement restricted by the presence of paramilitaries and guerillas in his home community. Another saw family members

“disappeared.”

The survivors expressed their fear that violence would return to San Rafael, a municipality made up of 54 rural communities, with nearly 17,000 inhabitants. It has three power plants and has mining, coffee and sugarcane cultivation. Its rich resources make the territory vulnerable to future violence due to tensions over resource extraction and unequal economic benefits.

They want to change that direction: jobs for young people, a search for those who are missing, and dignity for the families of those who were killed. They asked the signatories, “What can we do? How can we help?”

After listening to the survivors, the former FARC members reiterated their willingness to clarify and bring to light the acts of violence reported by the survivors.

Together, survivors and former guerilla members considered steps forward, including:

- **Convening similar** events to include victims’ organizations.
- **Implementing activities** to tell the truth and reconstruct the historical memory.
- **Promoting greater** awareness and adoption of the peace accords.
- **Holding public** forums and events for forgiveness, hope, truth and reconciliation, including the army and the power and utility companies.
- **Carrying out** processes to search for the 253 persons “disappeared” by the armed parties.
- **Offering reparations** for victims.
- **Engaging children** as peacebuilders.

The meeting closed with the planting of a coffee tree, representing together the identity and values of San Rafael before the violence came to their community. ☸



MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE COFFEE TREE PHOTO BY KARLA BRAUN

Palestinian advocacy persists through new college partnership

Byron Rempel-Burkholder

Mennonite Church Canada Palestine-Israel Network

Like other educational institutions around the world, the West Bank's Bethlehem Bible College has been broadsided by the COVID-19 pandemic. Campus lockdowns, infections among staff, a greater dependence on online instruction—all have been the new reality, in addition to the ongoing political uncertainties in the region.

Amid the challenges, Mennonite Church Canada, through its International Witness ministry and the MC Canada Palestine-Israel Network, has been forging a new partnership with the nondenominational Bible college, which serves Arab speakers in the Holy Land and beyond. On Sept. 26, the Joint Council of MC Canada approved a memorandum of understanding with the Bible college, officially adding Palestine-Israel to MC Canada's roster of international partnerships.

It's not a new relationship; off and on since the college's founding in 1979, Mennonites have been involved in providing funds and short-term volunteers, either

through Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) or MC Canada.

"These partnerships are first and foremost an encouragement to us," says Jack Sara, the Bible college's president. "They tell us that we are not forgotten by the western church, and we know we are not alone in this time when we are caught between a rock and hard place."

He refers not only to the pandemic, but also to two ongoing realities in the Palestinian territories: the small and diminishing presence of Christians (currently less than 2 percent) among a predominantly Muslim population, and the ongoing suffering that all Palestinians experience under Israel's 53-year-old military occupation.

Sara is pleased about the "reciprocity" envisioned in the new partnership that focuses on people-to-people exchanges, that will involve Canadian Mennonites and Bible college faculty and students visiting each other and sharing their insights on such issues as faithful living in difficult

times, and pursuing peace and justice.

Jeanette Hanson, MC Canada's International Witness director, says that developing this partnership has been an "education" for her. "I have been so excited to see the many ways that Palestinian Christians can speak into issues that we grapple with as followers of Jesus here in Canada."

The partnership is the latest focus of the MC Canada Palestine-Israel Network, which grew out of the Palestine-Israel resolution passed at MC Canada's 2016 assembly in Saskatoon. The resolution, a response to a united call from Palestinian churches to the international church, promotes prayer, education, and advocacy for justice, human rights and international law.

The MC Canada network includes working groups and individuals from MC Canada's regional churches in Eastern Canada, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia, totalling about 40 MC Canada members. Regional representatives meet quarterly by Zoom to update each other on various local activities and to consider broader initiatives such as the partnership with the Bible college.

In the last four years, network members have mounted a variety of actions following up the 2016 resolution, including leading and sponsoring educational events and sermons in churches on Christian Zionism, the Christian community in the Holy Land, and advocacy; meeting with politicians to press Canada to uphold international law and human rights, including an MC Eastern Canada working group delegation to Ottawa in 2018; and promoting prayer, petitions and Palestinian fair trade via church bulletins.

The greatest rewards of this work for many network members have had to do with the camaraderie and energy that comes in a common cause for justice.



PHOTO BY AMIRA FARHOUD

Yousef Al-Khouri teaches exegesis to third- and fourth-year students at Bethlehem Bible College.

Many have worked or toured in Israel-Palestine and came back with a passion to work for change. The groups in Manitoba and Eastern Canada also include several university students who find the network a place to work out their convictions on peace and justice.

Kathy Bergen of Kitchener, Ont., a retired worker in the Middle East, finds gratification in the reception she has received in many MC Canada churches. "Once they hear of the issues and personal stories of Palestinian people, many people's attitudes change, and they begin to see Palestinians as human beings who have rights and are in need of justice and freedom," she says.

But the challenges are also real. Palestinian rights and self-determination seem more remote than ever in the wake of Israel's announced intention to annex large and fertile swaths of the West Bank. The accelerating pace of home demolitions in the West Bank and suppression of Palestinian culture in East Jerusalem discourage or energize would-be advocates.

Erin Yantzi, a political-science student and outgoing chair of the Eastern Canada working group, observes that many Mennonites struggle to make sense of differing interpretations of Scripture with regard to Israel, the nonviolent peace teaching of Jesus, and the call to combat anti-Semitism, while also upholding the call to support those living in oppressive conditions. The network seeks to help constituents explore all of these questions, particularly through Palestinian eyes.

While the challenges may make the work slow, risky and unpopular, the bottom line for the network remains: Palestinian Christians, ever persistent in their hope, have called the global church to remain with them in their quest for justice and liberation for themselves and also their Israeli neighbours. ❧

For more information on the MC Canada Palestine-Israel Network, or to sign up for its newsletter, visit: mennonitechurch.ca/pin. For current updates, visit the MC Manitoba Friends of Palestine Facebook page at [facebook.com/mcmfriendsofpalestine](https://www.facebook.com/mcmfriendsofpalestine).



PHOTO BY KANDACE BOOS / TEXT BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER

On the first Sunday after Labour Day, Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont., traditionally celebrates Gathering Sunday with a special worship service and potluck meal. This year, due to the restrictions around public gatherings, the church organized instead a "Building community receiving line" on Sept. 13 designated as "Reset Sunday." Seventy pre-registered congregants participated in a physically distanced gathering in the church parking lot for a time of face-to-face conversation. Participants wore masks and observed space markers chalked on the pavement. Earlier in the week, the church office sent a letter to households in the neighbourhood alerting them to the event. The congregation has been worshipping via Zoom and pre-recorded services, and having occasional conversation and faith formation times on Zoom. A task force is planning for eventual next steps in the congregation's practices.

/// News brief

Westgate Mennonite Collegiate grateful to be together again

WINNIPEG—Bands practising outside, masks indoors and cashless payments at the cafeteria are just a few glimpses of what Westgate Mennonite Collegiate has looked like this fall. The Winnipeg high school has 307 students, who have been divided into cohorts by grade, eating and hanging out in dedicated spaces. This means that the entire student body is able to attend school in-person every day; online learning is available if students must isolate at home. Weekly chapels have continued, with rotating cohorts meeting in the large gymnasium and the rest of the school on livestream. Even though they can't sing, students and staff do actions to worship songs while a small group sings at the front. All music programs are running, focusing on skill development rather than performance. Hiring an extra staff member to work with smaller groups, practising outside and using "instrument masks" inside, along with high-quality air circulation in the music rooms, make this possible. Athletics have continued in a similar vein, practising but not competing. The annual "cyclathon" fundraiser, which draws a large number of people, was transformed into a "moveathon," with students biking, walking and canoeing in smaller groups. "I can't believe how positive the atmosphere is," says James Friesen, Westgate's vice principal.

—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE



PHOTO COURTESY OF WESTGATE MENNONITE COLLEGIATE

Westgate's Grade 8 band practises outdoors.

We Own This Now

Webinar addresses Doctrine of Discovery

By Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

A Sept. 29 webinar helped 260 participants learn more about the Doctrine of Discovery and how a proclamation made more than 500 years ago still has repercussions for Indigenous peoples today.

The theatre group Ted and Co., based in Harrisonburg, Va., was invited to bring its *We Own This Now* production to British Columbia, but COVID-19 put those plans on hold. Instead, actors Ted Swartz and Michelle Milne, and playwright Alison Casella Brookins interacted with 260 participants during the online event, “A webinar conversation on the Doctrine of Discovery: Honouring our connections to the land.”

The Doctrine of Discovery is a philosophical and legal framework dating back to the 15th century that gave European Christian governments moral and legal rights to invade and seize Indigenous lands and dominate Indigenous peoples if the people living there were deemed “heathens, pagans or infidels.”

Mennonite Church Canada has responded to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s call to repudiate the doctrine and to learn more about ways to address the wrongs the doctrine has inflicted on Indigenous peoples.

Cohosting the event were Henry Krause and Carla Niemi of the MC B.C. Indigenous Working Group. Columbia Bible College students from David Warkentin’s The Church in Mission class also took part.

Moving to a world that is more just and empathetic, and righting the wrongs of the past were the focuses of the conversation, as well as a call to action.

Swartz said, “It’s important to bring Indigenous people into the conversation.” He encouraged people to “be in community where you are; be connected to the people you are with.”

Two participating Columbia students



SCREENSHOT BY ROSS W. MUIR

Participants in a Sept. 29 webinar on the Doctrine of Discovery are, clockwise from top left: Ted Swartz, owner and director of Ted and Co. TheaterWorks; Michelle Milne, actor with Ted and Co.; Henry Krause of the MC B.C. Indigenous Working Group; and Alison Casella Brookins, playwright of We Own This Now.

offered these comments:

- “I was really impressed by the passion that each person on the panel spoke on this subject, and how they weren’t afraid to call people out and say that we still have to take action,” said one. “They weren’t afraid of challenging the listeners to ask what our next step will be and how we will support the cause in our own way.”
- “One thing that really stood out to me was accepting the wrongs in the past, and moving forward to reconciliation, which starts first in the church,” said another. “Learning and participating in the webinar about the Doctrine of Discovery really opened my eyes to what has happened in the past that I had no idea about.”

Ted and Co. hopes to eventually bring its live presentation of *We Own This Now* to the West Coast. It has previously presented it in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. ❧

To watch the webinar, visit bit.ly/34Umie0.



News brief

New roof installed at Squeah

HOPE, B.C.—With the summer camping season cancelled, Camp Squeah decided to proceed with addressing much-needed repairs to its main lodge roof. Contractors started by tearing the old roof off in early September, aided by good weather, and proceeded with installing insulation, plywood sheeting and a waterproof membrane. “As anticipated, some rotten wood was discovered, removed and replaced with good wood,” says camp director Rob Tiessen. “We are thankful that the rot was confined to areas easily accessible and relatively inexpensive to replace.” With revenue losses the camp sustained due to COVID-19, commencing with the project—already postponed by two years—was not an easy decision. “We are very grateful for the preliminary bridge financing authorized by the [Mennonite Church B.C.] finance committee, which helped us kick-start the roof restoration when we did,” says Tiessen. “Now, we are seeking the help of Squeah supporters throughout MC B.C. and beyond, to help us raise the funds necessary to complete this project and pay back the preliminary advance. Any funds raised above and beyond the scope of the roof restoration will go towards offsetting the operational deficit we are dealing with as we pray for an end to this pandemic.” The camp’s goal is to raise \$350,000 by Dec. 31.

BY AMY RINNER WADDELL



PHOTO BY ROB TIESSEN

Workers take advantage of good weather to replace the roof on the lodge at Camp Squeah in September. This was one of many improvements that took place on the campground this past summer.

'Be bold! Make yourselves known!'

By Joanne De Jong
Alberta Correspondent

Giugovaz is not a Mennonite name, but Steven Giugovaz is definitely an Anabaptist. Son of immigrants from Italy and with a Croatian heritage, he has been on a journey that has led him to embracing a Jesus-centred theology whose world isn't flat, a commitment to peace and an admiration for the early "re-baptizers."

Now a pastoral intern at Bergthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury, Alta., he talks about his experience in the Mennonite world. "Mennonites need to re-discover their evangelical roots," he says. "Anabaptists have a lot to offer a world who hungers for peace."

He wonders whether Mennonites are willing to open their hands to the "other." "Every Mennonite church I have ever visited has asked me if I am related to a Mennonite," he says. "It sometimes feels like, if you do not have a Mennonite name, you are treated with suspicion."

That being said, one of the reasons the Giugovaz family joined Bergthal Mennonite was its warm welcome and authentic spirit, even when people asked with surprise, "So why did you come back?" Although Anabaptists were historically "outsiders," he hopes Mennonites can see that there is now openness to their teachings. He voices this challenge: "Don't be afraid to look outside yourselves."

Currently finishing a bachelor in pastoral ministry degree from Prairie Bible College in Three Hills, Alta., 37-year-old Giugovaz talks about his ultimate dream, which is to work in a setting where he can help different denominations come together. Growing up, he often heard people talking badly about other churches. He says this drove him crazy and fuelled his passion for church unity. "The Kingdom of God is more than just us," he exclaims.

One of his pet peeves is labels. He doesn't like labels, such as "conservative" and "liberal," which are words that mean different things to different people and cause unnecessary tension among

Christians. He notices that many Mennonites do not like the term "evangelical," even though it is a broad term that has so many views and ideas under that one umbrella. In his experience, some see the term as synonymous with "Protestant," or with the idea of "hell and brimstone." He wonders if, instead of being a stumbling



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVEN GIUGOVAZ

Steven Giugovaz, pastoral intern at Bergthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury, Alta., is pictured with his wife Emily and their children Luka, Walter and Lahna.

block, "evangelical" could be redeemed.

Giugovaz describes himself as "a Christian with Anabaptist views."

Anna-Lisa Salo, Bergthal's senior pastor, says having Giugovaz as an intern has been energizing—especially during COVID-19. "To look at pastoral ministry through the eyes of a new person, someone enthusiastic and idealist, that transfers to the supervisor," she says. "I'm loving it!"

Although initially uncertain if she had the time, or was equipped to supervise anyone, Salo has found the resources provided by Prairie Bible College very helpful. She has been surprised to discover that she does have the ability to mentor someone going into ministry, saying, "It has given me a sense of who I am as a pastor."

In addition to meeting weekly, Giugovaz

journals, preaches and visits congregants. He is required to complete 500 hours and, in return, receives an honorarium. He has especially enjoyed visiting the members, sharing meaningful conversations centred on questions he sends out in advance. They include: "What do you think the surrounding churches think of Bergthal?" and, "If you were given the opportunity to build your version of the ideal church, what would it look like?" He also explores why being an Anabaptist is important to people.

Salo mentions that he can get away with asking any question, as the church is committed to helping him learn and grow.

Growing up in a non-denominational church in Ontario, Giugovaz was especially influenced by his pastor, whom he describes as someone gentle who embodied Christ in life. Later, he discovered that pastor was from a Mennonite background. When his pastor passed away while Giugovaz was in his teens, he found it hard to connect with the new leadership that kicked him out of the youth group for asking too many questions. After a rebellious stint, he returned to the faith, never having fully left it.

Giugovaz hopes to begin working towards a master's degree next year. He loves interning at Bergthal and the experience has confirmed his calling. He has been surprised by how fulfilling it has been, saying, "The more I do it [pastoring], the more I want to do it."

Going forward, he humbly challenges Mennonites to get more into their communities, sharing ministry with other denominations, regardless of their beliefs. His heart is to see denominations building unity and being open to conversation around their differences. Believing that Anabaptists have good news to share, he enthusiastically encourages the church not to be shy: "Be bold! Make yourselves known!" ✎

Women supporting women across borders

Kenyan student receives bursary from Mennonite women in Manitoba during COVID-19 crisis

Story and Photo by Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

Pamela Obonde came to Winnipeg from Nairobi, Kenya, in September 2019 to study in the master of arts in peacebuilding and collaborative development program at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). But when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Manitoba in March, it threatened to foil all her plans.



Pamela Obonde has worked with women and children in Kenya for the last 17 years.

“I remember the day very well, when things just started shutting down,” says Obonde, 50, who attends Ngong Mennonite Church in Kenya. Her family was scattered—she with her son in Winnipeg, and her husband and daughter back in Nairobi. Her lease was up, her on-campus jobs had ended when the university closed and her prospects of getting a summer job were slim. She didn’t know how she was going to pay for rent or tuition. “I kept on asking, ‘Is this the end of the world?’” she says.

When she sent a prayer to some women at Charleswood Mennonite Church, her Canadian congregation, she couldn’t believe what happened next. A couple from Charleswood invited her and her son to stay with them until she could pay rent again, and the church helped her buy groceries.

Then she received a bursary from the Mennonite Women Manitoba Working Group, which connects women across the province and supports women in leadership, and which inherited \$24,000 when Mennonite Women Canada was dissolved a few years ago. These funds enabled the working group to provide the bursary, says chair Elsie Rempel.

“I have never experienced such love,” Obonde says. “It is just beyond my imagination. . . . Yes, COVID was a painful time, COVID was an ugly time. But to me, I can tell you that this is the time I saw the hand of God.”

Obonde is studying to further equip herself for her work in Kenya. She has worked with women and children there for the past 17 years. She began with vulnerable children living in the slums of Nairobi, then worked with women facing myriad obstacles like HIV/AIDS, stigmatization, lack of education, and being unable to own land or businesses. She fought to give Kenyan women a voice and to empower them with skills training and education.

In 2017, she felt called to bring her work into the Kenyan church. “I realized that the issues that I’ve been dealing with out in the secular world are three times in church, and nobody talks about them,” she says. “Why? Because the leadership is male.”

But when she started trying to bring women together to share stories and fellowship, it wasn’t easy. The women’s husbands, many of whom were pastors, questioned her agenda. When she explained that she just wanted to see what women could do when they connected, prayed and supported each other, the bishop objected. “He wasn’t comfortable with that,” she says.

With the help of Eastern Mennonite

Mission, Obonde finally hosted the first women’s meeting. She used her training in Mennonite Women U.S.A.’s Sister Care program to begin facilitating Sister Care seminars in her own region. She helped found Anabaptist Peace Mission International, whose program trains and equips women in missional leadership.

“In Kenya, when we talk about mission, we think about . . . the white-skinned missionary,” Obonde says. She wants to demystify missions and show women they are called where they are. “For us women as mothers, we have been called in the home and that is our first mission field. . . . We’re already leaders in this place where we are.”

Obonde says it was difficult recruiting women into the program because they are stuck in the same cycle of thinking. Many experience domestic violence at the hands of their husbands, and their voices are not heard in church, despite making up three-quarters of the church members. “If we don’t come together as women, the church is not going to grow, our youth are not going to come to church, and the church will close down,” she says.

The support from the working group is meaningful to Obonde not only because it is helping her continue her peace studies, but also because she is passionate about Mennonite women collaborating across borders.

She wants women in Kenya to gain hope for the journey by learning about women in the Canadian Mennonite church who have been called into ministry, who speak their mind and have overcome some of the struggles they are currently facing in Kenya.

“How can the church here in Manitoba hold our hand . . . and how is it that we can put this fabric together so that when we lay out this fabric, everybody can look at their place, and we can together say, ‘Glory to God, we are working in the Kingdom of God.’”

While in Manitoba, Obonde has shared her story at a youth gathering, CMU’s Renew conference and working group meetings. ❧

To view a video of Pamela Obonde made by Mennonite Church Manitoba, visit bit.ly/3nSjVRN.



Minority Mennonites organize a support group

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

When Gabby Martin mentions that she's a Mennonite, she's often met with, "Okay, but where are you from?" Her father is Black and her mother is Syrian; she was adopted by Mennonites. Martin grew up in Langham, Sask., and has been Mennonite her whole life, yet, because of her appearance, it feels like she's expected to prove it.



Gabby Martin

"I'll have to explain that I'm actually Mennonite," she says. "And that's even a weird term, like 'actually Mennonite.' I have to whip out the Mennonite last name and explain to them that I know how to make *schmaunfat* [cream gravy]," she says.

This is just one of the many experiences that led Martin to create the Minority Mennonite Talking Group with Andrea De Avila, associate pastor of Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.



Andrea De Avila

When the Black Lives Matter movement took off, Martin and De Avila began talking about some of their experiences, and realized many of them were similar. They wanted to establish a place where Mennonites of racial minorities in largely white congregations could feel comfortable and safe sharing their stories.

"Even as we trust and love our church communities, sometimes it's hard to find people with similar experiences as ours within the Mennonite church in Canada," says De Avila, who grew up in Mexico.

The group exists on Facebook, where members can post and chat with each other. It is geared toward adults and open to Mennonites across Canada. They plan to meet online by video as often as it suits the group, but have not met yet because they are still trying to gain more members.

In the meantime, De Avila and Martin, who also attends Sargent Avenue Mennonite, led anti-racist learning sessions for their home congregation. They began the five workshops by defining terms and teaching basic foundations to get everyone on the same page. Later weeks featured a guest speaker who taught how to listen in ways that are helpful instead of hurtful, and Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) individuals who shared their personal stories. Martin discussed the history of policing and the movement to defund the police, and De Avila explored with participants where their church might be headed.

The church can be a difficult place for minorities. Martin says that most of her experiences of racism in the church have taken the form of subtle or unintentional discrimination: feeling like she was chosen for a committee to fill a diversity quota rather than because of her skills; being repeatedly confused for another person of colour in the congregation; or witnessing racial stereotyping.

Just this year, a church leader told De Avila that she was "not black enough to claim being a person of colour." On the same weekend, someone else told her that "her people," a Spanish-speaking congregation in Canada, had such light skin that they almost couldn't distinguish them from the white people.

De Avila hears comments like, "I just didn't think of you as a person of colour, I didn't think of you as Mexican; you were just one of us." She says, "That shouldn't be exclusive! I can be 'one of us' while I'm Mexican. But they make it seem like, to be one of them, I need to let go of that identity that I carry."

"It is in those times that I receive those kinds of comments, that I think, wow, people don't get me. Even though what they're trying to say is, 'You fit in!' . . . What

it feels like is, you really don't understand my experience," she says. "That feels very isolating. And I think that's why a group like we're trying to start is very needed."

De Avila says that she feels grateful for how the church has supported and opened doors for her and, at the same time, she has "cried many times out of frustration" at how slow the church moves on important issues. She understands why some BIPOC folks do not have the capacity to struggle with the church. Yet she wants to stay in the church to make it a better place for others. "I am committed to my faith in many ways, and see it working within community . . . [The church] is wonderful sometimes; it is extremely hurtful sometimes."

Martin has seen that the church is willing to grow and change. "But, like a family, you need to put the work in, you

The church can be a difficult place for minorities.

need to address the issues in order for anything to change. . . . I'm invested in the church because I see a future that's better off with the church than without it."

She says that a good place for congregations to start is to build a foundation of education through books, movies and web research. She says that BIPOC individuals are often expected to educate white people without pay or recognition of the work and emotional energy it takes. "Racism is not a minority's problem," she says. "Racism is a white person's problem. What needs to happen is, there needs to be a lot more personal education and a lot more inter-education between white people, before bringing those issues to us."

De Avila says that if churches are nervous learning on their own, then paying a BIPOC consultant to lead workshops and to analyze church policies may be the appropriate next step. ▮

Anyone interested in joining the Minority Mennonite Talking Group can email Gabby Martin at gabbymartinwork@gmail.com.



‘There is always a way’

Young adult seeks to harness creative tools to build community locally and globally

By Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondent

Christen Kong, 27, was part of the community outreach team at Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church when the group started a local butterfly garden to encourage pollinators. Kong marvels at how that small garden project became a “community connector” and a place of healing and wholeness.

In a neighbourhood with food insecurity and high unemployment, the garden provided people with a little bit of fresh produce. But gardening also “gave them something to do” and gave them some purpose and meaning, Kong says. The garden “provided more healing than we thought as a church.”

Kong, who has served with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite Disaster Service, values what she calls “holistic” expressions of faith. Projects like community gardens, soup kitchens, food banks and clothing banks can end up being a way to draw people into the church.

She encourages every congregation to figure out what it means to be the church in its local context. It’s how her church began 40 years ago, when a pastor reached out to offer English-language tutoring to Chinese immigrants and invited them to church. And it is a vision of the church that inspires this young adult today.

But her vision doesn’t stop at the local community. Kong is Mennonite Church Canada’s delegate to the Global Youth Summit, a gathering of young Anabaptists from around the world that will precede the next Mennonite World Conference assembly in July 2022 in Salatiga, Indonesia. She is eager to learn from the Mennonite family, “sharing what it means to live out their faith in each local context.”

As someone who uses technology in her communications job, she says, “Technology is revealing itself as a powerful tool because of COVID.” It can be a tool to

advocate, mobilize and connect “beyond borders.”

Kong says she is learning “how to harness digital media platforms.” She acknowledges that there are barriers, but she is confident there “there is always a way” to innovate and move beyond them.

Currently she is using the online Zoom platform to lead a Bible study in South Africa with friends she made during a one-year Serving and Learning Together (SALT) experience she had through MCC.

Technology can also be used to “break isolation,” she says. Since her church has been using online tools for worship and connection, she has noticed that people seem to “engage more fully” with the pastor after a sermon and ask deeper questions. She says, “I am falling in love with these small discussion groups on Sundays,” and learning more about the people at her church than ever before.

She notices that isolation is pushing people to find other forms of communication and gathering. She sees online church as a less intimidating place to “break down some barriers by bringing friends.” The pandemic has “brought more important discussions to the forefront,” she says, adding that non-Christian friends are asking a lot of faith questions.

She sees the potential in technology for “harnessing a lot of creativity and art in faith-based communities.” She would like to see people produce content about faith—what speaks to their heart—through visual arts, writing, poetry, music and dance. She sees art as a medium for community building and for sharing across the globe.

She says that churches and art galleries are the first places to go in a new place, to understand culture. She is curious to explore how culture impacts what it means to be Anabaptist in various countries



PHOTO BY SANDY YUEN

Pictured from left to right: Grace Ho, Lauren Kong, Michelle Quan and Christen Kong work in the community garden begun by the outreach team of Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church. The garden became a place of healing and connection in the community.

around the world. She asks, “What speaks to you personally in your local context, but what does that look like when we bring it all together, and what are the patterns or differences or similarities that come out of that?”

She is disappointed that MWC shifted its next assembly to 2022, because she was so excited to meet other Anabaptists from around the world next year. But the extra time will give her and the other Canadian delegates to the youth summit time to prepare. They will be asked to work on a project together in the meantime. While they don’t have specific information about the project’s focus yet, they have met over Zoom and are eager to get started.

Kong is grateful for the opportunity to connect across continents, to share new experiences and to share in each other’s struggles. This interchange of faith and culture, Kong believes, will enrich the faith of all. ❧

GATHERING AROUND THE TABLE

Zwiebach from Saint Johanna

By Elfrieda Schroeder

My earliest memories of food go back to my childhood in the Chaco, Paraguay, where my family lived from 1947 to 1952. Our family, like the others in our village, were refugees from Ukraine. We had arrived from Germany on the the S.S. Volendam, a Dutch freighter, with nothing but the clothes on our backs.

With six children under the age of 12, my mother baked bread every other day in a clay oven outside. Until we were settled and able to grow our own crops, every family in the Neuland Colony received rations of food through Mennonite Central Committee. Our mother saved yeast from one baking to the next.

We had a stubborn, half-wild cow that my mother had to milk every day. It didn't supply us with much cream, but the Ratzlaff family, which had come to Paraguay in the 1930s, had a ranch at the far end of our village and often helped us out. Sometimes they even gave us cream that we could churn into butter. Rolling that jar of cream back and forth on my knees until it separated and turned into butter was one of my jobs. I loved butter and was known to sneak some when I thought no one was looking!

Our mother believed in making birthdays special, and she knew how to do that with the little we had. She would take some paper, fold it several times and cut beautiful designs into it. She called them snowflakes, and described to us what snow was like as she cut out the paper doily. At breakfast, the birthday child would get the doily, and on top of the doily our mother placed a special bowl.

Our grandmother had sent three bowls in a package from Canada. They were plastic and brightly coloured red, green and blue. We children gave them names, that's how special they were. The blue one was called "faith"; the red one, "love"; and the green one, "hope." We

would fill our cups with small pieces of bread, then we added cinnamon, sugar, and just enough milk to soak up the bread. We turned them upside down into our little bowls of faith, hope and love, and that was our delicious birthday cake! No other birthday cake ever tasted

labour of love!

Now that I am retired, I love to bake *zwiebach* as well, and I have become known in our church as the "Zwiebach Lady." My recipe comes from a cookbook made as a fundraiser for Parkwood Mennonite Home in Waterloo, Ont.,



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELFRIEDA SCHROEDER

Elfrieda Schroeder has become an expert zwiebach maker.

as good, not even the angel food cake our mother learned to bake in Canada!

Many years later, in 1984, when I was living in Canada with a family of my own, I got to know a saint. She loved to bake *zwiebach* (small double buns, a smaller one sitting on top of a bigger one), and at every church potluck we knew that there would be *zwiebach* from Johanna. She told me that she found baking *zwiebach* relaxing and de-stressing. I wondered how that could be when it seemed to me quite a complicated affair.

At the time of her husband's passing, Johanna had made *zwiebach* for the reception following the funeral—a

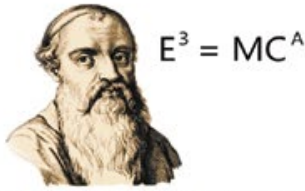
called: 1999-*International Year of Older Persons*. The recipe was submitted by Gloria Dirks, Parkwood's director at the time. These *zwiebach* turn out perfectly every time.

It is Johanna who told me the secret of really good *zwiebach*: "Use margarine instead of butter; it makes them lighter." ❧

Elfrieda Schroeder is the "Zwiebach Lady" at Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

The recipe that Elfrieda Schroeder uses for zwiebach can be found at canadianmennonite.org/zwiebach-recipe.





Encountering, Embracing, Embodying Christ
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Helena Ball,
Holyrood Mennonite Church

The spiritual discipline I have chosen to commit to is looking for God in the everyday and trying to listen and respond to His bidding.

I am starting out by observing the beauty in nature and being thankful for my place in it.

I want to work towards consulting with Him every step of my day.

What I have discovered is that my life goes a lot better when I give my day back to Christ and ask Him to use me as He sees fit.

The E3 Action Plan:
Living into God's Call



Staff change

Parkland Restorative Justice hires new executive director

Kerry Reimer was recently hired by Parkland Restorative Justice to be the agency's new executive director, replacing Heather Driedger, who plans to continue her education in Alberta. Reimer came to faith in Christ at age 40. "It flipped my life on its head," he says. "I was pretty broken, and I used drugs and alcohol to cover up. I was looking for meaning." At age 49, Reimer sold his business in Virden, Man., and moved to Saskatoon to attend Horizon College. He graduated with a BA in pastoral leadership, which included practical experiences in hospital chaplaincy and prison visitation. Most recently, he worked in the homeless sector with the Lighthouse in North Battleford, Sask. He says that he brings to his new job a passion for society's most vulnerable people, especially those struggling with addictions and mental illness. Reimer lives with his wife and two sons in Warman, Sask., and plans to commute several days each week to Prince Albert, where Parkland's office is situated. Parkland Restorative Justice is an ecumenical ministry supported by Mennonite Church Saskatchewan.

—BY DONNA SCHULZ



Calendar

Nationwide

Nov. 6-7: Virtual 2020 MEDA convention, "Towards an equal world," begins at noon on Nov. 6. The two-day event includes speakers, plenary sessions and networking opportunities. To learn more, or to register, visit medaconvention.org.

Dec. 7: Mennonite Creation Care Network's cookbook club virtual meeting, 7:30 EST. Register at mennocreationcare.org/sustainable-kitchen-cookbook-club/.

Dec. 13: Digital launch of MennoMedia's new Voices Together hymnal, from 5 to 7 p.m. EST. For more information, visit VoicesTogetherHymnal.org.

Alberta

Every Monday to Thursday: Congregants from across Mennonite Church Alberta are invited to join a Zoom group for morning prayer on Mondays and Wednesdays at 7:30 a.m. MDT, and evening prayer on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9 p.m. MDT, for about 15 to 20 minutes, using *Take Our Moments and Our Days*. Register online at mcab.ca/events.

Ontario

Nov. 20-21: "Becoming peacemakers," MCC's virtual peace conference. To learn more, or to register for the upcoming sessions, visit mcccanada.ca/stories/becoming-peacemakers.

International

July 1-4, 2022: Mennonite World Conference's Global Youth Summit, in Salatiga, Indonesia. Theme: "Life in the Spirit: Learn. Serve. Worship." To learn more, visit mwc-cmm.org/gys.

July 5-10, 2022: Mennonite World Conference's global assembly, in Semarang, Indonesia. Features speakers chosen by the Young AnaBaptist Committee and by the MWC commissions. Afternoon activities include workshops, service opportunities, local tours, a global church village and the Anabaptist World Cup. Each evening will have special music and speaker from one of the participating continents. For more information, visit mwc-cmm.org/assembly/indonesia-2022.

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





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Leon's Island

Will Braun tells the story of one family caught in the path of Manitoba Hydro's \$8.7-billion Keeyask dam project.

canadianmennonite.org/keeyask



Families negotiate education during pandemic

Maria H. Klassen reports on how teachers, parents and children in the Niagara Region are faring in the midst of COVID-19.

canadianmennonite.org/niagaraed



Postures of trust and openness

Tany Warkentin talks about the relationships between Canadian Mennonite congregations and the church in Burkina Faso.

canadianmennonite.org/postures



Some thoughts on proselytizing

On the CM blog, Anthony G. Siegrist wonders: Should Christians still share their faith with those who don't believe?

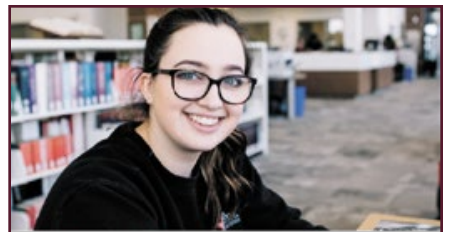
canadianmennonite.org/blog/as-proselytizing

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CALL FOR ART

Theme: *Hope*

Due date: *November 12, 2020*

Canadian Mennonite invites elementary and high school students from Mennonite schools and churches to submit artwork for the Christmas 2020 issue by Nov. 12, 2020.

Digital versions (at least 300 dpi) can be submitted to submit@canadianmennonite.org. Paper artwork (minimum 4 inches by 6 inches) can be sent to: 490 Dutton Dr., Unit C5, Waterloo, ON N2L 6H7.

Submissions should be high resolution and should include creator's full name, grade and the name of the student's school or congregation.

Selected works will appear in the Dec. 7 print issue and online.

CANADIAN
MENNONITE

Schools Directory featuring Menno Simons Christian School

Giving the gift of education

By Ann Pan / Menno Simons Christian School, Calgary

Sandy Karg grew up with her three younger brothers and one younger sister in Caster, Alta., on a cattle farm in the middle of nowhere.

She initially went to Red Deer College with the intention of working in the oil and gas industry before recognizing that, in her heart, she was being called to become a teacher. After finishing her first two years of post-secondary education at Red Deer, she transferred to the University of Alberta and completed her education degree.

She ran into Dave, the man who would become her husband, in a 7-11 parking lot during her college days, and they got married just before her graduation. They settled in



Sandy Karg with her Grade 1 class at the opening of the 7000 Elkton Drive location.

Stettler, Alta., to start their careers and family.

She started her first year of teaching as the first certified aerobics instructor in Stettler and as a teaching assistant in the town's special-needs program.

Eventually, her journey intersected with Menno Simons Christian School, first as a substitute teacher, before joining full-time in 1998 as the Grade 1 teacher.

She continues to give the gift of education to every student she interacts with. She is continually innovative, adjusting to meet the needs of each student and, most importantly, she continues to love each and every one of them.

She is a passionate life-long learner and has been honoured with an Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta teaching award.



Teacher Sandy Karg is pictured with a few of her students on 60's Dress up day

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PHOTO COLLAGE BY LOUISA ADRIA / TEXT BY JOANNE DE JONG
Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary held a physically distanced Thanksgiving youth night in the church parking lot on Oct. 9. Fun was had by all, as the teens used their creativity to carve pumpkins for Thanksgiving weekend. Pictured from left to right, top to bottom: Kienna Krahn, Jonah Koop, Bella Toews, Patrick Dunn, Julia Buhr, Ethan Willms, Ainsley Dunn and Simon Koop.